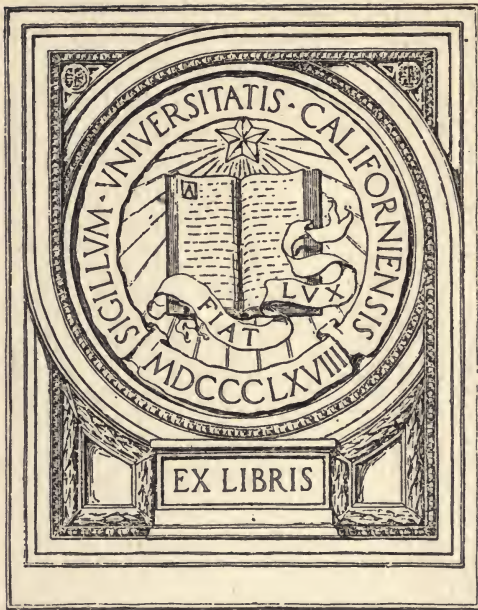


THE  
NEW CARTHAGE

— ■ —

GEORGES EEKHOUD



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**THE NEW CARTHAGE**



# THE NEW CARTHAGE

(La Nouvelle Carthage)

BY  
GEORGES EEKHOUD

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
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*Author of "The Celtic Dawn," "The Young Idea"*

CROWNED BY THE BELGIAN ACADEMY



NEW YORK  
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1917



THE  
NEW CARRIAGE

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TO THE  
DUFFIELD

*To His Majesty*  
**THE KING OF THE BELGIANS**  
*This volume is dedicated*  
*in profound homage by the*  
*Translator*

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## INTRODUCTION

### I

Georges Eekhoud was born in Antwerp in 1854. His mother came of German and Dutch parentage; his father, who came of Flemish stock, died in the boy's eleventh year. The boy received his schooling in Switzerland and upon his return to Belgium was destined for the profession of engineering by his uncle and guardian, but the plan failed dismally and Eekhoud was sent to military school, from which, after some months, he ran away. He was then cast off by his family, and as the income of his father's estate was insufficient for his needs, he turned to journalism as a means of earning a livelihood. After a time his grandmother, a woman of some wealth, took him into her home; here he enjoyed a period of leisure and study. Upon her death he inherited a comfortable fortune, which he invested in an estate at Capellen, to the north of Antwerp. His subsequent experience as a gentleman-farmer, although it was an economic failure, provided him with the opportunity of acquiring

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that familiarity with the psychology, the life and the customs of the peasantry which became the essential foundation of so much of his art. In 1881 he once more had recourse to journalism, this time in Brussels, where he became literary and musical critic of *L'Etoile Belge*. During the period which elapsed between his arrival in Brussels and the foundation of *La Jeune Belgique*, Eekhoud became acquainted with the group of men who were striving to give Belgium a contemporary national literature. Chief among them were Camille Lemonnier, Théodore Hannon, Max Waller (Maurice Warlomont), the founder of *La Jeune Belgique*, and the group of contributors to that magazine who have since achieved world-wide recognition: Maeterlinck, Verhaeren, George Rodenbach and Charles Van Lerberghe.

Before 1880 the literary revolt instituted by the younger men centered at the University of Louvain, where the future writers, painters and musicians—among the latter Jan Blockx, the Flemish composer, and Van Dyck, the Wagnerian tenor—were supposed to be studying law, but were, in reality, far more exercised over the future of the arts in Belgium. The movement was a healthy and normal expression of youthful vigor accompanied by the publication of many manifestos, a good deal of unconventional thinking, writing and talking, some humorous escapades which thoroughly shocked the University authorities, and an atmosphere of rousing collegiate life.

From Louvain the headquarters of the movement were transferred to Brussels. *La Jeune Belgique*, which under the editorial direction of Max Waller had brought the work of Verhaeren, Maeterlinck, Rodenbach, Van Lerberghe and Eekhoud to the attention

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of the public, was charged with decadence by *L'Art Moderne*, the organ of the lawyer, Edmond Picard. To Waller's doctrine of "Art for art's sake," Picard opposed the ideals of an art embodying a social content, and preeminently reflecting the Flemish race consciousness as in an earlier day it had been reflected in the paintings of the Flemish masters. The conflict over the form and content of Belgian literature and the attitude of the Belgian writer produced a schism in the movement, the writers of nationalistic tendencies rallying to Picard's magazine, while the Parnassians, as they came to be called, found a haven in *La Jeune Belgique*. In this schism Eekhoud, with Maeterlinck and Verhaeren, gave his allegiance to the revolutionary and nationalist program. And that part of the contemporary literature of Belgium which is best known to the world outside its native land has been produced neither by the few inheritors of the Parnassian tradition who, although living in Belgium, have written as Frenchmen, nor by the writers of the Walloon, nor by the writers of the Flemish school who have written in the Flemish language, but by those writers who have created a body of literature which, in the quality of its spiritual content as a record of racial experience, is purely Flemish, though written in French.

## II

Unlike many of the other contributors to the Belgian literary renaissance, Georges Eekhoud combines with a passionate love of his native land a broadly cosmopolitan culture. His contact with English literature has been especially significant as an influence upon his art. Of the Victorians, Dickens and De Quincey have profoundly impressed him; Dickens because of his humanitarian motive, De Quincey because of his hatred of the middle class and his sympathy with the criminal and the downtrodden. But Eekhoud's most effective service to English literature has been done as an interpreter and translator of Elizabethan writers. His "Au Siècle le Shakespeare," a striking volume of criticism, has done much to make popular in Belgium the writings of the Elizabethan masters. In addition to this book he has published translations into French of Beaumont and Fletcher's "Philaster" and Marlowe's "Edward II." His single original play, "Perkin Warbeck," is a tragedy founded upon the career of the Flemish pretender to the throne of England; and when the Great War beat down upon Belgium he was preparing for the press a volume of "Études Élisabéthi-



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anes." As a critic he has chosen to interpret that period in English literature which gave expression to a life closely akin to that of which his own art is a record.

To adequately understand the reaction to experience of which Eekhoud's novels and tales—"Kees Doorik," "Kermesses," "Nouvelles Kermesses," "Cycle Patibulaire," "Mes Communions," "Escal-Vigor," "La Faneuse d'Amour," "La Nouvelle Carthage," and its sequel, "L'Autre Vue"—are the expression, we must recall the character of the Flemish mind as it has found expression in literature. The Walloons, whose culture is purely Gallic, are logical, primarily intellectual, musical and scientific. They have, in letters, the French respect for clearness of conception, for lucidity and precision of expression, for purity of style and for intelligent discrimination. The genius of the Flemings, however, is emotional rather than intellectual, and among its characteristics have been the conflicting tendencies of religious mysticism and an almost pagan love of the sensual aspects of life. They think profoundly about life less than they feel strongly about it. They are steeped in the tradition of their glorious past, and they are keenly aware of an immediate and insistent present.

Until the middle of the last century the Flemish genius had achieved its fullest expression in painting, perhaps because even until three years ago Flanders was an essentially picturesque country. When the movement toward the creation of a national literature began to assert itself, the younger writers derived the method of their art not from a literary tradition, but quite consciously from the tradition of Flemish painting. For their inspiration they sought in the life about



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them, but they sought with eyes that had been taught to see by Rembrandt, Rubens, Teniers, Jan Steen, Ruysdael and Van Ostade. The qualities of mysticism, sensuality, love of nature and of life, and emotional enthusiasm were the first to be registered in the art of the Flemish writers, and to the service of literature they brought the sensitive feeling for form and color and the robust love of the material world which had always been characteristic of the art of their great masters. Almost as compelling was the influence of the various French schools of literature; realism, especially psychological realism, and subsequently symbolism, captivated the minds of the younger Flemish writers. Consequently the method of realism, which they soon began to apply to the life of the spirit, produced a literature that is mystic and symbolic in essential direction, but which finds its symbols in the life about it, a life in which there is a fusion of the romantic, enigmatic past and the industrial present to which the character inherited from the past is seeking to adjust itself. The most important tendency in the recent literature of Belgium is, however, the transfer of the method of painting to the subject matter of literature; the vision of the Belgian writers is the vision of their painters, taking delight in color and form, wooing the four other senses through its vivid appeal to the eye, founded upon accurate observation and delicate perception.

Georges Eekhoud found in the life of the peasantry the subject-matter for his art. He is a regional writer, and the region which he describes is the country to the north of Antwerp; the *polders* of the Scheldt and the wastes of the Campine. The polders of the Scheldt are rich plains, thickly inhabited by a vigorous and

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sturdy race of small farmers. The Campine is a far-reaching and sandy waste that stretches over a great part of the provinces of Antwerp and Limburg. Its little towns are scattered and have infrequent communication with the outside world; it is a wasted, dreary, forbidding country of cold, stagnant pools, dull marshes, russet heather and tenacious furze, and a sky that is by turns leaden and coppery. The peasants manage only with hardship to wreak a living from the sandy soil; they are brutally sensual, ignorant, superstitious, fatalistic and almost savage. It is with the life and the customs of this region that Eekhoud's art is chiefly concerned, and his preoccupation finds its analogue in recent English literature in the novels and tales of Thomas Hardy.

### III

In "The New Carthage" Eekhoud turned his attention to the life of Antwerp. And in order that his fundamental intention in writing the book may be immediately apparent, I quote the following paragraph from the body of the novel:

"To paint Antwerp, its life, its harbor, its river, its sailors, its dockers, its luxuriant women, its rosy and chubby children whom Rubens, in other days, had thought sufficiently plastic and appetizing to populate his heavens and Olympuses; to paint this human mob in its own ways, its costume and surroundings, with the most cherishing care for its special customs and morals, without neglecting the correlations which accentuate and characterize it; to interpret the very soul of the city of Rubens with a sympathy bordering upon assimilation—what a program and what an objective!"

It is to this conception that Eekhoud adhered in writing "The New Carthage," and the novel is essentially a record of the life of the whole city. Its protagonist is Antwerp itself, or, more definitely, the proletariat of Antwerp as its life is experienced by Laurent Paridael. The novel is largely autobiographi-

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cal; Laurent, like Eekhoud himself, is left an orphan at the age of eleven and committed to the care of a wealthy uncle, who, like Eekhoud's uncle, the Mayor of Borgerhout, is a manufacturer of candles. But this identification of Laurent with Eekhoud, beyond offering us an assurance that the novel is written out of an experience which the author has lived, is scarcely of major interest.

The fundamental content of the novel lies in its social feeling. Being a Fleming, Eekhoud reasons about life less than he feels it. He has a profound sympathy with the poor, the weak and the downtrodden. He denounces with bitter contempt the hypocrisy of the capitalistic organization of industrial society and the complacent philosophy of the bourgeoisie. Spiritually, morally and philosophically, Eekhoud is an anarchist. He distrusts all organization as setting an arbitrary limit upon life, as imposing its special utilitarian categories upon the mass of humanity. He challenges the cruelty of our contemporary industrial civilization, and sternly bids us face the facts of reality, however unlovely they may be. His own reaction to life's unloveliness seems, at first sight, supremely discouraging. If there were no organization, he tells us, there would be no evil, since evil is but a term applied to certain actions by an artificial society. Moreover, since atavism is the most potent force in nature, civilization begins and ends in savagery. This, however, is but one half of his doctrine. The other is contained in the following passage:

"And then, too, Antwerp will undergo a moral regeneration also. She will be restored again to her true children. You will see it, Paridael; the oppressed masses are becoming insubordinate. I tell you that a



## INTRODUCTION

new order will soon come into being! A breath of emancipation and youth has blown across the mob; there is something better here than a rich and proud city; there is a people no less interesting who are commencing to revolt against the representatives who serve them badly and compromise them."

Eekhoud, like Whitman, puts his faith in humanity and in an essentially spiritual democracy. If he seems to advocate anarchy, we must remember that this anarchy is but a logical extension of the democratic principle. His vision of the future is a social order in which the masses will have achieved self-expression. Like that other great Belgian artist, Constantin Meunier, he celebrates the modern beauty of labor and of the crowd. With Meunier and with Verhaeren, Eekhoud has made his art a vehicle for the wider social feeling and the plea for social justice which, in these days, is our chief concern.



## IV

I have endeavored, in this translation of "La Nouvelle Carthage," to enable the reader to obtain something of the effect which is produced by the original French. But Eekhoud, although a great writer, is in no sense a stylist. He is controlled by his emotion and by his conception, and his prose is exuberant and often rhapsodic; in his work we have a clear case of content creating its own form.

It has been necessary to delete one paragraph from the chapter entitled "The Runners," and several passages from the chapter dealing with "The Riet-Dijk." These passages are purely descriptive, and to French readers their frankness would have its warrant in the tradition of literary realism; in this matter Anglo-Saxon and Gallic taste are at variance.

LLOYD R. MORRIS.



**THE NEW CARTHAGE**



PART I  
REGINA



## I

### THE GARDEN

MONSIEUR WILLIAM DOBOUZIEZ arranged the funeral of Jacques Paridael in a manner deserving the approbation of his set, and the admiration of modest folk. That he was doing things handsomely could not help but be the opinion of the crowd. He would not have done better for himself. A second class service, but, with the exception of the undertaker's assistants, who was sufficiently experienced to distinguish the slight shading of difference between the first class and the second? A plain chant mass, but no general absolution, for he felt it useless to prolong a ceremony so trying for those concerned and so tedious to the indifferent. So and so many yards of black mourning crape bordered with white, so and so many pounds of yellow wax candles. During his life the late Paridael, poor devil, had never hoped for such obsequies as these.

Forty-five years old, upright, but already becoming grey, nervous, dry and precise, the red ribbon in the buttonhole of his tightly fitting coat, Monsieur William Dobouziez walked behind little Laurent, his ward, the only child of the dead man, who was plunged in an acute and hysterical grief.



Since his father's death Laurent had not ceased crying. In church he was a pitiable sight. The doleful tolling of the great chimes and especially the abrupt jingling of the choir bell produced little convulsive tremors throughout his body. This obvious affliction exasperated his cousin William, a former officer in the army, thick skinned, an enemy to all exaggeration.

"Come, come, Laurent! For heaven's sake control yourself! Be sensible! . . . Stand up! . . . Sit down! . . . Come along, now!" he kept repeating in a whisper.

It was of no avail. Every minute the little boy compromised the irreproachable progress of the ceremony by his wailing and his trembling. And just when so great an honor was being paid his father!

Before the funeral procession began to leave the church Monsieur Dobouziez, being a man who thought of everything, gave his ward a twenty franc coin, one of five francs, and a twenty-sou piece. The first was for the collection plate, the other two for alms. But the child, decidedly as awkward as he looked, became confused in the division of his offerings and, contrary to custom, gave the gold piece to the representative of the poor, five francs to the churchwarden, and the twenty-sou piece to the priest.

At the cemetery he barely escaped falling into the grave when throwing the little clod of yellow, fetid earth which sank with so muffled and lugubrious a sound.

Finally, to the great relief of his guardian, he was put into the carriage, and the coach and two horses rapidly regained the home and factory of the Dobouziez', located in a suburb outside the fortifications.

At dinner the conversation was general, and the family, without lingering over the events of the morning, accorded only an awkward attention to Laurent, who was seated between his great-aunt and Monsieur Dobouziez. He addressed no word to Laurent excepting to exhort him to duty, good behaviour, and common sense, three words sufficiently abstract to a boy who had barely received his first communion.

His kindly great-aunt wished to sympathize more tenderly with the orphan's grief, but she feared being taxed with weakness by the master and mistress of the house, and doing him an ill turn with them. She even tried to staunch his tears through fear that his prolonged grief would seem ungrateful to the two people who, from that time forth, were to take the place of his father and mother. But, when one is but eleven years old, one lacks tact, and her whispered injunctions provoked only a recrudescence of tears.

Through the mist that veiled his eyes, Laurent, fearful and panting like a hunted bird, surreptitiously examined the group around the table.

Madame Dobouziez, his cousin Lydia, was enthroned directly across the table from her husband. A little woman, slightly bent, her skin was yellow, and shrivelled like that of a prune. Her hair was black and shiny and dressed in thick coils that hid her forehead and touched the thick, heavy eyebrows that shaded her eyes, black also, gelatinous and almost popping out of her head. Her face was singularly inexpressive in its masculine features, thin and colorless lips, and flattened nose beneath the nostrils of which a little down was perceptible. Her voice was harsh and guttural, bringing to mind the cry of a guinea hen. A heart cold and contracted rather than entirely absent; she had

moments of kindness, but never of delicacy, and her soul was narrow and constricted.

William Dobouziez, brilliant captain of industry, had married her for her money. The dowry of this daughter of a retired Brussels hosier served, after he had resigned from the army, to build his factory and become the first stepping-stone toward a rapidly acquired fortune.

Laurent's eyes rested with more satisfaction and even with a certain pleasure upon Regina, or Gina, the only child of the Dobouziez', a few years older than himself, a slender, nervous brunette with expressive black eyes, a mass of curly hair, and a flawlessly oval face. The nostrils of her aquiline nose were sensitive, her mouth was roguish and wilful, her chin marked by a delicious dimple, and the soft rose of her coloring had the delicate, dull transparence of a cameo. Never before had Laurent seen so exquisite a little girl.

Nevertheless, he did not dare stare at her for very long, nor endure the fire of her malicious eyes. The turbulence of this spoiled and roguish child was tempered by a little of the solemnity and arrogance of cousin Dobouziez. And already something disdainful and inexpressibly bantering puckered her innocent lips and altered the tone of her candid laugh.

She dazzled Laurent, she impressed him as being a personage. And vaguely, he felt afraid of her. Especially since she had looked at him fixedly two or three times, accompanying her examination with a smile full of condescension and superiority.

Conscious herself of the favorable effect that she had produced upon him, she became even more restless and capricious than usual. She began to intrude



upon the conversation, and toyed with her food, not knowing how to attract attention to herself. Her mother seemed unable to control her and, reluctant to scold her, since that would draw the minx's malice upon herself, she cast distressed glances at Dobouziez.

He resisted his wife's desperate appeal as long as he possibly could. Finally, he interfered. Gina yielded instantly, with an amusingly martyred air, to the kindly command of her father. In behalf of Gina the head of the family dispensed with his habitual rigidity. He controlled himself with a violent effort that he might not reply to the irritating sallies of his darling child; when he did finally call her to account, it was only in self-defence. And the unaccustomed sweetness of his tone and of his look recalled to Laurent the voice and the smile of Jacques Paridael. So much so that Lorki, for that was the name by which his dear absent father had called him, could hardly believe that the cousin Dobouziez who was remonstrating with his little Gina was the same rigid disciplinarian who, at the sad ceremony so shortly before, had commanded him to do this, and then that, to do so many things that he had not known which to do first. And in what a brief and peremptory tone those instructions had been uttered!

What matter; though his childish heart was breaking at the comparison, the Lorki of yesterday, the Laurent of to-day did not bear his little cousin a grudge for being the favorite. She was far too beautiful for that! But, had it been a question of some other child, a boy like himself, for example, the orphan would bitterly have resented this revelation of the extent of his loss; he would have experienced malice and hate as well as consternation and despair. It would have

gone badly with the other child, for the injustice of his own lot would have made him rebellious.

But Gina seemed to him one of the radiant princesses or fairies of his nursery tales, and it seemed natural that God should be more clement toward beings of so superior an essence!

The little fairy could control herself no longer.

"Run along, children, and play," said her father, making a sign to Laurent to follow her.

Gina led him into the garden.

It was an enclosure as regularly laid out as a peasant's backyard, bounded by walls roughcast with lime upon which fruit trees were being trained. It was a kitchen-garden and orchard as well as a pleasure garden; as large as a park, it offered neither sloping lawns nor shady woods.

It boasted, however, a single curiosity, a turret built of red brick, its back to a little hill, at the foot of which stagnated a tiny sheet of water serving as an habitation for two pairs of ducks. Winding paths converged at the top of the hillock, from which one commanded a view of the pond and the garden. This bizarre structure was rather pompously known as "The Labyrinth."

Gina did the honors to Laurent. With the air of a busy guide she showed him everything of importance. She marched him along with her in a protecting manner.

"Look out! Don't fall into the water . . . !"

"Mama doesn't allow anyone to pick the raspberries. . . . !"

She laughed heartily at his awkwardness. When two or three hardly elegant phrases crept into their jargon, she reproved him. Laurent, who was little of

a talker, became even more taciturn than usual. His timidity increased, and he felt disgusted with himself for appearing ridiculous to Gina.

That day Gina was wearing her school dress, grey trimmed with blue silk. She described to her companion, who never wearied of listening to her, all the peculiarities of the convent at Malines. She even regaled him with a few caricatures, imitating, with grimaces and gestures, several of the good sisters. The Reverend Mother squinted and Sister Veronica, who took care of the linens, spoke through her nose, and Sister Hubertine fell asleep and snored during the evening study hour.

The chapter of infirmities and defects of her teachers having put her in good humor, she took delight in embarrassing her companion.

"Is it true that your father was nothing but a clerk? Was there only one little door to your house? Why did you never come to see us? We are cousins, eh? Funny, isn't it? Paridael, that's a Flemish name, isn't it? You know Gaston and Anthanasius Saint-Fardier, the sons of my father's partner, Monsieur Saint-Fardier? They are two merry fellows. They ride horseback, and they don't wear caps. They're not at all like you. Papa told me you looked like a little peasant, with your red cheeks, your big teeth, and your hair pasted down flat. Who cut your hair that way? Yes, father is right, you look very much like the little peasants who assist the priest at the mass here!"

She set upon Laurent with implacable malice. Every word went straight to his heart. Blushing more than ever, he forced himself to laugh as he had at the portraits of the good sisters, and found nothing to say in reply.



He would have liked to prove to the little tease that one may wear a blouse puffed out like a bag, a coat both too long and too wide, made to last for two years, that clung to one's legs and made one look knock-kneed, a starched collar from which emerged a face as childish and blank as that of John the Baptist after his decapitation, a cap with grotesque lace trimming badly concealed by a mourning band, buttons of jet and velvet, useless buckles and cumbersome tassels, that one may, in short, be dressed like a peasant's son and yet not be more silly and ungainly than a Gaston or Athanasius Saint-Fardier!

His good nurse Siska was not a model tailor, but at least she knew how to make the most of the material. And then, too, Jacques Paridael had liked these clothes so well upon his little Laurent. On the day of his first communion the dear man had repeated, as he embraced him, "You are as handsome as a prince, my Lorki!"

And even now he was wearing that same holiday suit, just as it had been then, with the exception of the crape wound about his cap and replacing, upon his right arm, the glorious band of *moiré* trimmed with silver.

The tease was suddenly seized with a good impulse. While running through the flower beds she picked a China-aster with poppy colored petals and golden heart.

"Here, Peasant," she cried, "put this flower in your buttonhole!"

She might call him Peasant all she wanted! He forgave her freely. This flower stuck in his black blouse was the first smile that illumined his grief. Even less able to put into words his joy than he had been able to express his bitterness of heart, he would,



had he dared, have fallen upon his knees before the little girl and kissed her hand, as he had seen the plumed knights do in an old volume of the "Family Magazine" that he had read on Sunday afternoons in Winter, munching roasted chestnuts as he turned the pages.

But Regina skipped to the other end of the garden without waiting for Laurent to put his gratitude into words.

He felt a pang of remorse at having allowed himself to be so quickly tamed, and sullenly tore the gay flower from his blouse. But instead of throwing it away, he put it tenderly into his pocket. And, giving himself up to his loneliness, he began to think of his home. It was empty now, and had been placed upon the market. His dog, good old Lion, had been willingly abandoned to a neighbor who consented to relieve the house of death of its presence. Siska, having been paid off, had also left. Where was she now? Would he ever see her again? Lorki had not said farewell to her in the morning. He saw her face as he had seen it in church, far at the farther end, as swollen with tears as his own.

In leaving, he had had to pass her, urged on by Cousin William, when he would so greatly have loved to throw his arms about her neck. In the carriage, he had timidly hazarded a single question.

"Where are we going now, Cousin William?"

"To the factory, of course! Where did you think?"

So they were not going to return to the house! The little boy had not insisted; he had not even asked permission to say farewell to his nurse. It was not because he had already become hard and proud. He was only timid, and out of his element. Cousin William

would have snubbed him had he mentioned so inconspicuous a person as Siska. . . . !

Tired of calling him, Gina decided to return to the dreamer. She took his arm.

"You must be deaf. . . . Come, I want you to see the nectarines. They are Mamma's special fruit, and Felicité counts them each morning. There are twelve of them. Don't touch any!"

She did not notice that Laurent had removed the flower. The little girl's indifference enlivened the Peasant, though he would have preferred her to ask what had become of her present.

He tried to forget his grief, and allowed himself to be led about by Gina. They played boys' games. To please her, he tumbled about, yelled like a little savage, rolled on the grass and in the paths, soiling his good clothes, mottling his cheeks, wet with perspiration, tears and mud.

"Oh! What a funny sight!" cried the little girl.

She dipped the corner of her handkerchief in the pond and tried to clean Laurent's face, but she laughed too much, and succeeded only in making it even more dirty.

During this operation there came the squeaking of a shrill voice.

"Mademoiselle, Monsieur would like you to come in. The guests are leaving. . . . And you, come here! Tomorrow you go back to school! You have had enough vacation as it is!"

But at the sight of young Paridael Felicité, the redoubtable Felicité, confidential servant to the family, cried out as though she had met the devil himself.

"Faugh! You nasty child!"

She had called for him at school the night before,

and was to take him back again. Acrid, grumbling, crafty, flattering the pride of her masters by copying their faults, she had immediately divined the footing upon which the child was to be treated by the household. Cousin Lydia had shifted to this wretched servant the maintenance and supervision of the intruder.

The imprudent child had just provided Felicité with a magnificent debut in her rôle of guardian. The harpy took good care not to neglect this windfall. She gave free play to her amiable sentiments.

Gina, still shaking with laughter, abandoned her companion to the taunts and scolding of the servant, and entered the drawing-room at top speed, so anxious was she to describe the farce to her parents and their guests.

Laurent made a movement to rejoin the little rogue, but Felicité did not let him escape. She pushed him toward the stairs, giving him, as she did so, such a description of the dispositions of Monsieur and Madame Dobouziez toward little pigs like himself that, wholly terrified, he hastened to gain the garret in which he had been lodged, and hid himself beneath the sheets.

Felicité had pinched and cuffed him. He had been stoic, not uttering a sound, controlling himself as far as possible before the shrew.

The stormy ending of the day diverted his mind from his grief. Emotion, fatigue, and the open air produced a heavy sleep disturbed by dreams in which contradictory images blended in a fantastic sarabande. Armed with the færy ring, the radiantly laughing Gina conducted the dance, and alternately sacrificed him to and saved him from the dark plots of an old sorceress incarnated in Felicité. In the background the pale and sweet shades of his father and Siska, the dead and

the absent, stretched their arms toward him. He threw himself toward them, but Monsieur Dobouziez with an ironic "Stop it, young rascal!" seized him in full flight. Bells were ringing. He was throwing the China-aster, Gina's gift, into the collection plate. The flower fell with a clink like that of a gold-piece, accompanied by the sprightly laugh of his little cousin, and the sound put to flight the mocking goblins and the pitying shades. . . .

Such was the initiation of Laurent Paridael into his new family life. . . .



## II

### THE STONE MILL

ON his second visit and on those which followed, when vacations sent him home to his guardians, Laurent found himself no more acclimated than he had been on the first day. Each time he seemed to fall in upon them from the moon and take up space.

They did not wait until he had put down his satchel to find out the length of his stay, and they were more anxious about the state of his clothes than they were about himself. A welcome utterly without effusion: Cousin Lydia mechanically offered him her lemon-like cheek, Gina appeared to have forgotten him since the last time, and as for Cousin William, he did not expect to be disturbed at his business for so small a matter as the arrival of a young rascalion whom he would see soon enough at the next meal.

“Ah! So there you are, eh? Have you been good? Have you improved in your studies?”

Always the same questions, asked with an air of doubt, never of encouragement. If Laurent brought home a prize it was ever his bad luck that it was one of those to which Monsieur Dobouziez attached no importance.

At the table, the round eyes of Cousin Lydia, implac-

ably levelled at him, seemed to reproach him for the lusty appetite of his twelve years. Truly, she made him let fall glasses from his fingers and morsels from his fork. These accidents did not always earn him the epithet of clumsy, but his cousin could make a contemptuous little grimace which told her thoughts very clearly. And this grimace was as nothing compared to the bantering smile of the impeccable Gina.

Cousin William, whom it was necessary to call several times before the family took their places at the table, would finally arrive, his expression preoccupied, his mind upon a new invention, computing the results, calculating the probable income from one or another improvement, his brain crammed with figures.

With his wife Monsieur Dobouziez talked shop and she understood it admirably, and when answering him made use of barbarous technical words that would have proved a stumbling block to many a man in the same business.

Monsieur Dobouziez never ceased figuring, and relaxed only to admire and cajole his daughter. More and more Laurent came to feel the absolute and almost idolatrous understanding existing between them. If the man of business became human in troubling himself about her, then, reciprocally, Gina abandoned, with her father, her airs of superiority, her little manner of conceit and detachment. Monsieur Dobouziez anticipated her desires, satisfied her least caprice, defended her even against her mother. With Gina he, the practical and matter-of-fact man, amused himself in futilities.

On each vacation Laurent found his little cousin more beautiful and more distant. Her parents had withdrawn her from school, and able, worldly tutors



were preparing her for the destiny of an opulent heiress.

Having become too big a girl, too much the young lady to amuse herself with the boy, she entertained or visited friends of her own age. The little Vanderling girls, daughters of the most celebrated lawyer of the city, two blonde and lively little gossips were her boon companions, in both studies and pleasures. And if, by exception, lacking any other company, Gina so far forgot herself as to play with the Peasant, Cousin Lydia immediately found a pretext for interrupting this recreation. She would send Felicité to warn Mademoiselle of the arrival of some professor, or the dressmaker would be bringing a dress for her to try on, or it would be time for her to practise upon the piano. Felicité, who had been worthily trained, usually anticipated her mistress's intentions and carried out this kind of mission with the most laudable zeal. Laurent had nothing to do but to amuse himself as best he could.

The factory was becoming so prosperous that each year new installations were being made; sheds, work-rooms, stores began to encroach upon the gardens surrounding the house. Laurent witnessed, not without regret, the disappearance of the Labyrinth with its tower, its pond and its ducks; that abomination had become dear to him because of Gina.

The house also annexed a part of the garden. In view of the coming débüt of their daughter the Doubouziez's were erecting a veritable palace containing a suite of rooms decorated and furnished by the most aristocratic interior decorators. Cousin William seemed to preside over these embellishments, but he always deferred to the selection and the taste of his

daughter. He had already contrived for the spoiled child a delicious little suite of two rooms, done in blue and silver, which would have delighted the heart of any lady of elegance.

The physiognomy of young Paridael's room changed like that of the others. His mansard under the roofs assumed a more and more provisional appearance. It seemed as if a deliberate malice had presided over the destiny of the young collegian's lodging. Felicité had cleared out only a space sufficient to hold a folding bed.

The attic no longer offered enough room in which to store away the rubbish accruing from the former furnishings of the house, and, preferring not to cumber the servants' rooms with such bric-a-brac, the housekeeper transported them to Laurent's retreat. She put so much zeal into doing this that the child already foresaw the time when he would have to emigrate to the stair-landing. At heart he was not displeased by this investiture. The conversion of his quarters into a place of confusion produced unforeseen and charming results. A certain sympathy, arising from the similarity of their condition, was established between the forlorn orphan and the objects which had ceased to please. But that Laurent amused himself with these old things was sufficient excuse for the amiable factotum to remove them elsewhere. To conceal his treasures and secrete his finds, the young rogue resorted to the ruses of a true smuggler.

In this garret were hoarded up, to the great joy of the refractory youth, the books condemned as too frivolous by Monsieur Dobouziez. Forbidden fruit, like the raspberries and nectarines in the gardens! The mice had already nibbled powdery holes in them, and

Laurent took delight in what the voracious little beasts had the good grace to leave him of this literature. Often he became so absorbed in his reading that he forgot all precautions. Walking on tip-toe so that she might give him no warning, Felicité would take him by surprise in his asylum. If she did not catch him red-handed at the prohibited reading, the old devil would perceive that he had rummaged over the shelves and upset the books. Then came a squall from the shrew, and howls from the punished, which ended by exciting Cousin Lydia.

Once he was caught in the act of reading "Paul and Virginia." "A bad book! You would do better to study your arithmetic!" she admonished. And Monsieur Dobouziez ratified the decree of his better half by adding that the precocious scapegrace, too great a reader and too much the dreamer, would never amount to anything, would remain all his life a poor devil like Jacques Paridael. A dreamer! What scorn Cousin William put into that word!

On winter evenings, Laurent rejoiced in gaining his dear attic as early as he could. Downstairs in the dining-room, where they detained him after dinner, he felt himself a bore and a nuisance. Why did they not send him up to bed! If he suppressed a desire to stretch, if he yawned, if he took his eyes off the school book before the clock struck ten, the sacramental hour, Cousin Lydia would roll her round eyes, and Gina would bridle, affecting to be more wide awake than ever, and chiding the boy for his temper.

Even during the day, after some remonstrance or other, Laurent would run for his refuge under the roof.

Deprived of his books, he opened the skylight,



climbed upon a chair; and surveyed the suburb.

Low, red, suburban houses huddled together in compact blocks. The growing city, having broken through its girdling ramparts, had designs upon the neighboring radish beds. Streets had already been planned, running in a straight line through the harvests. Pavements bordered fields exploited until the last moment by the expropriated peasant. In the midst of harvests there emerged, at the top of a stake, like a scarecrow, signs bearing this phrase: "Building Plots." And, veritable scouts, sentinels sent in advance by the army of urban construction, saloons took the corners of the new streets, and from the height of their many-storied, ordinary facades, new, but already of a sordid aspect, surveyed the stubble, cut short and gathered in and seeming to implore the clemency of the invaders. There is nothing as suggestive as the meeting of the country and the city. They riot in a real combat of outposts.

The plethoric, unnatural, shy appearance of the landscape was darkened by the embankments of the fortifications: crenelated doors, sombre as tunnels, crushed under platforms; walls pierced by loopholes; barracks from which plaintive bugles replied to the factory clock.

Three windmills, straggling in the fields, turned in full flight, playing their last stake while waiting to share the lot of a fourth, whose stone walls rose pitifully above the scaffolding against which was rising a tenement of workingmen's hovels, and whose wings the besiegers, with the customary behaviour of the rabble, had cut away like drunken bird-catchers.

Laurent sympathized with the poor dismantled mill without coming to detest the population of the little

streets that hugged it, hard-hitters and habitual vagabonds, heroes of many a sinister adventure, a tormenting race which the police did not always dare to grapple with in its own haunts. These "millers of the stone mill" were among the most sturdy ruffians of the city scum. The prowlers on the docks and the fresh water sharks, better known under the name of "runners," came chiefly from these waters.

But even aside from this gang of irregulars and criminals, whom Laurent came in time to know at closer range, the rest of this half-urban, half-rural population, a hard-working and tractable people, sufficed to invite and preoccupy the speculative child. Besides, the millers inevitably gave the neighborhood its color; they sprinkled with a vulgar and spicy leaven these fugitives from the villages, farm laborers turned masons and dockers, or, reciprocally, artisans turned market-gardeners, and work girls become dairy maids. By scratching the bully, one could find the cowherd; the butcher's boy had been a herdsman. Strange mongrels, sullen and fanatical as in a village, cynics and fault finders as in the city, at once surly and unreserved, truculent and lustful, fundamentally believers and superficially blasphemers, awkward and sharp-witted, patriotic, chauvinistic, their hybrid and badly defined character, their tawny, muscled and sanguine complexion endeared them, perhaps from that time forth, to the kindred barbarian, the vibrant and complex brute that was Paridael.

For a long time these affinities smouldered, vague, instinctive, latent within him.

Standing upon his chair, the view of the far lying suburb beneath him, he saturated himself in his homesickness and tore himself away from his morbid con-

templation only when he had reached the point of tears. And then, falling to his knees or rolling upon his bed, he poured out in a flood of tears all the bitterness and distress that had accumulated within him. And the sprightly noise of the mills, clear and detached like the laugh of Gina, and the snarling of the factory, grumbling and disdainful as a rebuff from Felicité, accompanied and stimulated the slow and full fall of his tears, mild and enervating showers of a weary April. And this bantering, tormenting lullaby seemed to repeat: "More! . . . More! . . . More! . . ."



### III

## THE FACTORY

FELICITÉ ended by locking up the hermit's garret during the day, and sending him out into the garden to play. The garden itself had been reduced, by one encroachment after the other, to the dimensions of a back-yard. From the windows of the house the eyes of the spy could pry into its furthest corners. And, wearied by her surveillance, the boy made incursions into the workshops.

The fifteen hundred hands in the factory were held in check by rules of a draconian severity. For the least infraction there were penalties, salaries were held up, dismissals accorded against which there was no appeal. A strict justice. No actual iniquity, but the discipline was that of a barracks, the code of penalties was badly proportioned to the offenses, and the balance invariably inclined toward the owners.

Saint-Fardier, a stout man with the head of a comic mask, an olive green skin, thick lipped, with woolly hair like that of a quadron, scoured the factory upon certain days, leaving behind him a trail of flame and brimstone. He bellowed, rolled his basilisk eyes, shoved his way about, slammed doors, and bounded like a ball of fire from one room to the next. Like a waterspout, he left in his wake despair and desolation.

Penalties rained like grapeshot upon the bewildered population. The least peccadillo entailed the discharge of the best and oldest hand. Saint-Fardier showed himself as abrupt with the foremen as with the most recent apprentice. One would have thought that if it occurred to him to measure his blows and distinguish between his victims, he would have preferred to smite the oldest employees, those whom no punishment had ever compassed, and those who had been with the factory since its foundation. The workers had named him "The Pasha," equally because of his despotism and his wantonness.

Dobouziez, who was as self-willed and as arbitrary as his partner, was less demonstrative and more close-mouthed. He was the judge, the other, the executioner. Dobouziez, crafty and well-bred, gauged at his true value the illiterate and boorish partner whom a rich marriage had put into the possession of a fortune equal to his own. The mathematician was happy in making use of the man of strength, the man whose mouth was as scorching as that of a furnace, in extremities repellent to his own finely tempered nature.

It was generally known among the workers that the worst holocausts among the important employees usually coincided with a decline in the demand for the manufactured article or an increase in the price of raw materials.

Nevertheless, Dobouziez found it necessary to curb the zeal of his partner, who, urged on by a chronic affection of the liver, rioted in proscriptions worthy of a Marius.

A very shrewd business man, but none the less clever, Dobouziez, who permitted the exploitation of the proletariat, disapproved equally of Utopian schemes and

poetic eccentricities and of useless brutality and compromising cruelty. He likened his workers to beings of an inferior race, to beasts of burden that he worked for his personal gain. He was a frigid positivist, a perfect money-making machine, without the slightest inopportune vibration, without any sentimental fancies, never deviating by the thousandth part of a second. With him nothing was unforeseen. His conscience represented a superb sextant, a magnificent instrument of precision. If he was virtuous, it was because of his dignity and his aversion to all irregularity, scandal and publicity, and also because he had found it true of human life that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. It was virtue of a purely abstract order.

If he disapproved of the uproar of his too hasty acolyte, it was in the name of equilibrium, of good order, because of his respect for the proper alignment, for the golden mean, because he wished to preserve appearances and a nicely adjusted symmetry.

When he walked around the factory, which he did only upon rare occasions, as, for instance, when it was necessary to experiment with or apply some new invention, he often found himself astonished at the absence of a face to which he had become accustomed.

"Hm!" he would say to his partner, "I don't see old Jeff around any more!"

"Cleared out!" replied Saint-Fardier, with a gesture as sharp as a chopper.

"And why?" Dobouziez objected. "A man who has worked for us for twenty years."

"Peuh! He drank. . . . He became careless and negligent. What?"

"Really? And his successor?"

“A solid, healthy workman who draws only a quarter of what that old invalid used to cost us.” And Saint-Fardier winked maliciously, noting a smile of intelligence on the face of his partner. But the other soothsayer did not unbend, and without disapproving of the discharge, called off the dogs with an indifferent air.

A strong dose of philosophy and of patience was required by the workers in order to endure without contempt the haughtiness, the scornful treatment, the rigor, the despotism of employers armed against them with an iniquitous legality.

And what accidents, infirmities, deaths did not aggravate the lot of these helots!

Laurent, who visited all parts of the factory, who followed the many complex processes necessary in the making of candles from the treatment of the fetid organic matter, beef and mutton fats, from which the white and glossy stearine was separated with great difficulty, to the packing, the casing, and the loading of the trucks—Laurent was not long in attributing an occult influence, fatal and perverse, to this place itself, to all this apparatus, to this stock of tools to which was applied all the perfection of mechanics and the most recent chemical discoveries.

He went down into the engine room, dodged about the machine room, passed the vats in which the raw matter was purified by being melted and remelted, and came to the presses where, refined of its impurities, it was compressed in skins and again solidified.

Of all the rooms in which the fats were triturated, the one in worst repute was that in which they were treated with acreoline, a colorless and volatile substance whose gases attacked the eyes of the workmen.



In vain they were relieved every twelve hours, and from time to time took a respite in which to neutralize the effect of the poison; in the end the odious essence frustrated their precautions and ate away their eyeballs.

It was as if Nature, the eternal sphynx, furious at having her secrets torn from her, revenged herself upon the lowest auxiliaries of the defeats inflicted upon her by the scientists.

More expeditious than the corrosive vapors, but as artful and as silently inevitable in its effect, the dynamic force masked itself and, not always succeeding in gaining in a single blow its revenge upon the men whom it had enslaved, it lay in wait and trapped its victims one by one. Danger was not present in the spot where the machine, in full activity, rumbled, belowed and stamped, and shook the cage of thick masonry in which was plunged, like a giant buried alive, its mass of steel, copper and cast iron. Its roars kept the vigilance of its guardians ever keen. And just when it was ready to free itself from its shackles, to burst forth, to shatter everything around it, the monster would be betrayed by its gauge, and the accumulated steam would inoffensively escape through the safety valves. But far away from the generator, the fly-wheel and the cranks, the machine conspired against its servitors. Simple bands of leather detached themselves from the principal mass like the long tentacles of an octopus, and, through holes let into the walls, ran tributary machines. These endless bands wound and unwound upon their reels with a grace and a smoothness that banished any idea of cruelty and assault. They moved so rapidly that they seemed immobile. And there were even moments in which they

were no longer visible. They escaped, flew away, returned to their point of departure, flew forth again tirelessly, accomplished the same operation thousands of times, making as they revolved hardly as much noise as the beating of wings or the purr of a wheedling kitten, and in nearing them their breath floated past with a soft and gentle caress.

In the end, the workmen who kept them in repair and superintended them did not suspect them of any more harm than the trainer suspects the apparent forbearance of his felines. At intervals in the work they lulled him to sleep or induced him to revery like the murmur of water or the nasal whirr of a spinning wheel. But velvety cats are panthers on the watch. Forever lying in wait, they took advantage of his drowsiness, of a slight relaxing of his attention, of a furtive heedlessness, of a careless gesture in working, of his desire to lean back, to stretch and yawn.

They took advantage even of his untidiness. A puffed shirt, a loose blouse, a mere crease sufficed them. Masters of a tip of his clothing, the transmission belts, their endless bands like prehensile, sucking tentacles, pulled at the cloth and, before it could tear, drew it toward them, sucked it in and the poor fellow with it. Vainly he tried to fight it off. Dizziness overcame him. A cry of horror strangled in his throat. The torturer exhausted upon him the whole series of obsolete punishments. He was extended upon the rack, torn, scalped, mangled, hacked to pieces, flung piece by piece yards away like a stone from a sling, or squeezed like a lemon in the gearing, his blood, his brain and his marrow were sprinkled over the excited and helpless gang of laborers. Most rarely did the burnt offering get an opportunity to take reprisals

upon the drunken minotaur. If he did recover, it was with one member the less, an arm reduced to pulp, a leg broken in twenty places. Dead forever to work, he was a living mockery.

Fall upon the murderer? Shut off the power? The man is either mangled or killed before one has time to see the unequal struggle.

Laurent absorbed from the worst instruments of torture and the most malignant elixirs of the inquisitors the highly vaunted marvels of physics and industrial chemistry; he could see only the reverse of that prosperous industrialism of which Gina, from her side, saw only the radiant and brilliant aspect. He discovered the lie innate in the word Progress so constantly upon the lips of the middle classes, he saw the illusion of a society, claiming to be fraternal and democratic, founded upon a third estate more rapacious and more inhuman than the feudal lords. And, from that moment, a profound pity, an instinctive and absorbing affection, a sympathy partly maternal, partly that of a lover, seized him, a fundamental pity for these pariahs, beginning with those of his own environment, the brave daily laborers of the Dobouziez factory, who belonged to the eccentric and interloping suburban proletariat that swarmed about the Stone Mill. He took forever the side of these wide-awake, husky, well-built chaps, who worked with such energy, who braved each day sickness, poisoning, mutilation, formidable tools that turned against them, without losing for an instant their rude, free manner, their familiarity, whose relish excused its indecency.

With them the boy became communicative. When he met them, black, sweaty, panting, and they doffed their caps to him, he summoned enough courage to



stop them and ask questions. After the little persecution of veiled hints, of irony, of reticence, and the blind torture that he had undergone in the drawing-room of his guardians, to speak to them was like inhaling brisk country air after being in a hot-house of forced plants whose perfume made him giddy. He began to consider himself a sharer in the destiny of the lowly. His downtrodden weakness communed with their passive force. He conciliated stokers, machinists, draymen, laborers. They responded to the halting advances made by this repulsed child, morally neglected, misunderstood, severed from parental tenderness, whom the servants, scum of the common people, patterning themselves upon Felicité, treated as a burden upon the establishment.

## IV.

### “THE SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON”

“WERE I to live till the end of the world,” the machinist, a former cavalryman, said to Laurent while he cleaned, polished and rubbed down the three hundred horsepower metal monster, “I should never forget that scene. Yes, sir! This jade here did a pretty piece of business that day! And instead of grooming it as I am doing now, I am often tempted to hack it into as many pieces as it made of my pal. And he hadn’t even been drawn, that stoker of mine! And he was so robust, so healthy, that they called him the blond ‘Curly.’ Not a blemish on his body. There was a conscript for you whom the board of militia would not have discharged! He was so well built that one of those gentlemen from the Academy sculptured him in white marble, like the ‘poses’ in the park—idols, they say! Maybe that resemblance to the false gods brought him bad luck! It wouldn’t have made any difference had he walked around naked like our first parents; nobody would have been shocked. Oh, well! It wasn’t in ten, but in a hundred pieces that he was hacked by this machine. After the pieces had been gathered together with great trouble, it was necessary to shroud them, and I began with two other good chaps—I tell you it was necessary—by swallowing, one right after

the other, five glasses of pure gin. We rolled that human chopped meat, like so much sausage meat into sausage casing, into a half dozen linen sheets reluctantly sacrificed by Mademoiselle Felicité. And six sheets were not enough, for the blood trickled through the last one!"

While this tale, so evocative in its barbaric candor, was distressing young Laurent, he heard his name called by a great voice which was trying to make itself small.

"Hey, Master Laurent! . . . Master Lorki!"

Lorki! He had not been called that since leaving his father's house. He turned swiftly, in agony, expecting to see a ghost rise before him. And what was his joy in recognizing a stocky, bronzed fellow with twinkling eyes and a great curly beard.

"Vincent!" he cried, pale with emotion. "You, here!"

"At your service, Master Lorki. But sit down. My word! One would say I'd scared you. I'm foreman of the packing-room; you know, the women's workshop. . . ."

This packing-room was the only part of the factory into which Laurent had not yet adventured. These low women, more brazen, more roystering, less patient than their companions, had never ceased frightening him. From his bed, at night, Laurent had often heard the clock strike the hour of deliverance. The women were released fifteen minutes before the men. Directly there arose, from the carters' door, the stamping, the galloping, the uproar of the unbridled fillies. Outside, however, they dawdled, dragging their feet. The clock struck once more. The men, in turn, packed up, more heavily, joking with each other in less sharp

voices. And in a few moments there arose from the end of the street the confused clamor of badly treated women and their surly swains. It made Laurent's flesh creep.

"The devils, they're hurting them!"

The innocent boy did not yet understand the oaths, the jerky laughs that became shrill shrieks. The uproar turned the corner of the street, lost itself at the bottom of blind alleys, dispersed, little by little, in the windings of the courts, until the district again fell into dismal and secret silence, a party to the gloom, auspicious for lurking and pairing off in the gluttoned, wanton night around the Stone Mill.

The next day, those who had yelped and clamored in a heart-rending fashion appeared sprightly, alert, even more full of pranks than before; and in the halls on the ground floor the men, vainglorious and pleased with themselves, jostled each other with an air of connivance, winking to each other, avidly gabbling.

To what mysterious conquests were they alluding, these truculent fellows?

"What! You don't know the packing-room?" cried Vincent Tilbak. "It's the most curious corner of the factory. You must see my crew! Regular bees, they are!"

Tilbak was a sailor, and from the same district as Siska.

Formerly, after a long voyage, having hardly disembarked, he would make for the house of the Paridaels. His clothing of coarse blue cloth exhaled tar, seaweed, brome, the salt water, and all the fragrance of the open, and from his being emanated a perfume no less virile and loyal. To assure himself of a welcome, his pockets were always full of curiosities from



the ocean and the antipodes; carnation-colored shells, scented fruit for Laurent, and for Siska some material from the far East, a Japanese jewel, a cannibal's amulet. Tilbak told of his adventures, and so great was the pleasure that Laurent derived from these tales that when the teller had exhausted his repertoire of true ones, he had to draw upon his imagination. And woe to him should he decide to abridge them, or alter a single detail! Laurent did not permit any variants, and implacably recalled the primitive version. Happily for the willing rhapsodist, the little tyrant, in spite of his vigilance and his curiosity, would fall asleep. Siska would then put him to bed in a little room next to the master's. And then the two friends, relieved of their beloved though occasionally annoying witness, could talk of other things than shipwrecks, whales, white bears and cannibals.

One time when they thought he was fast asleep, before Siska had taken him upstairs, Laurent half woke up at the sound of a sonorous kiss immediately followed by a slap no less generously administered. The kiss was Vincent's work, the blow, Siska's. Good old Vincent! Laurent interferred in the quarrel and reconciled the two friends before going back to sleep for good. At other times Siska wickedly chided the good-natured fellow on account of his acrid tobacco, which made her cough, she said, and which smelled up the whole house. One should have seen the contrite and appealing face, at once radiant and abashed, of this "tar-coat," as Siska called him.

And it was this Vincent, this bewitching Vincent, whose cap and loosely hanging oilskins, whose large turned-down collar and high boots dazzled him to the point of making him wish to become a cabin-boy, that



young Paridael saw again this morning, in the prosaic costume of a landlubber, in the stifling factory of Cousin Dobouziez! How did that happen?

In spite of his passion for the "big pond" and for dangerous but ennobling adventures which banished from him all vile and narrow thoughts, Tilbak had resigned himself, for love of Siska, to doff his tarry brogues, his blue cotton jersey, his oilskin sou'wester, and to set foot upon dry land. The friends had married. From their savings they bought a little food-shop for sailors in the sailors' quarter. Siska ran the shop, and Vincent had just taken the position of foreman with Monsieur Doubouziez, having been recommended by his former captain, who had become very fond of his brave topman.

"And Siska?" young Paridael kept asking.

"Prettier than ever, Master Lorki—Master Laurent, I should say, for you are a man now. . . . How happy she would be to see you! No day goes by that she does not talk about you to me. During the three weeks that I have shipped here, she has asked me at least a thousand times whether I hadn't seen you, whether I didn't know what had become of you, how her Lorki looked, for, by your leave, she continues to call you by the name you were called by when your late dear father was alive. But, confound it, I did not know who would give me any information. These bourgeois here—excuse my frankness—have something about them that takes away any desire to talk to them. Really, he isn't a very comfortable person, that Captain Doubouziez! And the other! A regular old field marshal! But here you are, anyhow, so tell me quickly what to say to Siska! And when will you come to see us?"

And the good fellow, always square, always frank, always open hearted as he had been in other days, a little more bearded, a trifle less burnt, his ears still pierced by silver rings, thought it was his duty to tell young Paridael how well he looked, although the boy no longer had his former bright and carefree air. But at that minute the boy's joy at seeing Vincent again was so great that a transient gleam dissipated the shadows of his prematurely thoughtful expression.

"I never go out alone," he answered, sighing deeply. "My cousin thinks it wasted time, and that visits would distract my attention from my studies. Studies! That's all my cousin ever thinks about!"

"True! Well, it's a pity," said Vincent, a little disappointed. "But it's for your own good. Siska will understand that! And you will become a great scholar and do us all proud, eh, Master Lorki?"

What would he not have given to seize the sailor and charge him with kisses for Siska! But within the walls of that malevolent factory, so near the room in which his majestic cousin sat enthroned, not far from the place haunted by the terrible Felicité and the mocking Gina, the schoolboy felt ill at ease, hampered, constrained, and so did not give expression to his emotion. And he felt a little remorseful at the thought that he had not once inquired for his faithful Siska since the day of his father's funeral.

Vincent divined the boy's embarrassment. At Laurent's age feelings are not easily disguised, and Vincent easily read the boy's pain in his serious expression, his husky voice, and especially in the fervent looks that lingered upon this dear inhabitant of his father's house. And as tears threatened to veil Laurent's big homesick eyes:

"Come, come, Master Lorki!" he said, grasping the boy's hands in his and pressing them warmly. "None of that, now, by my quid! Shh! Hush! We're not setting sail yet! At least you can join me on the bridge of the schooner! I'll wait for you. Now I'm going to heave anchor, for I hear the voice of old Cat o' Nine Tails, otherwise called The Pasha. To your posts, all of you!"

The packing-room, a huge hall around the sides of which ran a platform, was situated on the first floor of the main building, and accommodated three hundred workwomen, for the most part fresh, plump, turbulent girls, brazen, full blooded, with laughing, sensual mouths, intrepid eyes, possessing the gift of gab. They were uniformly and cleanly garbed in blue skirts and cottonette jackets, their hair tightly twisted into a knot at the back and held together under little, white frilled caps, the strings of which fell down their backs. Employed in putting the finishing touches to the candles as they came out of the mould, in polishing and packing them, some plying the roller, others the wick-cutter, they bustled about the three rows of tables and polishing machines, and the candles passed from one machine to the next, approaching, with each manipulation, the type destined to garnish candelabra and girandoles. Since it was very hot working above the steam propelled machines, and since they worked with a great deal of spirit, many of them, in order to be more comfortable, opened their waists and uncovered their throats, braving the reproofs administered by Tilbak reluctantly, and, to borrow his own picturesque phrase, only when the girls had reefed their last sails. They and their machines were reflected in the floor, constantly waxed by stearine waste, and as slippery



as the floors of "The Pelican" or "The Mirror," their favorite dance halls. In the evening, the light of many lamps enlivened this multiplied reflection, and added to the noise of many voices and the grinding of the machines, blinded and deafened Laurent each time that he had come to the door of the room. What troubled him most was the sight of all these pretty girls facing him as they stood at their benches. Very abashed and very clumsy, he passed between the long lines of benches and, stepping gingerly to avoid slipping on the glassy floor, he gained the end of the room where Vincent Tilback sat enthroned in a species of pulpit that he termed his "poop."

There, under the protection of his friend, Laurent soon regained his self-possession. He suffered the inquisition of those many dark and brilliant eyes, responded to the smiles upon those shining faces, and gathered his courage sufficiently to approach the polishers and follow the movement of rosy hands as smooth as the stearine itself.

One day Tilbak asked him if he still cared as much for stories as he used to. "Oh! more than ever," exclaimed Laurent. The sailor took from beneath his coat two volumes that had been tightly pressed to his breast, and gave them to the young schoolboy.

"Accept these books as a remembrance from Siska and Vincent," said the good fellow. They were "The Swiss Family Robinson." "I inherited them from a helmsman who died of yellow fever in the Antilles. I do not know how to read, Master Lorki; when I was nine years old I took care of the cows with Siska, and I was a cabin-boy at twelve."

Laurent did not foresee the consequences of receiv-

ing this gift. Felicité soon discovered the two poor volumes so well hidden at the bottom of his trunk. He had not yet read them through. Outrageously spoiled, these two contraband old books exhaled that odor of the hold and of stale tobacco which obstinately impregnates the belongings of sea-folk, and as suspicious as an excise-man, Felicité doubted greatly that they could have come from the library, hermetically shut since last vacation. The untidy people and the air of adventure in "The Swiss Family Robinson" likewise contributed to excite the horror and indignation of Felicité. Souls of her species become harder and haughtier in proportion as they wish to impress humble folk with their importance. She began a genuine magisterial hearing. Laurent submitted to question after question, and, since he was firm in his refusal to name the donor of the books, she took them to Cousin Dobouziez. Called before his guardian, Laurent refused to answer his summons. He was deprived of dessert, put upon a diet of bread and water, locked in a dark room, but they forced not one more word from him. Denounce Tilbak! He would rather have been crushed to his last fiber by the man-killing machine! While waiting to share the lot of the blond "Curly," he commenced by braving old Cat o' Nine Tails, whom Dobouziez, who had exhausted all his methods of intimidation, had decided to call to the rescue.

The Pasha had stripped the boy with the truculence of a flagellant friar, and held the boy's head between his knees. Laurent did not deign to make the slightest plea for mercy. Already the executioner began to raise his cane to thrash the rebel, when Dobouziez, overcome by some scruple or shocked by a spectacle



more worthy of a convict gang than a respectable place of business, stopped his partner's hand.

"I have just found a method of breaking your pig-headed will," he declared to Laurent, whom Felicité had come to remove to his cell. "Tomorrow you will leave for Saint Hubert, where parents lock up rascals like you with young thieves!"

Laurent told himself that, prison for prison, any one would be satisfactory that did not have Felicité for its jailor.

However, Tilbak, worried because he no longer saw his young friend, that very day asked the servants, and having been told what had happened, he immediately asked to see Monsieur Dobouziez about an urgent matter.

Sitting at his desk, his back turned to the door, the manufacturer, who had just condemned his ward, had recovered his habitual calm and was working with his usual lucidity of spirit. Tilbak presented himself, hat in hand, and took off his great boots in deference to the rich Tournal carpet. Dobouziez barely turned his head, and without raising his eyes from the diagram stretched before him called:

"Come here! What do you want of me?"

"Excuse me, sir, but it was I who gave Master Laurent the books which made you so angry with him. . . ."

"Oh! It was you, was it?" was all that Dobouziez said, and he pressed the electric button on his desk.

"Please ask Mademoiselle Felicité for the objects forfeited by Monsieur Paridael," he ordered the office boy who had run from the next room.

The circumstantial evidence having been brought to him, the manufacturer rose with a bored air, consid-

ered a moment, with disgust, the poor old books, as if they represented to him a jelly fish or some other slimy and gelatinous inhabitant of the waves, and, having no forceps with which to touch them, made a sign to Tilbak to remove his property.

"Hereafter you will spare yourself the trouble of putting such rubbish in the hands of my ward."

"Certainly, sir. And be sure that had I foreseen the trouble which these old books caused the dear boy, I should have been careful not to give them to him. Forgive him, I beg you. It wasn't his fault. I am the guilty party. . . ."

Monsieur Dobouziez, visibly annoyed by this intercession, turned his back upon the pleader, seated himself, and methodically filling the space between the two branches of his compass with Chinese ink, settled himself to continue his diagram.

"Listen to me, boss," insisted Tilbak, after having coughed to attract the magnate's attention, "your ward is not a rascal. They are deceiving you about him. . . . My wife knows him better, you know. She can tell you what he's worth! Are you serious about locking him up with thieves? Captain, I appeal to your honor, to your feelings as a former soldier. It is impossible for you to condemn that child because he refused to be a Judas! . . . Yes—a Judas!"

At this heated defiance, Monsieur Dobouziez jumped, half rose from his chair, and more white than usual, stretched his arm toward the door with so peremptory a gesture, and cast so bitter a look at Tilbak, that the latter, fearing to do an ill office to Paridael by insisting, decided to draw on his boots, and to walk out, holding his hand to his hat.

Did the mediation of Tilbak cause the wise Do-

bouziez to reflect? Or did the moderate man fear the effect that such an extremely rigorous act would have upon public opinion? Laurent escaped the prison of Saint Hubert. Only, to the numerous interdictions which weighed down upon him, his guardian added one forbidding him entrance to the factory and converse with the workmen.

"As if he were not ill-bred and common enough without that," added Felicité, charged with keeping a tighter rein than ever upon the unnatural child.

"Beware, Peasant, if I catch you rooting about the workroom!" said Saint-Fardier, accompanying this menace with a twirl of his cane.

As if Laurent would have recoiled before the dangers of a whipping! He tried more than once to violate the interdiction, and to see Tilbak, to thank him and convey to him his faithful affection, but they had not forgotten the key in the door connecting the garden with the factory, and the date of his return to school came before he had found the chance to climb the wall in order to visit the foreman.

In the following vacation, Felicité told Laurent, in the guise of welcome news, that his sailor had not remained in the factory for long after the affair of "The Swiss Family Robinson." Particularly designated for the ill-humor and meddling ways of Saint-Fardier, the much-enduring and very stoic man had finally replied in kind, and the satrap, who was seeking only a single pretext for getting rid of him, did not allow the occasion to slip by.

All broken up by this news, Laurent sought Gina, counting upon interesting her in the fate of Tilbak and his family, for the poor folk had children.

During the drama which ended with the discharge

of the foreman, Gina had affected a supreme indifference to what was occurring. Far from seeking to excuse the so-called fault of Vincent Tilbak, she had not even interceded in Laurent's favor. On the contrary, as soon as she heard of her cousin's relations with "common people," she outdid her former coldness and disdain, ceasing even to speak to him of the scandal that was turning the house upside down. During the boy's quarantine, for Tilbak and his book had given the boy the pestilence, the proud little lady had not once asked for him. And when he was put back into circulation she hardly deigned to recognize him.

And in despite of this, Laurent retained illusions concerning his cousin's character. He imputed her dryness and her lack of feeling to her education. How could she be interested in the working classes, people whose existence she scarcely suspected? She never came in contact with them, and she heard them spoken of by her parents as a fourth kingdom of nature, a tool, an animated mineral less interesting than plants, and more dangerous than animals.

He found Gina alone in the dining room, watering the hyacinths that flourished in the window-boxes. Emboldened by his affection for Vincent, Laurent came up to her and began without preamble:

"Gina, Cousin Gina, ask your father to reinstate Vincent Tilbak. . . ."

"—Vincent," she answered, continuing to tend to her aristocratic flowers, "I do not know Vincent Tilbak. . . ."

"The foreman of the packing room, whom Monsieur Saint-Fardier discharged. . . ."

"Ah! Now I know whom you mean. 'The Swiss Family Robinson!' The man who made us all angry



with you! Are you not ashamed to speak again of that pretty mess? I certainly shall be careful not to mention his name to my father!"

And, with a scandalized grimace, Gina passed into the other room, humming a popular song. Laurent remained stupefied, mechanically looking at the hyacinths, pretty and crisp, of which Gina was so careful. For an instant he nourished a desire to ravage these flowers, persuaded for the moment that he had taken an eternal dislike to his inhuman little cousin.



## V

### THE DRAIN

THAT vacation passed like the others, with this difference only, that in the great, newly-furnished house, Laurent was even more neglected and left to himself than usual. He came to envy the lot of the old pieces of furniture, cast off and doomed to slumber in the gloom and the dust of the attic. At least, when they had ceased to please, they were not humiliated by being placed in contact with their successors, while he, who had never pleased, nevertheless continued to figure as an incongruous and melancholy contrast to the assortment of rich furnishings and chilly plants. He felt himself more and more out of place in this costly and exclusive environment. Waiting for that day to come when he would be free to join others among his fellow men as ill-favored as himself, he used to long for night to come so that he might rejoin, in his narrow corner under the roof, the repudiated and banished objects that he loved.

And yet, as dismal and long as these vacations seemed to him, he was surprised to find that, hardly returned to school, he began to lament their end out of a real love of those tedious hours.

Of his sojourn with his guardians, he remembered most pleasantly the melancholy episodes, and it was the

least pleasing and the most rough and corroded aspects of the factory that haunted him as he studied, or when he could not sleep. Out of aversion for the hyacinths that to him symbolized his beautiful cousin's harshness toward the poor and the downtrodden, he would have collected withered bouquets and rustic flowers. To the expensive nectarines reserved for Cousin Lydia, he preferred a hard apple that would crunch between his teeth.

In the same way, he retained in his nostrils the anything but soft odour of the factory, especially the smell of the drain which bordered the immense inclosure and into which was discharged the refuse of the various chemical processes, pestilential acids, the waste arising from the refining of the tallow. The musty, oily odour exhaled by these filthy excrescences pursued him, when he was at school, with the obstinacy of a vulgar refrain. This reek was associated in his mind with the working classes, with the poor wretches blinded by acrolein, mangled by the machines, discharged by Saint-Fardier; it spoke to Laurent of the packing room and its girls, with their breasts bare, of Tilbak and the episode of "The Swiss Family Robinson"; it suggested the peculiar suburb, the gluttoned, wanton night about the Stone Mill.

When he set foot in his natal city it was by this drain that the realm of Gina announced its presence to him. Of all that belonged to the factory, this drain alone came to meet him at a distance, took him when he got out of the train, welcomed him with a certain cheerfulness long before he had seen, through its curtain of trees, the first roofs and mills of the suburb, the high, red, rigid chimneys shaking their fuliginous plumes in derisive welcome. It was also the last to say farewell

to him when he went away, like a lost, mangy dog that runs along after a pitying passer-by.

Its dark surface streaked with delicate colours, this horrible sink flowed, open to the sky, the whole length of the leprous road leading to the factory. With insolent sluggishness it sought the branch of the river whose waters it dishonored. The dwellers upon the banks of the river, humble folks who were dependent upon the all-powerful factory, murmured among themselves but did not dare complain too loudly. Confident of their submission, the owners kept adjourning the great expense of covering this cesspool. An epidemic of cholera, breaking out in the middle of August, gave them, however, something to think about. Provoked and stimulated by the noxious exhalations of the drain, the scourge struck the factory quarters more cruelly than any other. The working people died like flies. Although the survivors feared famine should they protest openly against the stench, the Dobouziez family thought they could win over the population, secretly rising against them, and came to the relief of the stricken families. But their almost forced generosity expended itself without good grace, without tact, without that pity which enhances kindness and distinguishes true charity from made-to-order philanthropy. To the charitable Felicité had been entrusted the distribution of alms. Occupied in this direction, she had less chance to watch Laurent, and he profited by this laxity in taking an occasional furlough.

One opaque and coppery evening he was making his way toward the factory-quarter. While walking slowly down the long workingman's street, sordidly lit at great intervals by a smoky lantern, his attention, more finely sharpened and more subtle than usual, was dis-

tracted by a prolonged and mournful murmur. He thought first of a chorus of frogs, but immediately knew that no living beast ever haunted the silt of the drain. As he advanced, the noise became more distinct. Upon turning the corner near a crossroad close to the factory he discovered the cause.

In a little bracketed niche adorning the angle of two streets was enthroned a Madonna of painted wood about which a hundred tallow candles made a resplendent halo. The total obscurity of the rest of the road rendered this partial illumination especially fantastic. At the foot of the glistening tabernacle, before which there usually burned only a small night light, underneath this naive simulcarum of the Assumption, so low that the tongues of flame darting and trembling in the immobile, suffocating night could barely reach them, the poor women of the quarter swarmed in a prostrate mass. In black mantles and white caps, they told their rosaries, mumbling litanies in the broken and whining voices of beggars who tell their misfortunes. They had each paid their share of this offering of illumination in the hope of prevailing, through the intercession of His Mother, upon the God who at will lets loose and withholds devouring plagues.

It was to be expected that the illumination would not last as long as the psalmody. The aureole was already punctured with black stains. And each time that a candle threatened to become extinguished the supplicants redoubled their prayers, lamented more loudly and quickly. Without doubt the dear souls of a brother, a husband or a child corresponded to those agonizing flames. And they would cease trembling at the moment when the invalid was in the throes of death. It was as if so many last breaths extinguished



one by one the tremulous glimmering candles. And the shadows thickened, heavily weighted with the day's dead. A few steps away rose the factory, even darker than the surrounding gloom, like the temple of a malicious divinity. An excess of calamity: at that equivocal hour the terrible drain, rising higher than usual, neutralized by its murderous effluvia the increase of their prayers and the holy water of their tears.

To reinforce this impression of agony and despair, it seemed to Laurent, who was closely scrutinizing the smiling Madonna, that her face reproduced the imperious and too regular features of his Cousin Gina. Was it possible that, in order to make these devotions miscarry, the spirit of the Dobouziez factory had substituted itself for the Queen of Heaven? Just then the poor mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, children and grandmothers began to intone, after the vicar, a pleading and lamentable Regina Coeli!

Laurent could no longer doubt it. He recognized her overweening expression, her distant and mocking glance. He would have sworn that a breath escaped between the lips of the false Madonna, and that she was taking a crafty pleasure in blowing out the last candles!

He was tempted to throw himself between the crowd and the idol and to cry to them:

"Stop! You are deceiving yourselves cruelly, O poor women, my sisters! She whose aid you are invoking is the other Queen, as beautiful, but the most pitiless of all queens. Stop! She is Regina, the nymph of the drain, the flower of the cesspool; it nourishes her and makes her proud and strong. But you! You it poisons, and you it kills!"

But the canticle melted suddenly into a torrent of



tears. Not one candle was burning any longer. The little Madonna hid herself from the imploring eyes of those many women. The last victim of the cholera had just expired.

## VI

### THE NEW SUIT

THAT winter Mademoiselle Dobouziez was to make her debut. The days passed in errands and purchases. Gina was ordering many expensive and rare gowns. Her mother, forced to chaperon and accompany her, felt the effects of an access of coquetry. She thought it proper to dress like a young girl, to wear light colors, to choose gowns and hats as nearly like her daughter's as she could obtain them. Pushing her love of artificial flowers and flashy ribbons to an extreme, she turned the modistes' shops topsy turvy, unrolling all the ribbons, upsetting all the reels of trimming, bathing in a sea of feathers, ribbons, marabou and ostrich plumes. Had Regina not been there to take the milliner aside as she left the shop and cancel some of the embellishments chosen by the good lady, her mother would have harbored upon her hats enough things to decorate the chief altar of the cathedral or to enrich a botanical and ornithological museum. It was not without a struggle that Gina, who was very sensitive to ridicule, succeeded in pruning away a few of the shrubs from the nursery that Madame Dobouziez proposed to offer to the admiration of the commercial aristocracy.

Gina was already beginning to reveal a feminine restlessness, to cherish some thoughts of emancipation. For the surroundings in which she exhibited them, her girlish gowns were a little lacking in modesty, so the provincial puritans said, but they possessed a great deal of character, and Gina wore them with a challenging swagger that was very alluring. Laurent felt himself more and more greatly fascinated by the radiant heiress, and that without discerning whether his feeling for her was envy or love.

He arrived at the moment when the perspective of continued pleasures and new successes was beginning to excite Gina and make her more communicative and more amiable to those around her. Won by her good spirits, her conciliating and jovial moods, Laurent himself often remained near her. When he sulked in his corner she would call him, tell him her plans, disclose the number of invitations being sent out for her first dance, show him her purchases, even deign to consult him about the shade or the hang of a gown or the choice of a ring.

"Come here, Peasant, and show that you have some taste!"

She darted out the sobriquet with a good humor that deprived it of any disagreeable implication. Would this momentary calm in their family relations endure? Laurent availed himself of it as a famished tramp happily warms himself at an hospitable hearthside, forgetting that in an hour he will have to resume his road out in the snow and ice.

When Laurent went to the vestibule or to the portecochère to watch their departure, Gina accepted his attentions, consenting to let him hold her evening wrap, her fan, her umbrella. He watched her quickly

get into the carriage, lifting the lacy flounces of her petticoat with an adorable gesture.

"Are you coming, Mother? Good-by, Peasant!"

Cousin Lydia, all out of breath, hoisted herself into the carriage. The step creaked under her weight, and the carriage itself leaned down on her side.

Finally she was installed. Gina's nervous little gloved hand let down the window. The footman, hat in hand, opened the folding doors of the entrance hall and saluted the ladies. She had gone!

It was necessary also to give some attention to the outfitting of young Paridael, who was to be sent far away, to an international college, from which he would not return until he had finished his studies.

Cousin Lydia and the inevitable Felicité made inroads upon the wardrobe of Monsieur Dobouziez. With the minute exactitude of archaeologists they inspected, piece by piece, the togs that "Monsieur" no longer wore, passing them from hand to hand, weighing them, fingering the material, deliberating together. Herself won over by the spirit of gayety that filled the house, Madame Dobouziez declared herself ready to sacrifice, in order to complete Laurent's outfit, one of her husband's coats, almost new, or an overcoat that was rather more out of fashion than worn out.

But Felicité invariably found the clothes too good for a boy so negligent about his belongings.

"Really, madame, the boots, cap and leather trousers of one of our workmen would suit him better."

Cousin Lydia tore a promise from Laurent, almost upon his oath, to take good care of his clothes. It was "you are sure, now?" and "you'll do better, won't you?" as if they had been confiding to his care the seamless tunic of the Saviour. They brought it to



such a pass that rather than saddle himself with the responsibility which he had to assume with his cousin's cast-off clothes, Laurent would have preferred to wear the comfortable and durable clothes of his friends the laborers.

Nothing remained but to dispose of a certain pair of green and blue plaid trousers, an abomination that Cousin William himself, who was not very exacting in regard to his wearing apparel, had ceased using after its third wearing.

Felicité coveted these disastrous breeches with a view to reselling them to the haberdasher. Each piece of clothing falling to the orphan decreased by so much the profit which she usually made on her employers' wardrobe. This circumstance was no stranger to the animosity that she cherished for Laurent. He, moreover, would willingly have given her his cousin's entire outfit, and especially the frightful spinach and indigo trousers, but he did not dare show his repugnance openly, since Cousin Lydia had taken it into her head that they would please him mightily.

At this moment Regina, who was looking for her mother, appeared on the stair-landing.

"Oh! The nightmare!" she cried, "I hope, Mamma, that you're not going to give that to Laurent? All the Peasant needs is that horror to make him deserve his name!"

And in an outburst of fraternal emotion, Gina, having examined the pile of old clothes destined for her cousin, declared that some of it might do for lounging clothes, but that there was no single suit which he could wear in public.

"Let's go, Mamma," she said, "I have two things to tend to down town, and, in passing, we'll stop at the



Saint-Fardier's tailor's. He will find a way to polish this young man up a bit. Come along, you, too."

There was no way of resisting Gina. Felicité swallowed her spite, and consoled herself for the unwonted favor which the capricious girl was bestowing upon the accursed child by appropriating the plaid trousers entirely without repugnance.

It was the first time that Laurent had gone out riding with his cousins. Seated next to the coachman, whom surprise had almost precipitated from his seat when Laurent perched there, he turned from time to time to show Gina a less sullen expression than usual, and to thank her by his unaccustomed joy. He counted for something in the Dobouziez family! This sudden access of favor just escaped making him vain. He felt a bit of conceit creeping into his spirit and looked down upon the pedestrians from the height of his grandeur. Under the effect of this moment he forgot the disparagement and the affronts that he had previously undergone, the harshness of Gina and her parents toward the Tilbaks, and he remembered, not without remorse, his blasphemies against the "nymph of the drain" on that sinister night of the novena when the cholera was raging.

Ah! the cholera-stricken, the wounded, the pariahs were far away! He had not abjured them, but he no longer worried about them. He was ready to recognize without pain or reserve the beneficence of his guardian, to find Cousin Lydia very affectionate, to account for the Pasha's ferocity on the score of his liver trouble. He no longer bore a grudge even against Felicité.

A charming morning of reconciliation! It was a beautiful day, the streets seemed in holiday apparel,

the ladies whose carriages passed theirs almost included him in their bows.

They stopped in turn at the Saint-Fardier's tailor, haberdasher, bootmaker and hatter. The tailor took Paridael's measure for a suit, for which Gina chose the most expensive and finest material, in spite of the protests of her mother, who was beginning to find Gina's solicitude for their young, poor relative a rather ruinous affair. To what prodigalities would Gina not go before being obliged to return home? Every minute the economical lady consulted her watch.

"Gina, it's time for luncheon. Your father is waiting for us."

But Gina had taken it into her head that it was her turn to arrange her cousin's outfit, and she brought to the execution of her plan her customary haste and petulance. When she had decided to do something she brooked neither delay nor reflection. "Now or never" could well have been upon her crest.

At the haberdasher's, besides ordering six fine linen shirts to be made up for her protégé, she bought a couple of beautiful ties. At the hatter's he exchanged his worn felt for an irreproachable headgear, and at the bootmaker's he bought shoes that fitted his foot to perfection. He wore his new shoes and hat. It was the beginning of a metamorphosis. At the glove shop Gina remarked for the first time that he had a finely shaped foot and hand. She rejoiced in the gradual change that was taking place in the boy's appearance.

"Look, Mamma! He hasn't such a clownish appearance now. In fact, he is almost nice looking, isn't he?"

The "almost" spoiled Laurent's happiness at bit, but he could hope that when he was newly clad from head

to foot Gina would find him altogether presentable.

An illusion, a lure, a mirage, that day was none the less one of the happiest in Laurent's experience. After Gina had paved the way, every one at the factory, even Cousin William and the irreconcilable Felicité, was more gentle with the boy, and did not scold him as often.

"Mademoiselle acts as if she still played with dolls," the peevish creature contented herself with saying in an undertone, when Gina made Laurent turn and turn so that he might show his new things to Cousin William.

The game must have amused the girl, for when the tailor delivered Laurent's things on the eve of a boat trip to Hemixem, where the Dobouziez had their country place, she asked that he be included in the party. As he was to leave the following day, her parents lent themselves to this latest fancy, upon condition that he merit it by prodigies of application to his studies.

Decidedly Laurent felt his last prejudices disappear. He was of the privileged age when injuries are forgiven, when the slightest attention compensates for years of disaffection and indifference.

## VII

### HEMIXEM

HAPPY Laurent! At the wharf, exulting in his new clothes, carrying his head high, he mixed with the guests with a confidence and an equality that he had never before felt. There were at least thirty people in the party. Ladies and girls in fresh, delicate summer gowns, gentlemen in elegant negligé, straw hat and white flannels. Not only was Laurent as well dressed as they, but even better dressed, and the Saint-Fardier boys, two prigs of eighteen and twenty, to whom Gina introduced him as a young savage reputed to be incorrigible, but in the process of being trained, looked askance, exchanging a smile of understanding with the young girl, which, at any other moment, would have quite taken the starch out of Laurent. That smile commented clearly upon the anomaly of his city clothes.

Athanasius and Gaston were inseparable, and always dressed alike, so that they looked like two fingers from the same hand, or two stalks of asparagus from the same box. Spare, pale, unhealthy looking, they made their weak tonsils a pretext for exaggerating the height of their collars and for periodically muffling up their throats.

The widow Saint-Fardier, their grandmother, mistress of a gouty and almost imbecile nobleman, had



wheedled her lover so successfully that he had forced his daughter, a charming and affectionate girl, to contract a mesalliance with the son of his concubine. To the misconduct of the Pasha was attributed the moral affliction and the mysterious and incurable disease which caused the premature death of Madame Saint-Fardier. Athanasius and Gaston had inherited from their mother her agreeable features and a certain native distinction, but they were no more intelligent than the Baron de La Bellone, their grandfather, and the paternal immoralities had marked them with the stigmata that had obliterated the kings of France.

To Saint-Fardier, his pitiful offspring constituted a reproach, a living remorse. He had had a horror of them since he first saw them in their cradle, but his repugnance prevailed over his hatred, and he never dared to whip them. He kept them at a distance, confided them to the care of strangers, or left them to themselves, filled their pockets with money and sent them travelling, so that he might see as little of them as he possibly could. They ended by living their own life, as he lived his, by taking their meals and lodging outside the house, treating him simply as a banker, and even having business only with the cashier of the factory. It was not his fault that they had not become horrible scamps; that they came to be nothing but high livers infatuated with their own appearance, but not thoroughly rotten. In spite of their weak mentality, they could not forgive him for what they had vaguely heard of the death of their mother. The jockey-like pace of the Pasha made them blush. They avoided talking to him, frequented patrician society, looking to their mother's name as protection, and had themselves called Saint-Fardier de La Bellone.

Blasé and unsophisticated, young and already senile, their appearance recalled to Laurent his own when, one All Souls' day, Siska had made him up to look like an old man. But the young Saint-Fardiens did not claim his attention for very long.

A gong rang, the signal for departure. The gang-plank had been drawn in, the engine was stretching its limbs, and everybody, having hurried to get on board, placed themselves as best they could on the front deck, which had been covered with an awning to protect the passengers from the indiscreet ardors of an August sun.

The weather favored the excursionists. Not a cloud appeared in a sky blue with the clear color of a turquoise.

The wide olive-yellow river had a holiday aspect. Toward the north, in the roadstead and in the basins, reposed the great ships of commerce, steamers and sailors, deserted by the bulk of their crews. The gangs of dockers were taking a day off. At most one boat would be loaded in time to get to sea by afternoon. There was no other movement on the river than that of the pleasure excursions; yawls, the yachts of amateurs and sportsmen rigged for a cruise, steamers offering trips at a reduced price to the principal riverside villages for the idle working people.

Entire societies, in holiday attire and accompanied by fanfares, embarked upon these little boats. A great, noisy, demonstrative gaiety, a pressing haste, a fever of excitement exhilarated the emancipated populace, a legion of accidental and inexperienced sailors. Families joked with each other on the shore about parcels that had been left in saloons. Choral societies sang in double quick time after the signal for departure had been given, and one or another boat, having un-

moored, left the shore and tacked majestically before gaining the current in the middle of the river.

The yacht upon which the Dobouziez and their guests had embarked belonged to Bédard, a great ship-owner and wholesale merchant of the city. He had placed his elegant and spacious boat at the service of the Dobouziez's, and in exchange accepted their invitation to be one of the party.

The yacht weighed anchor, to the great joy of Laurent.

The Scheldt! With what emotion the boy saw it again! Another old and good friend of his father's day. How many times had they not walked, the two Paridaels, on the tree-planted quays, making a halt now and then in one of the little restaurants, so well frequented on Sunday afternoons that the doors were not wide enough to accommodate the crowd of patrons who entered through the windows, after climbing a little portable staircase set against the wall outside. There, if one could find a table, how nice it was to follow the movements of the strollers on the quay and the sails on the water! What a sweet freshness was in the air at twilight! How many years had gone by without his having seen his beloved river.

But it was the first time that Laurent had sailed upon it, and the new impressions allayed his regrets.

The yacht, after having turned about with the coquetry of a bird that tries its wings before taking flight, found the channel and stole away, under redoubled pressure of steam. The panorama of the great city became visible at first in all its length, and then betrayed the audacious and grandiose proportions of its monuments. It was as if the city appeared out of the earth. The trees on the quays shot forth their leafy



tops, then the roofs of the houses appeared above the foliage; the piles of the churches, surging above the high houses, looked across the roofs of warehouses, markets, historic halls, higher and always higher, towers, donjons, campaniles, pointing, mounting, seeming to climb the sky, till the moment came when they all ceased, vanquished, breathless, except the glorious tower of the cathedral. That alone continued its ascension, leaving far behind the highest of the others. Again! Again! In its turn it abandons the attempt. It overhangs the city and towers above the country. The aerial and lacy belfry surpasses all its rivals, so high that one can now see nothing else. Antwerp is eclipsed by a bend in the river; the tower, like a proud lighthouse, marks the location of the powerful metropolis. And Laurent contemplated the tower of Notre Dame until it melted, slowly, into the far distance where the blue horizon paled.

Then the devout passenger began to look at the banks of the river; clayey *polders*, reddish brickyards among green dykes; white villas curtained by trees, whose vast lawns, descending gently to the banks, afforded a perspective from the river. But, more than all else, the Scheldt itself made an impression upon the boy. He filled his heart with it through his eyes, his nostrils, his ears, with the avidity of an exile on the eve of banishment; he drank in pictures that were to be the stuff of his dreams during so many to-morrows.

Leaning against the rail at the stern, he amused himself with the foamy back-wash of their wake, with a flock of sea gulls, battering down upon the water, calling each other with a harsh cry, with the bulging, heavily laden lighters which passed by the yacht, with sails that were like landmarks in the far reaches of the



distance. Then Laurent awoke to his surroundings, to the bustle on the bridge, to the work being done by three or four stalwart looking sailors picked from among the most robust in Monsieur Bédard's crews—for, being the founder of a line of steamers running between Antwerp and Melbourne and Antwerp and Batavia, the owner of the yacht owned more serious craft than his plaything.

"Do you see that hull?" Bédard was asking Mademoiselle Dobouziez, not far from where Laurent was standing, pointing to the dockyards on the right bank. "Excuse me, mademoiselle; hull is the technical word for the skeleton of a boat under construction. That one is the embryo which is to become a vessel of nine hundred tons, equipped in a fashion never before seen, the pearl of our merchant fleet. It will be called the Regina if, in a year's time, you will do us the honor of being its godmother." And he bowed politely.

"In one year! We shall have time to think it over, Monsieur Bédard. And do you not find me a little lean and young to hold a beau as corpulent as your boat over the baptismal fount? I who do not weigh as much as a small cask! For I had myself weighed the other day at the factory, like any keg of stearine. Suppose some misfortune were to befall my godson!"

"Oh!" said Bédard, with the laugh of one who plays a sure hand, "nothing ever happens to the Southern Cross boats. They are all born under a good star. Besides, they are insured!"

"That makes no difference," answered Gina, "I have the pride of a godmother, and all the insurance in the world would not make amends for my chagrin in knowing my great godson engulfed in the bottom of the sea, gone to the kingdom of the madrepores. I'm

sorry; I give you back your hull." And laughing, she ran to join a neighboring group in which her friends, the Vanderlings, were chattering.

Hearing Gina's clear voice, Laurent turned toward the speakers. He regarded the proprietor of the yacht attentively.

Béjard had, in addition to the haughty manner common to the great merchants of Antwerp, a furtive expression in his eyes and a crafty manner of speech. Forty-five years old, of medium height, dry and gnarled, a yellowish, almost watery complexion, a hooked nose, long reddish beard and auburn hair brushed back from his forehead, thick lips, grey eyes, an arched forehead and distorted ears; such was the physical aspect of the man. In his manner and his features there was both the shrewdness of a musty Jew behind the counter in a sordid alley of Frankfort or Amsterdam, and the audacity of an adventurer who has skimmed the seas and traded in vague, distant lands. But this mixture of braggadocio and honeyed urbanity was irritating in its atrocious discordance. His expression was protean and desperate; his dull eyes gave the lie to a sharp word, or his crafty, cloying voice contradicted the malicious, hard gleam of his grey eyes. Withal, he was correct, well bred, a facile conversationalist, a prodigal host.

He was not well liked in society, but he was sought assiduously, people suspected him, but sought to propitiate him. Through his fortune, his activity, his address he had become an influence in the world of business, and now he was seeking to cut a figure in the world of politics and that of art and literature in Antwerp. He paraded the most complete tolerance, extolled broad ideas, claimed to be a free-trader and

a utilitarian, swore by Cobden and Guizot, affected, during business hours, the manners of a Yankee, but, having left the atmosphere of commerce, he aped the etiquette and the bearing of a perfect "English gentleman."

His origin and that of his fortune was far from being commensurate with his actual prestige. Credible tales, strange and disquieting as legends, were told of him. With an utter detachment and perfect serenity he had just called Gina's attention to the Fulton dockyard. And nevertheless, the mere sight of that locality should have seared his heart, or at least shamed him into modesty, so bound up was it with some deplorable pages of his career.

Many years before, his father had been the director of that same dockyard when unheard of abuses and monstrous acts which had been committed there were brought to light.

Succumbing to a perverted imagination, rare enough among the common people, the workmen in the dockyard had amused themselves by martyring their young apprentices, threatening them with even more atrocious tortures or with death itself, should they ever attempt to divulge these abominable practices. The victims, terrorized as the "fags" in English colleges used to be, could only succeed in escaping these tortures by paying over to their tormentors the greater part of their wages. Finally, however, the whole proceedings came to light.

The scandal was tremendous.

The band of torturers were lined up in court, and, as long as the trial lasted, a special detail of policemen and soldiers had difficulty in protecting them from the reprisals of the crowd, especially from the rag-



ing women, whose nails would have torn them to pieces. The court proceedings had revealed abominable mysteries; sham crucifixions, wholesale flagellations, drownings pushed almost to the last extremity, a veritable auto-da-fé. Children had been buried for hours up to their necks, others had been forced to eat revolting things, still others had been forced to fight with each other, though they cherished no animosity.

The verdict removed any suspicion of direct complicity with his underlings on the part of Monsieur Béjard, but his negligence was made manifest in a most crushing manner. The company having dismissed him from its employ, the public was not yet satisfied, and, confusing Béjard's father with the criminals who had been sentenced to hard labor, forced him to leave the city. One circumstance that had been established by all the testimony contributed to their ostracism. The disgraced director's son, then a schoolboy fifteen years old, had presided more than once at these spectacles, and, upon the oath of those concerned, took pleasure in them. Little more would have been necessary to make the public, in their great excitement, urge the imprisonment of the crafty sneak who had taken such good care not to denounce to his father the people responsible for these pleasures.

Twenty-five years later it was rumored that Béjard, junior, was coming back to his natal city. His father had become wealthy in Texas, and had left him important plantations of rice and sugar cane, cultivated by an army of blacks. On the eve of the Civil War, Freddy Béjard liquidated a part of his holdings and placed the proceeds in the principal European banks. He stayed in America for the beginning of the campaign less because of sympathy with the slavery party



than to protect his remaining property. He was under fire as a prairie guerilla against the northerners. Finally, after peace had been declared, many times a millionaire in spite of his great losses, he returned to Antwerp, dreaming, perhaps of clearing his reputation from the blots and stains of the past.

This was what was known about Bédard and his antecedents, and he himself had avowed it, with an air of boasting, in his moments of good humor.

His ostentation and the magnificent enterprises through which he contributed to the superficial prosperity of his city, opened all doors to him, at least those of the business world, for the aristocracy and the higher patrician bourgeoisie held him in as shabby repute as did the common people.

If the flatterers of success, the admirers of "clever business men," the speculators bowed down before his millions, forgot and buried the past, the most essentially local classes, the stable population, the old families of Antwerp remembered former scandals and cherished an inveterate antipathy for Freddy Bédard.

Thus they had gone as far as to claim that, enraged by the victory of the North, whose abolition movement had cut into his fortune, he had, far from freeing his slaves at the conclusion of the war, sold them to a Spanish slave dealer in the Antilles, and that he had had to leave his adopted country in order to evade the law. Another version had it that, rather than obey the decree by which the slaves were freed, he had slaughtered his down to the very last one.

The business men treated all these stories as old women's tales invented by jealous people and by the political adversaries of the parvenu. Monsieur Dobouziez himself, without exhibiting a fondness for Bédard

which it was not his habit to lavish, could not but admit that the enterprising and courageous shipowner was being held responsible for a fault, or, rather, an accident, that had been expiated with enough pain by his father. Saint-Fardier evinced for this daring chap Bédard the admiration of a connoisseur. He was ambitious to serve him as a ferocious and faithful retriever, for he approved of the bloodhounds with which the planters tracked down their fugitive slaves. At bottom he chafed under the scruples of the correct Dobouziez; his proper partner would have been Bédard.

Laurent had never seen Bédard before, and he was ignorant of his reputation. And, nevertheless, an unspeakable uneasiness took possession of him in that man's presence. He had a sad presentiment, his heart contracted, and when he had turned away from the shipowner to resume his contemplation of the landscape, the banks of the river seemed to exhale a fatidical sadness.

Just as the Fulton dockyard was about to disappear behind a band in the Scheldt, the complicated framework surrounding the hull took on the appearance of an enormous skeleton to which clung, here and there, strips of flesh and burned clothing. But this sinister illusion lasted for but a moment, and the charm of other parts of the landscape reassured the momentarily troubled spirit of Paridael.

After the illusion had passed, he attached no importance to it, but later he was destined to recall it when, with a redoubled horror, it occurred again in the most tragic moment of his life.

They had spared themselves the trouble of presenting Laurent to the proprietor of the yacht. Several times Bédard threw a keen and distrustful glance

at the boy, who, embarrassed by his new clothes and staying by himself, was continually contemplating the Flemish scenery, too flat and too unpicturesque to be of interest to an habitual tourist. The shipowner himself inquired about the intruder, having made ready to stop the boat and land him.

"Let him be," said the elegant Saint-Fardier, laughing at his annoyance, "he's a poor young relation of the Dobouziez'. They are sending him away tomorrow, and no doubt that is why he is so taciturn."

"I understand," answered Bédard, not laying claim, by that exclamation, to understanding the orphan's feelings, but simply approving of the isolation in which he had been left. And reassured of the identity of this worthless person, he ceased worrying about him.

In the natural order of events, the little passenger in the stern would have held no claim to the attention of Croesus. But had he foreseen the decisive rôle which the scamp was to play in the future! The other passengers, informed about Laurent in equally indifferent terms, accorded him no more attention. He did not notice their disdain today. He rejoiced in being able to draw in, at his ease, the full raciness of his beloved land.

Cousin Lydia, wearing a gown of Nile green trimmed with ivy, and looking like a walking arbor, was exhausting her breath in schooling the host of servants who accompanied the society with baskets of provisions. Cousin William was conferring with Bédard, Saint-Fardier, and the eminent lawyer Vanderling. If these grave gentlemen honored the Scheldt by looking at it, it was only to discuss the profit that a group of capitalists were drawing from a manufac-



tory of chemical matches or of guano that had been established upon its banks.

Regina, clothed in tea-rose muslin, her curly head topped by a large straw hat turned back *à la* Lamballe, was the center and the life of a group of young girls who amused themselves by making piquant remarks about a circle of young men in the midst of which were enthroned the Saint-Fardier brothers. The two little Vanderling girls, blonde, plump, loquacious and very alluring, had taken their eye.

The yacht glided up to the pier of Hemixem. Once landed, the program was accomplished without impediment. During their walk, the excursionists occupied themselves chiefly by ascertaining the names of the proprietors of the principal villas and estates. The young fellows guessed at the contents of the stables, and the young girls exclaimed over the beautiful white swans and red, red roses. And when the whole troupe stopped with some respect before a gilded grille at the foot of a lordly avenue at the end of which could be seen, across the lawns, a beautiful renaissance pavilion:

"Yes, it's very handsome," said Béjard, who, with his inseparable chum Dupoissy, had rejoined them, "It belongs to Baron de Waerlant, and it is very handsome. But it is mortgaged up to the hilt, and one can have the whole thing for fifty thousand francs above his debts, which amount to about a hundred thousand francs. So if you like it, buy it!"

"A just punishment for a do-nothing aristocrat, a libertine," added Dupoissy, in a nasal tone like that of the chanter of funeral offices.

These figures threw cold water upon the admiration of these well-bred people who one and all laid claim



to a solid position. They hurried on their way, ashamed of their condescension toward this real estate, feeling a little as if the proprietor, reduced to the last ditch, was going to make his appearance from a grave and borrow money from them.

After an hour's walk under the blue cupola in which carolling larks were darting, through fields of after-math exhaling perfume from every rick, all of them, without daring to say so, were beginning to have enough of the blue and green, of the little farms and the big estates whose owners they did not know. A halt was made in a little wood of fir trees, the only one in the district, a horrible little artificial grotto placed there by the proprietor, the Dobouziez' chief clerk, a fellow who understood "country pleasures" and "al-fresco breakfasts." They had skirted superb avenues of generously shady beeches and oaks, all beseeching them to halt. But they must needs have a wood, even though that wood were wretched and scraggly.

The ladies' parasols supplemented the miserly shade of the firs. The provisions were unpacked, and they ate cold food and drank warm drinks, the ingenious apparatus for freezing the champagne having refused to work, as such things usually do. Nevertheless, the luncheon was very gay, subjects for conversation not being lacking, thanks to the cursed apparatus and the heat. The bugs and caterpillars that fell into plates and upon the necks of the ladies gave Gaston and Athanasius Saint-Fardier an opportunity to remove them from Angéle and Cora Vanderling, near whom they had placed themselves, and whose coquetry held them fast.

A company of little peasants returning from high

mass were regaining their hamlet at an accelerated pace. At first timid and defiant, they halted, and after having consulted together, red as the neck of a turkey-cock, they drew close, pushing each other, and the crowd filled the boys' pockets and the girls' aprons with the remains of the meat-patties, sandwiches, badly broken bones and carcasses of chicken, and, as they were about to leave, called them back to put the hardly opened bottles of wine under their arms.

This interlude diverted the walkers until they came to the estate of the Dobouziez'. Cousin William, a good walker, would have liked to take the longest road back to the dock. His guests wanted first to know whether it was shadier, and whether there was anything else to see but fields and trees.

But as, after searching his memory, Monsieur Dobouziez remembered no other curiosities than an abandoned distillery and the military depot of Saint Bernard, the majority wanted to retrace their way by the shortest path at the risk of stumbling upon the penniless baron.

Having reached the house, and while waiting for dinner, the ladies went upstairs to freshen up, and the gentlemen went off to look at the grounds.

At dinner, which was served in a fashion to satisfy folk who did not care for rustic gastronomy, all were unanimous in praising their luncheon in the woods, and the younger folk, whose craving for food had now been satisfied, feigned astonishment at their appetites. "It is true that the walk and the fresh air . . ."

They took coffee on the terrace. Béjard took Gina to the piano and begged her to sing. Laurent went down into the garden, allured by the delicious evening-tide, the breeze from the Scheldt, the perfume of the

thickets, the sensuous and heady silence that teased the cry of the crickets and dulled the oblique, velvety flight of the bats, terrified by the unwonted presence of the masters of this deserted country place.

The voice of Gina, clear and pearly, reached him at the other end of the garden. She sang the waltz from *Romeo et Juliette* divinely; the interpretation was superior to the song. She gave it the sincerity that it lacked, she treated it with the cavalier spirit of a virtuoso. She parodied its sophistication by exaggerating the rhythm to such an extent that one could have danced to it. Laurent felt that Gina was showing herself to be too much the woman of that waltz, the woman of the void, of the vortex, of intoxication, of rarity, of velleity. Without having read Shakespeare, Laurent detested this tinkling music, thought its trilling out of place: this song, too gay, too laughing, became worse than an air of bravura, an air of bravado.

The listeners, Bédard and the Saint-Fardiens, applauded and called for more. Laurent tried to approach the beautiful singer to say farewell to her. The first morning train was to take him away. He had so many things to say to his cousin. He wanted to thank her for her kindness of the past week; to ask her to remember him from time to time. He could only stammer the simplest of goodbyes. She negligently gave him her finger tips, not turning toward him, continuing to skirmish with Bédard. Laurent was beginning to despair of attracting her attention and of obtaining a word with her, a word sweet to keep in memory, when she threw him with a coolness and a self-possession truly cruel a: "Goodnight, Laurent; be good and study hard!"

Monsieur Dobouziez could not have said it better.



## VIII

### IN SOCIETY

REGINA was to enter society. Six hundred invitations were sent out; two hundred more than had been issued for the last ball given by the governor of the province! In the city the only subject of conversation was the great event that was being prepared for. If Madame Van Belt met Madame Van Bilt, they broached the important question immediately after the usual salutations had been disposed of. They inquired what each other's daughters were going to wear. Madam Van Bal dreamed of eclipsing Madam Van Bol, and Madam Van Bul enjoyed talking it over with Madam Van Brul, her most intimate friend, who had, doubtless through an oversight, not been invited. Madam Van Brand, also omitted, pretended to have sent her regrets, although she had not received even the shadow of an invitation. But they were all partial to details, and when they could not obtain them from their friends, they tried to drag them by main force from the tradesmen. Florists, restaurateurs, confectioners; the Dobouziez' monopolized them and retained them all.

"They have them all," said the Saint-Fardiens. Other clients resigned all hope of being served. Even the highest in the social scale, if they were insistent, drew



forth this reply. "Impossible, madame, for that day we have the ball at the Dobouziez'!" The caterer, Balduyn, entrusted with the arrangement of the buffet, prepared prodigies. All the chairs at the furniture stores and the caterers' had been requisitioned. But nothing equalled the rush at the dressmakers'. Even in Brussels they cut, fitted, sewed, hemmed, embroidered and ruffled yards of goods in preparation for the inauguration of the social season in Antwerp. What ill-humor, enervation, caprice and exigencies these dressmakers had to undergo because of their beautiful clients will be placed to their credit in paradise, and, while waiting, were paid for in thousand franc bills on this earth.

The hosts were no less excited than the guests. Felicité had never been so disagreeable. She exercised her tyrannical authority upon the reinforcements of servants and workmen to whom the preparations had been entrusted. Madam Dobouziez could not stay still for a moment; her increasing embonpoint grieved her; thanks to the confusion and the exercise, she would lose a few pounds. Gina and Cousin William were more reasonable. Together they had curbed the list of guests. Gina was radiant; the trouble everyone was taking on her account flattered her and exalted her still more in her own opinion; from time to time she deigned to be pleased.

This monster ball occupied the thoughts of the clerks in the factory, and even the workmen talked of it during their hour of respite, as they drank their cold coffee. These good people did not know exactly what was going to take place, but for some days there had been such a procession of vans, of boxes, cartons and cases before the delivery entrance that even the

least lazy among them had been distracted from their work.

Happily, Laurent was away at college for there was no room for him in his garret!

Invitations had been sent to the three chief clerks, to the bookkeeper, the man of country revels, to the cashier and the correspondent. This flattered the whole body of penmen, and the office boy manifested pride in the favor extended to his superior officers. The three elect were to represent their colleagues. During business hours, when they knew that Dobouziez was at home, they discussed in a very serious manner points of etiquette, convention, and social usage. The three privileged men first consulted their comrades about the word of the letter that had to be sent to Monsieur and Madam Dobouziez. Was it to be addressed to Madame or Monsieur? Having settled that point, they had to agree upon other points of etiquette. Should they wear chamois gloves, or pearl gray kids? Should they or should they not perfume their handkerchiefs? The office boy, having spoken of patchouli as being a very aristocratic scent, raised such a hue and cry that he did not dare risk any further remarks. And afterwards? Did they have to pay a party-call? And if so, when?

"Oh! let 'afterwards' take care of itself. We shall see when the time comes!" said the bookkeeper, the lover of the fields, the man of the little fir wood.

It is the eve—it is the day—it is the evening of the ball. The floors are waxed, the chandeliers illumined, lackeys in full uniform take their posts. At nine o'clock a first carriage risks itself in the tortuous and badly paved street leading to the factory, then a sec-

ond, and then a long line begins to form. It begins to look like a nocturnal Longchamps.

The vile, stagnant drain which, the cholera having passed away, the owners no longer thought of closing over, had never been bordered by such a cavalcade. In its perplexity, it forgot to poison the wintry air.

The gossips, their chubby babies in their arms, amused themselves by watching, from the doorsteps of their hovels, the procession of carriages, and tried vainly to look through their misty windows as they passed, and see the beautiful women lounging in their little rolling rooms. But the poor women saw nothing but the light of the lamps, the shining gleam of the harness, the flashing of curb chains, the cockade on the coachman's hat. The horses whinnied and sent their white breath out into the night. The little Madonna of the crossroads, reduced to the illumination of a single vacillating candle, seemed as poor and as humble as her devout people.

The factory did not abstain from labor, however. The night shift had taken the place of the day workers, and were busy feeding the furnaces, for the stuff must never be allowed to chill. Toil and sweat, O brave "prolos," while your masters are amusing themselves!

In getting out of their carriages under the portecochère, the muffled-up guests had, at the bottom of the vast back courtyard, a momentary vision of the factory walls, and could hear the drowsy but sleepless machines, and an odour of fat assailed their nostrils. But instantly the great glass doors opened upon the vestibule filled with flowers and plants, and the radiators sent forth a gust of warm, caressing air.

The three gentlemen from the office were the first



to arrive. That afternoon they had hired, at joint expense, a coupé from the livery stable, although the factory was but fifteen minutes' walk from their lodgings. The office must be represented with dignity! They left their overcoats in the waiting room, greatly confused by the attention which the lackeys accorded them. It was even necessary for the footmen to insist before the three friends consented to accept their services.

Madame Dobouziez, who was finishing her toilette, hastened to come down to the reception room. A footman announced the trio and showed them into the room. The lady started to come forward and meet these too punctual guests, but, when they had presented themselves as three of the columns of the house of Dobouziez and Co., the welcoming smile with which Madame Dobouziez had greeted them began to visibly contract. She condescended to inquire about their health; they bowed and bowed again to express their satisfaction. They were delighted to see that their employer's wife had never enjoyed better health!

At this point of the conversation, Madame Dobouziez feigned the necessity of giving some orders, and, after apologising to them, left the room. She went upstairs to add a rose and some golden combs to her coiffure, which Regina had made decidedly too simple.

However, the crowd, the really distinguished guests, began to arrive. Madame Dobouziez repeated to satiety the three or four formulas of welcome consonant with the rank of their guests.

Among them was the Governor of the province, the Burgomaster of Antwerp and his wife, the Military Governor of the city and his wife, the Commander-in-Chief of the Province and his wife, the Presiding Jus-



tice of the Court of the First Instance and his wife, the Colonel of the Civic Guard and his wife, the superior grades of the army, but especially Monsieur du Million, Madame du Million, and the young du Millions of both sexes with German, French, and Flemish particles, or with no particles at all; there were also all the Vans of commerce, all the Vons from the banks, Janssens, Verbists, Meyers, Stevens, and Peeters in a body. Everybody was there who possessed a negotiable name, a name that could be discounted at the banks; wealthy picture dealers jostled with usurers, the upstart of today lounged next to the bankrupt of tomorrow. Each guest could have made good an income of twenty-five thousand francs, or a capital of two hundred thousand francs invested in business. A judicious and sagacious proportion. If the names announced by the footman resembled each other, the bonds of identity were even more obvious in the people themselves. The same black dress suits, the same white ties, the same opera hats. The same faces, too, for the similarity of their professions, the worship of money, gave them all a certain family resemblance. The brands of identical preoccupations made them all resemble each other, the apoplectic and the ascetic, the fat and the thin. There were gross, self-satisfied faces, imperturbable and solemn, more tightly closed than the strong-boxes of their possessors. There were uneasy, shrewd, mobile faces, bucket-shop faces, spying faces, the faces of choir boys who gorged upon the remains of the abundant hecatombs devoured by the high priests of Mercury. Long, narrow noses, winking eyes, shifty looks. These people were possessed with a badly repressed temptation to scratch their beards as they did when they thought out a business transaction or a good deal; sensual

mouths, a vaguely sardonic grin, goose-footed, bald, wearing massive rings consistent with their short, stubby fingers and pontifical stomachs. Those who spent most of their time in their offices were the palest, others, travellers who were constantly moving about, retained the tan of the sea and the open air.

Despite their uniform clothing, they were distinguishable by certain habits: a young stock broker, embarrassed by his dangling arms, manipulated his dance card as he would his memorandum pad; a dealer in novelties searched his pockets for samples of sachet; the fingers of a manufacturer of worsteds were magnetically attracted to the upholstery of the chairs and portieres. Some of these wealthy people pushed their haughtiness and arrogance almost to the point of monomania. Old man Brullekens would never touch a piece of money, gold, silver, copper, unless as a preliminary it had been polished, scraped and cleaned in such a fashion that not the slightest bit of dirt adhered to it. A footman wore himself out every day polishing up his small change. By preference he desired freshly coined pieces, and collected bills newly come from the bank.

His neighbor, De Zater, never offered an ungloved hand to anyone, not even to his children, and if he were to inadvertently pollute his aristocratic right hand by touching that of one of his acquaintances, he could not rest until he had washed it.

All were learned in the arcana of commerce, in the tricks and the legerdemain that made money pass from other people's hands into their own coffers, as if by virtue of the phenomenon of endosmose established by the physicists; all of them practised dupery and legal theft; all were experts in finesse, in composition

under a strict law, in the art of evading the law itself. Rich, but insatiable, they wished to be even richer. The younger men, their heirs, already looked weary, care-ridden and prematurely old. They had the oldish foreheads of dejected men about town as much worn out by scheming as by dissipation. Although they were in society, they scrutinized and interrogated each other, their looks crossed swords as if it were necessary to play a careful game and "get" the other fellow. The practice of lying and of giving orders, the habit of deprecating and appraising everything, the instinct of craftiness and greed enveloped their persons with a feverish temperature. They could hardly refrain from being brusque even when people were polite to them. Their decorum was convulsive, their handshake seemed to feel the pulse of your fortune, and their fingers had soft and crafty flexions like those of a placid strangler who is about to twist the neck of a fat chicken. And in the very young, the greenhorns, and the fops, one felt the humiliation and the timidity of novices annoyed more because they had not yet begun to make money than because they could not spend it as they wished.

There was as much monotony and professional resemblance among the women. Only by the variety of plumage was the collective preoccupation masked and disguised. Fat mammas were stuffed into corsets far too tightly laced; bilious matrons seemed to have just broken a long fast, although the price of the cabochons illuminating their ear lobes was sufficient to feed fifty poor families for two years. As for the young girls, there were tall ones, thin ones, precocious ones; there were the unsophisticated, the elegant, the chubby, the blondes, the brunettes, the sentimental, the



laughing, and the affected. They had delicate judgment but narrow sentiments. In order to eclipse their friends, these ladies would employ as much Machiavelism in their social relations as did their fathers, brothers and husbands in order to bankrupt their competitors. Their conversation? It was of the most gossipy banalities.

The salons now being filled with people, Regina, whom the dressmaker, the chambermaid, the hairdresser and Felicité had succeeded in dressing, made her entrance on her father's arm. Among all these graven personages, his associates and his equals, Monsieur Dobouziez looked the youngest and the most care-free, at least on this occasion, for his paternal pride had brightened his usually worried expression. Nevertheless, his excitement did not prevent him from strictly observing, as he passed from group to group introducing his daughter, the administrative and financial hierarchy of his guests.

Gina's appearance provoked a whispered murmur of approval. Laurent would have been more dazzled than ever before. She wore a gown of white net, strewn with tiny beads of silver; lilies-of-the-valley and forget-me-nots were on her shoulder-strap and in her hair. Her regular, classic beauty was enhanced by a graceful carriage; she created a harmony of gesture and contour that would have been the despair of any sculptor. Her great black eyes, her moist red lips, her profile, like an antique medallion graven upon an agate of faint rose, were framed by the wilful curls of her opulent hair, and crowned a figure of beautiful proportions and the exquisite modelling of her neck and shoulders.

The smart little pencils had finished marking up



the satin surface of the dance-cards, and the beautiful girls were now showing each other their lists, murmuring, whispering, envying each other for having so many dances taken by the one man, consoling themselves in the fact that his name did not appear so frequently on their friends' cards.

The two brothers Saint-Fardier were very much in demand. They were on familiar terms with all the men, and they flirted with all the girls. But it was, however, the little Vanderlings who attracted them most. Nervous and excited, they had a stock of phrases which they kept repeating. "It is almost as good as the Count d'Hamberville's last affair," they were pleased to remark.

Monsieur Saint-Fardier, senior, ill at ease in his evening clothes, perorated and gesticulated as if he were setting upon the workmen in the factory. Angéle and Cora wore, with hoydenish ease, scandalous dresses designed by their mother, who, being the daughter of a wealthy cabinet-maker of the Faubourg Saint Antoine in Paris, professed a most aristocratic disdain for commercial and provincial society. She admired only Gaston and Athanasius Saint-Fardier de la Bellone, who at least had been educated in Paris, and as soon as they had seemed to select her daughters, she resolutely pushed Angéle and Cora upon them. Alluring, intoxicating, cleverly trained by the Parisienne—the nickname given to Madame Vanderling, a superior woman who was as crafty as a procuress—the two girls allowed their suitors no respite, and it seemed as if the game were hunting the hunters. Their father, the eminent Vanderling, a well-known figure in all important cases before the courts, abandoned to his wife the care of providing for their daughters,

and, retiring to the little card room, was telling, between two games of bridge, the story of the crime of passion whose author he was to defend.

"Ah! an affair with an unquestionable relish. Just as if it came out of Byron's work. Lara or the Corsair in real life," he said, passing his hand over his apostolic beard with a gesture that he had copied from a veteran of the Parisian bar who had been exiled to Antwerp during the Second Empire.

Here, too, was Freddy Bédard, accompanied by his bosom friend, his shadow, his man-of-straw, so evil tongues whispered. Dupoissy was the planet that received light and heat only in the sunlight of Bédard's presence. Whatever he was he owed to the powerful shipowner. The business men were hard put to it to find out just what he was "in." Was he in—it is the consecrated expression—grain, coffee, or sugar? Eloi Dupoissy was "in" everything, and nothing. If he were left alone for two minutes, he would ask, with an uneasy air, where Bédard, his master, was. Being but a subaltern, he never refused to carry out any orders with which he was entrusted by the omnipotent ship-owner. He cherished a contempt for the people with whom Bédard did not agree, exaggerated Bédard's haughtiness, made his opinions his own. Mealy-mouthed, insinuating, sticky, when Dupoissy opened his mouth he resembled a music-loving carp striking the pitch before singing a song. Originally from Sedan, he passed himself off as a merchant of wholesale woollens. It was characteristic of him to speak of the little country in which he was living in the tone of indulgent protection so irritating in exiles from large nations. He felt as much at home as did Tartuffe with Orgon, took part in everything, discov-

ered local glories, fulminated literary anathemas, and sent articles to the newspapers.

In France, the most centralized of countries, the draining of values toward Paris is formidable. Unhappily, in no other country than France is provincial life so narrow and insipid. And Dupoissy had exiled himself from one of these provinces in order to initiate the people of Antwerp into the life of the intellect, and to contribute his efforts to their moral renascence. Dupoissy possessed one defect which rendered his career as a well-known man about town very difficult. His breath was so malodorous that Madame Vanderling, the Parisienne, who treated the French provincial with the utmost contempt, complained that he had swallowed a dead rat.

He tried vainly to conquer this pestilential effluence by means of a strong dose of mint, cachous, and other remedies; the stench only dominated their faint aromas and became more formidable than ever.

Dupoissy did not dance, but while his patron was dancing with Mademoiselle Dobouziez he extolled the power of Terpsichore, and with the sickly expression of an obese and elderly counter-jumper he entertained the crowd by recalling his youthful exploits. He remarked devotedly that Bédard and Regina were a beautiful couple; they evoked for him, among other allegories, Beauty giving wings to Genius. This and other poetic efforts made him both hungry and thirsty and he profited by the absence of his master to make frequent visits to the buffet and place an embargo upon all the food and drink that was being served.

The ball grew livelier and livelier. The three clerks, having been presented to some dowerless girls, daughters of functionaries to whom the Dobouziez' were



obligated, conscientiously did their duty, and, since the girls were as pretty and far more amiable than the rich heiresses, the penmen considered themselves as happy as the Bédards, Saint-Fardiens and Dupoissys. Bédard's assiduous attention to Mademoiselle Dobouziez worried all the mothers, who either wanted the shipowner for their daughters or the daughter of the wealthy manufacturer for their sons.

But, and nobody could have foreseen such an occurrence, the dancer especially honored by Mademoiselle Dobouziez at this memorable ball was the grain-dealer Theodore Bergmans, or Door den Berg, as he was familiarly called by his friends, that is to say, by the whole population.

Door Bergmans was an exception, in the breadth of his views and the loftiness of his spirit, to the selfish and tardigrade men with whom he came in contact. He was young, hardly twenty-five years old, and did not look his age. Vigorous and healthy, he had the stature of a mortal destined to command, and he was taller by a head than the tallest man in the assembled company. His thick, flaxen hair curled slightly above his high forehead, his kindly, penetrating eyes were set beneath arched eyebrows, the pupils of that blue-violet which becomes darker or lighter in the reflection of thought in the same way as does a sheet of water beneath the play of clouds. His nose was aquiline, his mouth small and hidden by a cavalier mustache, his beard was like those seen in portraits by Franz Hals. His voice, warm and vibrating, had that compelling tone which sways the minds of crowds from the very first words, one of those fatal voices that subjugate and inspire, so musical that the significance of the words is not immediately apparent. The son of a low-



grade fish-dealer in the *ru lle des Crabes*, who sold more eels than he did herrings and fresh sea fish, the bromides and iodine and the odour of fish that saturated his father's underground shop doubtless contributed in endowing young Door with the healthy and appetizing complexion that is characteristic of most young fishermen. At the primary school, where his parents sent him upon the advice of customers who had been struck by the boy's intelligence and vivacity, his record for conduct was impossible, but he carried off all the prizes. Taken to the Flemish Theater, he developed a passion for the Flemish language, the only language of the poor. At fifteen he wrote a play which was produced at the *Poesjenellekelder*, a puppet show that had been established in the cellar of the old *Halle-la-Viande*, where all the children of the boatmen and mussel-merchants came to be amused. When he had left grammar school he did not pursue his studies, having learned enough to be able to perfect himself without the assistance of teachers. Forced into the paternal business, he attracted custom by his good humor, his fluent wit, his sharp mind. Among the lower middle classes there flourished formerly, and still flourish, "societies" of all sorts, political, musical, and so forth. Bergmans, who already exercised a tremendous influence among his friends, only had to present himself in one of these societies to be immediately elected president. From that moment politics called him, but politics of a broad nature, essentially inspired by the needs of the common people and especially adapted to the character, the customs and the condition of the land and of the race. He took the initiative in a great movement for a national revival, in which the youth of the country followed him. But his lofty

ideals did not interfere with his material welfare. Fortune favored him. He pleased old Daelmans-Deynze, one of the old aristocrats of Antwerp, who loaned him capital with which to extend his business. Leaving his fishmongery, young Bergmans, after a profitable apprenticeship to his patron, launched himself into the world of big business, especially into the grain-market. He became rich, but his fortune did not impair his popularity. He remained the idol of the people even though he was highly thought of by the bigwigs and met the proudest and most aristocratic people on an equal footing. He became the head of the democratic and nationalistic movement.

Without yet holding any office, he represented a much more actual power than that of the députés or the ediles elected by a limited body of voters vaguely corrupted by foreign influences. He was, in brief, one of those men for whom his followers, even though they comprised the majority of the truly representative public of Antwerp, would have thrown themselves into the fire—a tribune of the people, a *ruwaert*. He was so upright, so lucid in his spirit, he possessed so much common-sense and so much kindness of nature, that the most delicate people forgave his trivial faults, his braggadocio, his gasconades, his tendency to employ flashy, vulgar and trivial methods of speech.

This violent and often brutal tribune became, in society, a perfect conversationalist. He spoke French with a pronounced accent, drawling his words, and introducing a profusion of images and an unexpected color. He expressed his admiration for women in terms that were often a trifle frank, of which the bourgeois, weary of conventions and banalities, tasted the

spicy flavour even while pretending to be shocked and finding fault. Bergmans had a rare barbarism and an always piquant license.

At the Dobouziez's ball he lived up to his flattering reputation of being a charmer and a heart-breaker. Quite naturally, he was very attentive to Gina. It was the first time he had met her. Beneath her proud beauty, which caressed his taste for fine lines, noble blood, well-modelled flesh, he divined a character more original and more interesting than those of the other heiresses. On her part Gina did not fail to save him one of her so greatly coveted dances. Bergmans' frank and pleasing expression, his inherent ease of manner, impressed this proud young girl who for the first time had met in him a young man worthy of her attention. Beyond the perfect fashion of their clothes, Gina had for a long time found nothing to appreciate in the Saint-Fardiens. Therefore she did not for a moment dream of disputing Angéle's and Cora's title to them. And as for Laurent Paridael, that thick-witted savage could, at the most, hope only for her patronage.

During the dance Mademoiselle Dobouziez engaged Bergmans in one of those spirited skirmishes in which she excelled; but this time she met her match, for the tribune parried her sallies with a skill equal to his courtesy. Several times he reluctantly returned a spirited retort, showing, in doing it, his great desire not to conquer his petulant antagonist. They were seen together several times during the course of the evening. Even while she was dancing with other men, Gina tried to join the groups in which Bergmans found himself, and enter the conversation. Her interest in him was not lacking in a little vexation with this son



of the people, this revolutionist, this species of intruder who allowed himself to possess both better looks and more clever conversation than all the potentates of commerce. Instead of being thankful for the moderation with which he had defended himself against her epigrams, she was humiliated at having been spared, the more because from the first engagement she had recognized his superiority. Into each of his reluctant retorts the young man had put a reverent gallantry. Gina's sentiment toward him was indefinable. Admiration or vexation; which was it? Perhaps aversion, perhaps sympathy. At one time, knowing herself too weak, she called Bédard to her aid. He was recognized as one of the most convincing dialecticians of his set. She gave Bergmans an opportunity to confute one of the beings whom he held responsible for the moral decay of the city.

The tribune was bitter. He stripped his foils of their buttons. Nevertheless he showed himself to be a man of the world, respected the neutrality of the salon in which he was being entertained, did not forget himself, and tried to merit the esteem of Regina.

Bédard, irritated by Bergmans' moderation, fenced maladroitly, and became almost uncouth. Neither of them touched apparently upon the matter nearest their hearts; but they measured each other, looked for each other's vulnerable spots, told each other in an indirect manner their animosities, their contrary instincts, their disagreements. Bédard was not fooled by his adversary's tact and conciliating spirit. They revealed to him a force, a character and a talent even more formidable than those which he had learned to know in the public meetings. Was the tribune also a politician? Bédard would not admit that this idol of the



people, this fanatic nationalist found as much pleasure as the others were willing to think in frivolous meetings and in conversations in which so many things had to be said and done contrary to his convictions.

And B ejard likewise began to realize with what contempt and aversion Bergmans regarded people of his species. However, Bergmans' ironic good humor and ease of manner increased with the growing discomfiture of his opponent. B ejard ended by being totally eclipsed. Gina was annoyed by Bergmans' success; it was impertinent of him, a mere street-corner orator, to put to rout an oracle so greatly esteemed by Monsieur Dobouziez.

Several times during that winter, Gina and Bergmans met at various functions. She continued to pay him a little more attention than she did to the others. She treated him as a comrade, but nothing in her manner told him that she preferred him to the rest. And to the Vanderlings, who teased her about him, she answered: "Nonsense. He only amuses me!"

Nobody, after all, attached any importance to their friendship.

Bergmans, irresistibly attracted by Gina's charm, held himself violently in check in order not to tell her his feelings. The solidarity of caste and of interests, the community of sentiments and aspirations that he knew existed between B ejard and Gina's parents made him disconsolate.

Many times he had been on the point of proposing to her. In the meanwhile, Gina went about so much and with such an alarming ardor that Monsieur Dobouziez had to beg her to rest and take care of herself. She was the belle of the season, the most f eted, the most flattered, the most intrepid.

Everywhere Bergmans and Gina treated each other with an assumed familiarity, trying to put each other upon the wrong scent with regard to their reserve and their intimate thoughts. And each bore a grudge to the other because of this paraded friendship and flirtation, under which a profound and tender sentiment was budding.

"I shall draw no inferences!" thought Door Bergmans, as little experienced as Hercules at the feet of Omphale. "She thinks me a little livelier playtoy than the others, and nothing else! Does she know how much she fascinates me? Why am I not richer, or she poor and born to another sphere? I would have proposed long ago!"

Regina suffered no less. She was forced to admit to herself that she loved this "anarchist," she, the well-born girl, the heiress of the Dobouziez'. She would never have dared speak to her father about such a preference.

## IX

### “THE GINA”

THE dockyard of Fulton and Co., shipbuilders, was being cleared for action. A new ship, built for the Southern Cross, the line plying between Antwerp and Australia, was about to be launched. The ceremony had been announced for eleven o'clock. The last preparations were being made. Like an enormous butterfly that had for a long time been dormant in its chrysalis, the boat, now completely matured, had been stripped of its envelope of timber work.

The dockyard was decorated with masts and with porticos that vanished beneath a profusion of banners and flags of all colors and all nations, among which the most prevalent was the red, yellow and black of Belgium. Ingenious monograms drew together the names of the ship, its builder and its owner: Gina, Fulton, Bédard. And here and there were displayed figures telling when the work had been begun and when finished.

Near the ship itself rose a platform hung with sail-cloth, which the damp wind blew furiously about. Near the water, looking like a stranded whale, lay the huge boat, a powerful carcass, shored up and freshly painted black and red. On the poop, in golden letters upon

a carved shield representing a siren, could be read the word Gina.

Since early morning the dockyard had been filled by a crowd of curious people. The guests who were fortified with cards of admittance took their places in the tiers of the platform. In the front row arm chairs, upholstered in Utrecht velvet, awaited the authorities, the godmother and her family. Lookers on of little importance and the workmen took risks by placing themselves near the shore and the boat.

It was a beautiful, sunshiny day, as beautiful as it had been when they had made the excursion to Hemixem, almost a year before. Everybody who had the slightest pretension to importance in the world of intellect, style and politics, met there as if by chance. They strutted about, these people who counted, the Saint-Fardiens, the Vanderlings, the Brullekens, the De Zaters, the Fuchskops, the many Verhulsts, Verbists, Peeters and Janssens, and all the Vons and the Vans of the other occasion. It was always the same crowd.

Dupoissy was radiant and put on as many airs as if he had been the designer, owner and captain of the ship all in one. The ladies exhibited charming gowns designed with very evident meaning. Angéle and Cora Vanderling sat simpering next to their fiancés, the young Saint-Fardiens, who were parading stylish lounging suits of blue with brass buttons, like the uniform of a naval officer. Door Bergmans was also at the ceremony, accompanied by his friends, the realist painter William Marbol and Rombaut de Vyveloy, the composer.

And now everything was ready. The crew gathered upon the bridge of the boat, according to the cus-



tom. The sailors, clean looking in their holiday clothes, good-natured, frank fellows, would have recalled to Laurent, had he been there, his old friend Vincent Tilbak. A little embarrassed by their sea-legs, they looked as if they did not relish parading upon a boat that was still on dry land. Caught, as they were, in the midst of the crew, some of the lookers-on would have liked to give themselves the emotion of going down the ways on the boat. The wheedling Dupoissy would have liked to be among them, but his delicate duties kept him on shore. While waiting for the master he had to receive the guests, find a place for the ladies under the awning, and also do the duty of manager, and, when necessary, dislodge the outsiders. He was conscious of his importance, and very radiant. It was good to see him take the Misses Vanderling close to the boat and explain the details of its construction in technical terms. He confided to them, too, with an air of mystery, that he had prepared some verse, which he thought were "well turned." In order to get rid of him, the editor of the great commercial daily had promised to intercalate them in his account.

Several crews of the most picturesque and vigorous laborers on the dockyards waited, at arm's length from the boat, for the moment to set her at liberty. They were waiting only for the authorities and the principal actors in the ceremony to arrive. Outside the dockyards, on the quays, and down stream toward the city, thousands of curious people, stemmed only by the Fulton buildings, which were filled to suffocation, were standing, waiting to take their part in the spectacle, and were pushing each other in an uproar of excitement,

Attention! Dupoissy, his handkerchief tied to the end of his cane, gave a signal like a starter at the races.

Extemporaneous artillerymen, hidden behind the sheds, set off the charges of powder. "The cannon," said the crowd, trembling with a delicious thrill of expectation. The young Saint-Fardiens teased Angèle and Cora, who had jumped at the noise.

A choral society began singing "La Brabançonne."  
"They have come! They have come!"

They had arrived. Getting out of the carriage were the burgomaster, the godfather of the ship, giving his arm to the godmother, Mademoiselle Dobouziez, who looked ravishing in a gown of rose silk and net; then Bêjard, leading Mamma Dobouzièz, who was more beflowered and beplumed than ever, especially since Gina had given up opposing her mother's innocent mania. At the very end came Dobouziez, who was escorting the wife of the constructor. The populace, whom the police had great difficulty in keeping out of the reserved space, wondered naïvely at Mademoiselle Dobouziez' beauty. They had acclaimed Door Den Berg, but had grumbled audibly as Bêjard went by. And there were to be found in more than one group of these good people and even on the benches upon the platform, narrators to establish a contrast between the brilliant ceremony of that day at the Fulton Dockyards, and the atrocities that had taken place there twenty-five years before, under the responsibility of Bêjard senior, and with the complicity of Freddy Bêjard, the future ship-owner. But the hardly repressed hisses and murmurs were drowned by the silly gaiety and idle jubilation. When the cortégé had gained their places there was

another peal of cannon. The musicians were about to start playing when Dupoissy gave them a furious signal to be quiet. And, planting himself in front of the platform, on the steep bank of the river, a few steps away from the boat, he took a rose-colored paper from his pocket, opened it, coughed, bowed, and twittered in a voice like that of a prematurely weaned kid a whole litany of rancid alexandrines to which nobody, however, paid the slightest attention. From time to time, through the talking that was going on, one could catch a hemstitch: "Oh, ship! Thou son of earth! . . . Thou conqueror of the seas! . . . On distant shores . . . Salute for us . . . dawn creeps above the horizon over the sea . . . symbol of our laws . . . kingdom of Amphytrite . . ."

"What a lot of commonplaces!" murmured Madame Vanderling in Gaston Saint-Fardier's ear. "You will see that he won't pass one up! That man is a veritable almanach of the muses!"

He finished. There were a few discreet bravos. A few people whispered "Not bad, not bad!" Most of the audience indulged in a sigh of relief. Finally the really moving part of the ceremony began to be prepared. The musicians played an air of Grétry's: "*Où peut-on être mieux.*" M. Fulton, the builder, gave a sharp order to the workmen.

Beneath the powerful pressure of the rams and the wedges that were urging her forward, the immense hulk, immovable until now, began to move almost invisibly. All eyes anxiously followed the efforts of the robust crew of workmen massed under the bow of the ship, shoring it up from that side, and armed with handspikes in order to make it slide down the ways with greater speed. Piles, stanchions and braces had



all been removed; the last bit of shoring had been taken away.

Béjard had escorted Mademoiselle Dobouziez close to the mooring. Taking a plush-handled hatchet, the blade of which had been filed down to a razor-like keenness, he offered it to the godmother, and asked her to cut the last restraining cable with one sharp blow. The beautiful Gina, usually so adroit, went about it badly; she struck the cable, but the stout hemp held fast. She hacked at it a second and a third time, became impatient, and uttered a clicking sound of irritation. The silence in the crowd was such that the panting spectators, holding their breath, perceived the spoiled child's obstinate access of temper. The wags laughed.

"It's a bad omen for the ship," said the sailors to each other.

"And for the godmother!" added the lookers on.

As Mademoiselle Dobouziez did not make an end to it, Béjard, in turn, became impatient, took the recalcitrant tool from her hands, and with a firm and vigorous stroke cut the cable.

The enormous hulk creaked in every plank, began to move, and slid majestically down into its ultimate domain.

It was an affecting moment. What was it that made the hearts of all these people beat a little faster; not only those of the unpretentious, but those of the most vain and haughty, more difficult to move than the enormous colossus itself?

In slipping down to the water the boat, which now seemed possessed of a strange life, continued to creak and groan. Nothing could have been as majestic as the prolonged rumble that reverberated in the flanks



of *The Gina*. Some horses whinney thus with pleasure and pride when their master puts to the test their vigor and their speed. Then, brusquely, it traversed, like an impatient diver, the distance by which it was separated from the undulating water. Then with a crash it plunged into the Scheldt, whose foamy mass seemed to quiver and make way.

The noise of the boat having ceased, there arose from the crowd prolonged and insistent cheers. The band sent forth repeated and inspiring fanfares, the salvos began again, an immense tricolor was hoisted to the top of the largest mast. The crew of *The Gina* burst forth with cries of jubilation, and her sham passengers, convinced of their importance, waved hats and handkerchiefs.

Presently the ship strode into the middle of the river and turned with the dignity and easy grace of a triumpher. It was no longer the heavy, inert, crabbed and rather woeful mass that, a moment before, everyone had admired only in expectation; for a ship out of water has always the look of a wreck, but, as soon as it strikes its element, it is buoyed up and quickened into life. Its engines had been put in motion, its huge screws were churning the water, smoke was escaping from its great funnel. Its formidable organism was functioning, its muscles of steel and iron began to work, it groaned, it breathed, it lived. And the cheers were louder than ever. In the meanwhile, under the tent on the shore, Monsieur Fulton's manager had champagne and biscuits passed around. All the man drank, in high good humor, pretending a great joy, to the good fortune of *The Gina*. Everyone crowded about the beautiful godmother to express their good wishes for her godson. Gina carried her

glass to her lips and replied to every toast, with a dignified and aristocratic smile. The little Vanderlings, however, really drank. Held tightly by their fiancés, they pretended to be ticklish, laughing like little lunatics, white, plump, red-lipped, their eyes full of the science of love.

Béjard redoubled his attentions to Gina.

"Well, you are linked up to my fortunes, mademoiselle," he said, not without intention. "In *The Gina* that belongs to me, and which will do honor to its name, I don't doubt, I shall rejoice to find something of you. Besides, the English, our teachers in commerce, have done their ships the honor of including them among the women. For them, all objects are alike in being of the neuter gender. Only ships belong to the fair sex!"

"I feel like a little girl beside that imposing matron!" Gina replied, laughing. "And I find it difficult to believe that I held her over the baptismal fount. It was rather she who seemed to accord me her patronage. And that explains my emotion of a few moments ago! Really, all my nerve left me!"

Dobouziez, in a generous humor because of his daughter's success, and always anxious to follow usage and not to be stingy in public, had had the foreman called.

"Here," he said, giving him five louis, "here are the baptismal sweetmeats! Divide them among your men and have them quench their thirst!"

"What an idea!" grumbled Saint-Fardier senior in Béjard's ear. "The brutes won't be able to stand on their feet. Perhaps you think that I'd give them a tip! You ought to see how I sober them up at the factory on Monday mornings!"

After having executed several manoeuvres, in order to show herself to full advantage to the fashionable and critical crowd that had attended her first gambolings *The Gina* put on double speed and flew off to the roadstead to rejoice the eyes of other spectators. A berth had been prepared for her near the quay, where she could wait until she had taken on her full equipment and crew and her first cargo of passengers and merchandise. It had been agreed by the owner and the captain that she was to put to sea in a week's time.

Dupoissy, a little mortified at the slight success of his verses, approached the water, and, his glass filled with champagne, standing at the extreme end of the ways from which the boat had taken to the water, he called the crowd, with the air of a juggler waiting to do a new trick: "Attention, please!"

Every one turned to look at him. He had drunk glass after glass of champagne while nobody was paying any attention to him, and now, dishevelled and a little grey, he had remembered the marriage of the Doge and the Adriatic, and the antique libations to the Ocean made by the pagans in order to propitiate Neptune and Amphytrite.

"May this nectar of Bacchus, poured into the kingdom of the waves, assure to the glorious *Gina* the clemency of the elements!"

He spoke, and, seeking a graceful pose, put all his weight upon one foot and poured the Roederer into the river. But, being a fat man, he narrowly escaped following it; had Bergmans not held him back by his coat-tails he would have taken a header. Every one applauded and laughed.

"Good! Our bard is going to throw himself into the river," sneered the Parisienne.

"Be careful, monsieur, the ancient gods and the old Scheldt do not seem to be pleased with your parody of their rites!" said Bergmans.

"Oh, yes! I am a profane foreigner, am I not?" the pseudo wool merchant answered spitefully, instead of thanking his rescuer. "Only pure-blooded natives of Antwerp may revive the ancient ritual!"

"I did not say quite that!" added Bergmans with a laugh.

The company took leave of each other; the guests began to enter their carriages. The workmen, holding their tip as a pledge, cheered the important personages with more conviction than at their arrival. That afternoon there was to be a dance in the dockyard for all the staff; several casks were to be broached. Some of the workmen were already skipping about, making preparations for this new part of the program. Being fond of such ceremonies, Marbol and his friend Rombaut resolved to return with Bergmans in the afternoon.

"And you," he hazarded to Gina; "are you not going to attend these good folks' gambol; are you not going to take part in their joy, which is, after all, a little due to you?"

She made a little face of disgust.

"Peuh! It's not to my taste! That sort of thing is all right for democrats like you! You and Laurent would get along perfectly!"

"Who is Laurent?"

"A very distant cousin, both actually and figuratively, for just now he is at school some hundred miles away. He believes, like you, in the importance of



the common herd. But he hasn't the excuse of painting them like your friend Marbol, and making money out of them; or, like you, the prospect of becoming president of the Republic and Free City of Antwerp."

She only thought of Paridael in order to make an uncomplimentary comparison, at least in her own mind, between Bergmans and the boy. She was annoyed with Bergmans for not having been sufficiently attentive to her during the ceremony, and for having left her alone with Bédard the whole time.

"Decidedly," thought Door, "our opinions and feelings are widely separated. I would do anything to overcome the divergence. She is intelligent enough, and fundamentally she has a great deal of rectitude. If she loved me, I could easily interest her in my work and in my ideals. I should make an ally of her! If she but loved me. For in spite of her pride and disdain and her submission to convention and prejudice, she is out of place in her world. She is worth more, or will be worth more than her parents. Noble ideals and superior thoughts should find a place in her. Her beauty and her instinct contradict her education! Why should not I contend for her against the rich eligibles who are always prowling around her?"

## X

### THE ORANGERY

A YEAR slipped by. Young Paridael was able to come home for a few weeks. Dobouziez put him through an examination which showed conclusively that he had put all his energy into "grinding" harder than ever at subjects which his guardian thought unimportant, or that he studied them from a point of view totally opposed to that of his guardian. Thus, instead of learning from the modern languages the things necessary to a good business correspondent, he had crammed his head with literary nonsense.

"As if there were not enough silly stories in French!" protested Monsieur Dobouziez.

Laurent had become a tall, ruddy youth with straight hair and the constitution of a day laborer, but beneath his too material exterior, his sullen and dull expression, he hid a disposition that was excessively impressionable, an intense need for tenderness, an exalted imagination, a passionate temperament, and a heart greedy for justice. His seeming apathy, complicated by an insurmountable timidity and a slow and embarrassed diction, shackled and thwarted feelings that were almost morbidly acute, and vibrant and hypersensitive nerves. Beneath his torpor surged a lava, a ferment of desires and ideals.

From his earliest infancy he had been a little dif-

ferent, a little inconsistent, and this had made his parents fear for his future. The foreboding of the ordeals stored up for him by the world at large only endeared to them this scion who was both ill-favored and elect. But with the exception of these well-beloved folk, to whom his merits were revealed by the tie of flesh and blood, few people appreciated him. It need not be added that the boy baffled immediate observation, and discouraged commonplace advances. Then, too, when he was overflowing with feeling and thought, either his modesty or a false sense of shame prevented him from expressing them, or, if he tried to put them into words, what he said seemed excessively far-fetched and passed the bounds of normality set by convention.

Laurent was destined to be fatally misunderstood. The best-disposed and most penetrating people did not fathom him or were shocked by his unbridled enthusiasm and unusual opinions. He gave himself up to unseasonable demonstrations, and these would be followed by abrupt moods of dejection. Enthusiastic outbursts completely strangled themselves in his throat, and ended in an unintelligible, harsh and almost brutal grunt, as if his jealous soul were sharply recalling this flight of incendiary captives before they achieved expression, or as if he despaired of making himself understood and recoiled before the strangeness of his effusions. At times it was like the pantomime and the guttural noise of a deaf-mute on the point of speech. His impressions and his impulses congested him. At school he made but few friends. The other boys would have made him a laughing-stock had he not been able to make them keep their distance with his fists.

The premature death of his parents resulted not in disgusting him with life but in making him comprehend it in his own way, love it for other reasons, see it through other eyes, look askance at codes, morals and conventions. He became more and more taciturn. His apparent inertia resembled that of a Leyden jar filled to the point of explosion. Suffering, always constrained, plethoric, his instincts might have indemnified themselves for their long repression; he might have suddenly burst forth, gratified his passions without halt, ruined himself forever and ever; but, in doing so, he would have avenged himself upon life. Capable of any self-sacrifice and any tenderness, but also of any fanaticism, in certain events he would have justified vice and vindicated crime; according to circumstances, he might have been a martyr or an assassin; perhaps both.

At one of the informal dinners now quite frequent at the home of his guardians, Laurent became acquainted with Door Bergmans. His frank manner, his commanding appearance and his kindly attention tamed the young savage. Frequenters of the house had never taken any notice of the poor relation. Gina teased Bergmans about it.

"Do you remember my prediction on the day of the launching of the ship?"

"Perfectly," answered Bergmans, "and I must say that if that is the boy you were referring to he interests me greatly. The few words that I wormed out of him reveal a nature far above the ordinary."

Gina seemed not to take this praise seriously, but thereafter she condescended to talk more frequently with her cousin.

The marrying of Gina was not accomplished as eas-



ily as Monsieur Dobouziez could have supposed. Many obstacles stood in her road, even though she was an heiress and exceedingly beautiful. Suitors dreaded her imperious and trenchant disposition and her love of ostentation. Admirers were not lacking. She had around her a perpetual swarm of men paying her attentions, a siege of flirting and gallantry, but no recognized suitor presented himself.

Cora and Angéle Vanderling, who were younger than Gina, had just married Athanasius and Gaston Saint-Fardier. They plagued her with secret confidences and vaunted the liberty of conjugal life. Both led their lymphatic husbands around by the nose and hesitated less than ever to flirt with the gallants. Saint-Fardier senior, overjoyed at having rid himself of his sons, had obtained positions for both of them, one with an exchange-broker, and the other in the office of a nautical assessor. Vanderling, on his part, had dowered his daughters very fairly. The two young couples lived in very high style, and the girls, who were becoming ever more radiant and dazzling in their beauty, abandoned themselves to every whim.

With Bergmans, Béjard still remained the most assiduous visitor at the Dobouziez's. Laurent, who now knew the shipowner's antecedents, did not hide his aversion for him. Inclined toward a vague mysticism, he now accounted for the moment of hallucination that had come to him on the excursion to Hemixem. To Laurent, Freddy Béjard seemed to exhale the corrosive vapor of acreoline, to embody in corporeal form the manslaughtering machines. He, therefore suffered indescribably at seeing this sinister and inauspicious satellite incessantly gravitate in the orbit of the radiant Gina. Béjard had an intuition

of the feeling that he inspired in Laurent, and amused himself by irritating him, but distantly and prudently, as one irritates a watch dog that can unloose himself.

"My word!" he often used to say to Gina; "he hasn't a reassuring manner at all, that young ragamuffin! Look how he gloats over us with his assassin's eyes! Don't you think he will bite some fine day? Were I you I should muzzle him!"

In fairness to Gina it must be said that although Bergmans' praise of the little savage had annoyed her, she was nevertheless tempted to defend Laurent against B ejard's sarcasm.

Laurent was drawn closer to Bergmans by the fact that he was a competitor against B ejard. Laurent had heard Bergmans speak publicly, and, having been profoundly stirred by his imaginative and savory eloquence, he was not only his friend, but his partisan, too.

Nevertheless, by degrees a feeling of jealousy took possession of him, a feeling so vague that he could not have fairly said whether he was jealous of Gina or of Bergmans. One of Bergmans' inoffensive jokes, made before Gina, had wounded him. He turned his back on his friend, was sulky with him for days afterward, and was moodier toward him than toward any of the others.

"What's the matter with our little cousin now?" asked Bergmans.

But, unlike B ejard, who was amused by this fit of bad temper, Bergmans sought the poor boy and scolded him tenderly with so much real kindness that the child finished by being captivated once more and asked Bergmans' forgiveness for his whims.

Since his puberty the capricious and indefinite sen-

timent that he cherished for his cousin had been aggravated by enervating sensuous appeals. With increasing age he became even more impressionable. The unreasonable demands of his temperament made him impatient of his innate reserve and timidity.

At school, when he was in his fifteenth year, he fainted like a little girl at the too ardent perfume of the vernal gardens. The witchery of the springtime, whiffs of stormy twilights, the heavy winds that preceded rain, beating down upon the tall grass and seeming to swoon there, too intoxicated with joy to resume their flight, the atmosphere of the summer solstice and the autumnal equinox caressed him like the touch of invisible lips.

During these moments the whole of creation embraced him, and demoralized and beside himself, he burned to give it caress for caress! Why could he not clasp to him in a spasm of total possession the trees that grazed him with their branches, the hay-ricks against which he leaned, and all the perfumed and soul-stirring environment? He longed to be absorbed forever into Nature in ferment. To live for but one season, but to live the life of that season! What gentle melancholy, what a renunciation of his being, what a delicious anguish there was in this already posthumous suppleness! One day the singular timbre of an alto voice had moved him to tears. He discovered again its velvety, grave sound, sombre and rich like the mantle of night, or like an autumnal thicket, in his cousin's voice. He compared the despotism of her voice to the quality of those unusual nights when he obtained only a mocking sleep; nights propitious to nightmare, to entreaties and attempted violation—the nights of the Stone Mill.



He had not ceased, he thought, bearing Gina a grudge; he judged her with more severity and bitterness than ever. And the fact that she accepted no one brought him a certain amount of pleasure. Not only did he rejoice in the disdain and malice with which she treated Bédard, but he was almost happy when she teased and repulsed Bergmans. Apparently she did not encourage either more than the other. "The little mischief-maker," he said to himself with a labored and artificial indignation, "in Door's place I'd teach her a lesson."

Distrustful as he was, he noticed one day the tender and almost passionate intonation in which she said a few inconsequential words to Door. And he was so troubled by it that, alone with her afterward, he gathered his courage and said, point blank:

"Why don't you marry Monsieur Bergmans?"

She burst out laughing, and looking him straight in the eye:

"I? Marry a demagogue like him and become the wife of Citizen Bergmans?" she cried with so great an accent of sincerity that Laurent allowed himself to believe her.

Although he protested bitterly, at heart he was overjoyed. Her words so greatly reassured him that he pretended to reproach Bergmans for his hesitancy and backwardness. He was deceitful unpremeditatedly, instinctively; he was indignant at his own diplomacy, and was furious at finding all the dictates of his upright conscience thwarted and paralyzed in the meshes of a sensual duplicity. If ostensibly he were serving his friend Bergmans, it was in spite of the cry of his flesh.

"I, marry? Ask for the hand of Mademoiselle Do-



bouziez? You're joking, my boy!" protested Bergmans at the perspective that young Paridael had just suggested to him, not wholly without anxiety. "Who the devil put that bee in your bonnet? In the first place, the girl is too rich for me. . . ." And when Paridael urged him: "To tell the truth, I do love her, and I have made seeing her a delicious habit. If she had encouraged me the slightest bit perhaps I should have dared to open my heart to Father Dobouziez. . . . But what you have just said is a warning to me! Other people have also probably taken note of my assiduity. It's time that I stopped compromising your cousin!"

"What a pity!" answered Laurent. "You two seem made for each other." But in spite of this justifiable conviction the paradoxical youth had difficulty in containing his joy, and not throwing his arms about Bergmans. He did his best, however, to combat and dispel his friend's scruples. And when he thought that if Bergmans stopped coming to the house he would have no more chance to see him, he found himself exhorting his friend without a mental reservation, for he was honestly and exceedingly fond of him.

As for Bédard, Laurent was certain that Gina would never accept him as her husband. Not only could the shipowner have been her father, but the correct and irreproachable Dobouziez esteemed him in a purely professional way which did not render him oblivious to the little peccadilloes that this aspirant had upon his conscience. He would more easily have chosen Bédard for a partner than for a son-in-law.

Faithful to his resolution, Bergmans frequented the house less regularly, and, after a month of these visits, farther and farther apart, he ceased coming altogether.

Laurent breathed freely, although he was both

happy and heart-broken; almost happy in spite of himself and his remorse. But he was not yet at the end of his anguish.

Gina, the flirtatious and mischievous Gina, who seemed to have made so little of Bergmans' attentions, seemed most affected by his absence. Her regret and her worry became so apparent that finally a light broke upon Laurent.

"She lied to me; she loves him!" he said to himself. And the lacerating torture that this discovery caused him made him admit to himself his own desperate love for her. He was struck down, for he knew instantly that she could never love him.

In that case it was his duty to bring the two lovers together. He should have warned the girl long ago of the love that Bergmans bore her. If he kept quiet now he would be acting like a cheat. By one word he could have consoled his cousin and overwhelmed his friend Bergmans with joy. Racked with remorse, he abstained from saying that word. He endured an unheard-of martyrdom. "Are you finally going to speak?" asked his conscience. "No! No! Pity! Have mercy on me!" sobbed his flesh. "Call Bergmans back as quickly as you can." "I can't! I'd rather die!" "Miserable fool, I tell you she will never love you!" "It makes no difference! She will never belong to anyone!" "But Bergmans is your friend!" "I hate him!" "Murderer, Gina is dying!" "Rather than bring them together I shall kill them both!"

That Gina was dying was true. Watching her become thin, emaciated, sad, so feeble, so quiet and sweet, never laughing or teasing, indifferent to all distractions, Laurent was a hundred times upon the point of telling what he knew of Bergmans' feeling. His

tongue burned like that of a mute whom one word will relieve, but whom pitiless nature prevents from pronouncing that word. A hundred times, too, upon the point of writing to Door, he let the pen drop from his hand. He would have preferred to sign his death warrant.

Having left for Odessa, Bergmans sent two or three business letters from the shores of the Black Sea so that people would not comment upon his prolonged eclipse. The anguish of the Dobouziez' was so great that they paid no attention to their ward's convulsed face and extraordinary manner.

Laurent, who did not feel able to talk to Gina, resolved one evening to tell everything to her father the next day. "She will never love me!" he said to himself, like a stoic refining his torture in order the less to feel it. "And am I sure that I love her? Is it not envy that blinds me, and which makes me, because I am gloomy and without inheritance, hostile to the good fortune of everyone else?" In spite of all the effort that he made to persuade himself that such was the case, in the presence of Dobouziez he could not speak one word, and all his spiritual grandeur foundered in the abyss of his love.

He went and sat beside the invalid, in the orangery, among the intoxicating and perverse flowers with which she persisted in surrounding herself. Since her illness she had accustomed herself to Laurent's presence and care as she would have to those of a trained nurse. Generally he read to her, and she took pleasure in finding fault with him. On this particular morning he stammered and stuttered outrageously.

"What is the matter with you, Laurent?" she asked. "I can no longer understand one word that you are reading!"



He threw the book down on the table and seized her attenuated hands.

"Regina," he muttered; "I have something very serious to tell you. . . ." He stopped, looked in her eyes and became very red. He was about to pronounce the name of Door Bergmans, and again that name stuck in his throat. Without saying another word, carried away by an irresistible impulse, seized with dizziness, he could only fall upon his knees and cover with kisses the hands which Gina, confused and even frightened, was trying to withdraw. Annoyed and excited by her aversion for him, instead of ceasing, he came nearer and brutally caught her to him. Gina gave vent to a piercing scream, in answer to which the providential Felicité came running.

"Better and better!" shrieked the factotum, throwing her arms in the air.

Laurent ceased, and ran out, his fists clenched, furious at having betrayed himself and ruined everything just when he was about to score a victory. The servant immediately told her employers, and that same day, before his vacation had expired, Monsieur Doubouziez sent Laurent back to college.

From there the guilty boy, abashed and ashamed of his violence, and worried at its probable consequences for Gina, wrote letter after letter asking for news. Nobody answered them. He was horror-stricken. Without doubt, Gina was getting worse. Was not the aggravation of her illness due to the emotion which he had caused her to undergo? Perhaps she was in agony; perhaps dead! Finally he was no longer able to contain himself, and he fled from college and fell like a bomb into the factory. The first person he



met was the terrible Saint-Fardier. The telegraph had already warned the establishment of his flight.

"Ah! Here you are, good-for-nothing?" cried Saint-Fardier, making a face as though he would have liked to cut off Laurent's ears.

"I beg you, monsieur, tell me how my Cousin Regina is."

"Madame Béjard is much better since she no longer has occasion to have anything to do with a rascal like you!"

Madame Béjard! Laurent heard nothing but these two words and stood dully, so dully that when Saint-Fardier took him by his collar he did not even think to defend himself. Dobouziez interfered at that moment.

"Let him go," he said to his partner. "I'll finish with this blackguard!" And to Laurent: "You, come with me to my office!"

The young man obeyed mechanically.

"Here are a hundred francs," Dobouziez said to him. "On the first of each month you will be sent that amount. That sum represents the income from the modest capital left by your father. And now, get out. Oh! One word of advice. You can never count upon any member of my family. All our doors are closed to you! That indefensible prank of yours has placed you without the pale of your relatives. Good-by. I am not detaining you!"

"Cousin Gina has become Madame Béjard, hasn't she?" Laurent hazarded, hardly having heard the major excommunication fulminated against him.

"Mme. Béjard is no longer your cousin. Come, take your money. And see that I never hear you spoken of!"

Laurent paused at the door. Already Dobouziez had sat down in front of his desk and was going back to work as if nothing important had happened, as if he had simply been paying off a discharged clerk.

His attitude froze Laurent, and recalled him to the feeling of the situation. For several seconds he was plunged in grief, and foreswore life; then he came to his senses.

"Very well! So be it!" he thought. "It is just as well that we separate!"

He left the room. In the street a nervous gaiety took possession of him, in reaction. Was he not free, emancipated, his own master? No more college, no more control, no more guardians. And, especially, no more remorse, no more jealousy, even no more love. He believed her to be Madame Bédard now, detached her forever from Gina. He rejected his cousin as if he were throwing away a flower polluted by a slug.

"And to think that the Dobouziez' think that they are punishing me in throwing me upon my own resources!" he repeated excitedly. "And that brute of a Saint-Fardier! If I had not been taken by storm by the news I would have strangled him on the spot!"

And in going along the ditch: "You speak in vain, oh, greasy, putrid water! It is the past, my past, that wallows at the bottom of your oily urn. It is a cadaver, a chrysalis that you withhold! Your nymph has become Mme. Bédard! Cloaca for cloaca, oh, disastrous ditch, you seem less disgusting to me than certain marriages!"

PART II  
FREDDY BÉJARD





## I

### THE HARBOR

CARRYING his head high and throwing out his chest with the air of a conqueror, Laurent began to walk through his native city. One thing he had to consider immediately, and that was the choice of a lodging. The merchants' quarter, in the heart of the city, summoned him more strongly than any of the others.

He took lodgings on the second floor of one of those picturesque houses, with wooden facade and Spanish gables, in the *Marché-au-Lait*, a narrow and much frequented street encumbered from morning until night with all sorts of vehicles, the trucks and drays of large manufacturing corporations, the hampers and carts of the market gardeners.

Laurent's windows looked out over the hovels across the street, upon the gardens of the cathedral. The immense Gothic pile rose above the grove of tall trees. A few crows flew about the coping of the cathedral. It was at *Notre Dame* that Laurent had been baptised, and precisely the same dear carillon, the melodious soul of the tower, that used to lull him to sleep during his early childhood, when he used to play marbles or hopscotch in front of the cathedral door with the boys of the neighborhood, began to peal out the notes of an old Flemish ballad that *Siska* used to sing:

“Au bord d’un rivelet rapide,  
Se lamentait une blanche jeune fille.”

Laurent resolved to hunt up his faithful friend immediately.

A new shock awaited him at the water-gate. He passed through the Place du Bourg, where the quay broadens and juts a point out into the roadstead. From the very end of this promontory the view was magnificent.

Upstream and downstream the Scheldt spread out with a majestic quietude the superb surge of its tide. One could see it describe a curve to the northwest, recede, wind back again, proceed on its way, turn once again, as if it wanted to retrace its steps and again salute the sovereign metropolis, the pearl of all the cities through which it flowed, as if it were forsaking her with regret.

On the horizon sails receded toward the sea, funnels of steamers unfurled against the milky, pearly grey of the sky, long woolly pennants, like exiles who wave farewell with their handkerchiefs as long as they are able to see the beloved shores. Sea gulls scattered in flight above the tawny, green surface of the water, rising and falling in the gentle and subtle curves that will forever be the despair of marine painters.

The sun was slowly setting; it, too, could not decide to leave these shores. Its fiery glow, pierced with wide bands of gold, crested the waves with luminous little drops of blood. As far as the eye could see along the wharfs and the tree-planted quays and beyond the grassy dikes of Polder, there was a fluttering and scintillating of living jewels.

Fishing boats began to regain the canals and basins

in which they were to tie up for the night. Lazy barges slipped down stream with the tide so slowly that they seemed almost immobile and unconscious of the titillating caress of the flaming water, charged with electricity like the fur of a cat.

White sails became rose. The decks, the loins and the flanks of the boats were almost lifeless at this hour. And every little while the graceful silhouette of a sailor, hauling in a cable or repairing a mast, would stand in bold relief, tall and black, against the sail of the ship's boat, taking on an air of indescribably fateful authority and superterrestrial worth.

To the right, on the border of the residence quarter, there plunged deeply inland, as if following upon a victory of the river over the land, great square sheets of water that were the basins, and yet more basins, from which shot up in compact tufts thousands of entangled crossyards and masts. And in this forest of masts, pierheads, gangways, locks and drydocks, rose faintly and by fits and starts against the horizon.

In certain parts of the basins the crowding was so great that, viewed from a distance, the masting and rigging of the closely packed boats seemed to be tangled up, to cross, and conjured up a web so tightly woven that it clouded the opaline sky or pricked off an early star, setting one to dream of the cloths woven by fabled genii, where the multicolored signal lights and silvery constellations began to appear like glow-worms and fireflies.

Ready to seek its rest, the swarm of workers hurried, redoubled its activity, in a desire to finish its daily task. To recrudescences of tumult there succeeded sudden lulls. The calkers' pickaxes ceased hammering at rotted hulls, the chains of the hand winches suspended

their grinding; a snorting, whining steamboat held its peace; the yells and the rhythmic chant of sailors and longshoremen working in gangs suddenly died down.

And these alternate moments of silence and tumult extended simultaneously in all parts of the laboring city, giving the effect of the sighs of a Titan confronted with interminable labor.

In the infinite confusion, Laurent distinguished guttural calls, raucous or strident, as plaintive as the bugle calls at the barracks, as sad as the moaning of exhausted forces.

And after each phrase of the human chorus there resounded a grosser noise; bales fell to the bottom of the hold, bars of iron tumbled and rebounded upon the flagging of the quays.

In turning his attention from the river to the shore Laurent perceived a gang of workmen uniting their forces to move a giant cedar sent from America. Their manner of forming in line, of grouping themselves, of bringing their force to bear upon its inert mass, of bringing into play their shoulders, backs and loins, would have made a bas-relief of heroic days look quaint in comparison.

But a strange and complex odor, compounded of sweat, spices, the skins of animals, fruit, tar, wrack, coffee and herbage, intensified by the heat, went to his head like the bouquet of a superfine wine; the incense pleasing to the god of commerce. This perfume, teasing his nostrils, sensitized his other organs.

The carillon began to peal once more. Rippling down from above the water, the sound seemed even more gentle and tender, as if lubricated by some mysterious unction.

The sea gulls were wheeling, their oblique flight tak-



ing the air over his shoulder. They came near, flew away, returned, surrendered themselves to a choreography determined by the most elemental rites; in turn, attracted by the water, the earth and the sky at the moment when these three masters of space were kindled in the same bath of humid and unctuous vespereal light.

At this last magic spell Laurent turned away, fascinated, almost reeling, sucked in by the abyss. He looked once more at the workmen who had been toiling at the cedar; then saw, nearer to him, a huge dray to which a powerful horse was harnessed, and the driver waiting at its side for his wagon to be loaded. And on the plank between the dray and the ship, the cadenced coming and going of the plastic, hooded longshoremen, bending their necks but not their bodies beneath their burdens, their figures in full relief against the stern of the boat, their knees bending a little at each step, settling their load firmly on their shoulders with one hand, the other fist at their hips, Gods!

A pyramid of bales gradually piled up upon the dray. The tackle and the hydraulic crane never ceased to search and bite into the entrails of the transatlantic steamer and to withdraw gobbets of merchandise.

Not far away a contrary operation was taking place. Instead of emptying the stomach of a steamer they were gorging it without respite; coal was sliding into its bunkers, bags and cases engulfed themselves in the insatiable depths of its hold. And its purveyors sweated hugely without succeeding in allaying its sudden pangs of hunger.

The manual labor being accomplished by picked men suggested to the observer the grandeur and the

omnipotence of his native city. But it did not cease to frighten and intimidate him.

"Shall I again be repulsed and held at a distance?" he asked himself.

And in its proud raiment Antwerp, in its turn, seemed to him the incarnation of a no less haughty and triumphant creature.

One night when going to theater in full evening dress, his Cousin Gina had been so dazzling that an ineluctable impulse had precipitated him toward her like a ruffian. But the radiant young girl had foreseen his movement of adoration. She had settled herself, waved aside his candid idolatry with a distant gesture, as if it were unclean dust, and with a desperately even voice, without pleasure, without even the gleam of satisfaction that all homage, even the shallowest, calls up in a woman's face, she said to him:

"Go away, silly! You will crumple my flounces!"

Yes, his city, too rich, too beautiful, too vast for her foster child, deceived Laurent that evening.

"Is she, too, going to wave me aside, as if I were valueless and unworthy?" he asked himself in anguish.

But it was as if the adorable city, less hard and less cruel than the woman, had read the distress of the declassed youth and determined that nothing should spoil the intoxication of his emancipation before he had entirely succumbed to grief, and the flaming sky dulled its too brilliant radiance, and at the same moment, the water, into which it seemed that rubies had been poured, took on its normal appearance. The twilight air became tender and fluid once again; the waves were velvety with a fleeting mist, on the horizon there was but the vague memory of the furious kindling that had terrified Paridael.

It was a veritable relaxing. The city was going to treat him more kindly and with more pity!

Even the movements of the longshoremen seemed less superhuman, less hieratic. The workers, on the point of quitting work, surprised him by breathing like simple mortals, their arms crossed or hanging loosely at their sides, or wiping their foreheads with the back of their sleeves. Laurent found them as handsome this way, and more kindly. At the moment of going home, of bathing themselves in the intimacy of home life, they laughed, having become listless in advance, and a langor descended from their backs to their legs, and their embraces sought objects less rough and less inert.

Laurent set foot upon reality once again.

## II

### THE CAP

HE began his search for the home of the Tilbaks in the Quartier des Bateliers.

The street lamps were beginning to be lit when he spied a little shop, bearing a sign proclaiming it to be At the Sign of the Cocoanut. The show window displayed a pile of the most incongruous objects; field glasses and compasses, tarred hats, coarse woollen caps, packages of English and American tobacco wrapped in yellow paper, plugs of Cavendish and rolls of chewing tobacco, penknives, bottles of perfume, and Windsor soap.

Something told him that it was the home of his dear Siska. He had no further doubt when he saw, inside the shop, a woman busy putting in order the objects that had been misplaced. She had her back turned toward Laurent, and, as the room had not yet been lit, he could hardly discern her silhouette. But before she turned her face toward him he had recognized her. She lit the oil lamps. He saw her in full face. It was the same good, open face of former days; she still wore her hair in the curly bands, now beginning to become a little grey, in which the lad's fingers used to become tangled, and which he used to pull mercilessly. He stood still in front of the show window with the



air of a customer making his choice, and as the street was even darker than the store, Siska could hardly see him. From time to time, while busy tidying up her shop, she threw the unknown a stealthy glance. That didn't please him? What did he need to decoy him into the shop? Poor woman! Laurent wondered whether she sold many of these things.

Siska, no longer counting upon this customer, began walking toward the little room at the back of the shop. In opening the door Laurent rang a little bell; she turned and came toward him with the alacrity and the engaging smile that shopkeepers display before a customer.

In the most serious manner possible Laurent asked to try on some caps. She looked him up and down, trying to guess which among her stock of caps would please him. This rapid examination gave her, without doubt, a sufficiently high notion of Paridael's elegance, for she showed him the dearest ones, fancy sailors' caps such as stylish travellers wear. But Laurent asked to see peasants' caps, stevedores' caps, or carters' caps, and pretended to fix his choice upon huge tufted, peaked, brown woolen ones.

Siska looked at him suspiciously. He surely was an odd one! Or he had good reason to disguise himself when it was not carnival time! Nothing good about that. She filled Laurent's cup of malicious joy to the brim by quickly removing her bunch of keys from the counter; he watched her out of the corner of his eye. Laurent had occasion to remember, because of its consequences, this sudden desire to masquerade, and his fancy for plebeian headgear.

Keeping one of the flashiest specimens of the assortment, a rakish cap that would have delighted the heart

of a wharf rat, upon his head, he asked the price. She looked at him with so amusing and sincere an air of consternation that he could no longer control himself. While she gave him change for a twenty-franc note with the haste of one who would willingly be rid of a suspicious customer, he, on the contrary, took his time, could not finish looking at himself in the mirror, or adjusting his purchase in the most impudent and flippant manner.

Finally he planked himself down comically, his hands on his hips, before the shopkeeper, and looked her up and down fixedly. And when, nettled by his gaze, the good woman changed color, recognizing in his eyes a familiar expression, Laurent abruptly threw his arms about her neck. With a little cry she had already opened her arms to him.

"It is I, Siska, I. Laurent Paridael, your Lorki!"

"Lorki! Monsieur Laurent! It isn't possible!" the good soul exclaimed.

She released him, stepped back to admire him, hugged him again, uttering over and over again:

"What an old rogue! What a child to make a fool of me so seriously!"

However, at Siska's cries of joy, Vincent had run in, no less agreeably surprised than his wife. They took Laurent by the shoulders and pushed him into their little living room.

This retreat resembled a cabin with a vengeance. During the day a window as narrow as a porthole admitted a dull, filtered light as though it were submerged under water. Its industrious occupants solved anew each day the problem of making it hold the greatest possible number of people and objects. There was not an empty inch of space. The walls of the room were

daubed in a brown color to look like mahogany, decorated with cuts of travel scenes; on the mantel there was a miniature three-master riding at full sail, a masterpiece of Vincent's handiwork, and several of those large shells which, when they are held against the ear, reverberate with the surge of the sea.

Laurent found himself in the presence of a string of children of all ages. They first introduced him to Henriette, a demure little housewife. She had an oval face, elongated without being badly proportioned, blue eyes that were astonishingly tender, and, so to speak, milky, blonde curls, a quiet and confident expression; her whole personality spoke sweetly of primordial candor and deep-seated purity.

Siska's possession of such a grown-up girl puzzled Laurent greatly. Before he had time to count the number of years that had slipped by since their marriage Vincent profited by a moment during which the girl left the room to whisper in his ear, nudging him and winking as he laughed heartily:

"You see, Monsieur Laurent, after Siska had put you to bed, we had to spend the time somehow. . . . The humbug only slapped me and held me off while you were in the room!"

And Laurent recalled a certain mysterious illness that had come upon the servant, and with what joy and good-heartedness Jacques Paridael had summoned her home after a month in the country.

After Henriette came Felix, a long-limbed, dark lad of fourteen, who resembled his father, and whom Door Bergmans had engaged as office and errand boy; then Pierket, a delightful little chap of twelve with the blonde hair of his mother and big sister, and the fiery brown eyes and slightly ambered coloring of his father



and Felix; and Lusse, a baby of at most six years, the miniature of her mother.

How many confidences were poured out! Laurent told the Tilbaks everything that had happened since Vincent had been discharged, but his bashfulness kept him from saying anything about Gina. He was not sure that he detested her as much as he would have liked to. Had he not just conjured up her image on the bank of the Scheldt?

Always allured by his favorite element, Vincent had been forced to relinquish even pilotage and the coasting trade, and discharged the functions of a ferryman, a lighterman and a barge pilot at one and the same time. He also took down to the mouth of the river the river clerks sent out by the traffickers to meet ships at the pilot station.

"And you, what are you going to become?" asked Vincent, with such a show of devotion that one could never have taxed him with indiscretion.

The young man himself did not know. He had nothing to look for from the people of his family, and even had his hundred francs of income been enough to live on, he was not at an age to fritter away his time.

"If I understood you correctly," Siska's husband resumed, "you would prefer, to a sedentary occupation, a job that would leave you free to come and go and give you plenty of exercise? Perhaps I can arrange it for you. The head of one of the 'Nations,' a comrade of mine, needs an employee who can help him with his estimates and superintend the work, both at the dockyards and at the warehouse. Shall I speak to him about you?"

Laurent could ask nothing better; it was arranged that he come and hear the result the next day.



### III

## SWARMS AND WASPS' NESTS

MASTER JEAN VINGERHOUT immediately engaged the young man recommended by his friend Vincent Tilbak. Jean was a jolly fellow, vigorously, solidly built, the youngest son of a well-known family of farmers of the Polders, the alluvions of the Scheldt, who, tired of farming at a loss, had bought, with the proceeds of his inheritance, a share in one of the "Nations."

The "Nations," trades unions reminiscent of the ancient Flemish guilds, shared the business of loading, unloading, stowage, cartage and warehousing of merchandise; they formed a power in the modern city upon which the most powerful merchants had to rely, for, combined, they had at their command an army of not too precise workers capable of entailing a complete paralysis of commerce and holding the power of the Municipal Council under their thumb. With them, at least, the rights of the native sons would be safeguarded; no immigrant would ever supplant the true born inhabitant of the district of Antwerp as *baes*, or director, or even as a simple journeyman.

The "America," the oldest and richest of these nations, into whose service Laurent had just entered,

took the best workmen, had at its command the finest horses, possessed model buildings and a highly perfected equipment. Their trucks, harness, cart tilts, lines, hampers, pulleys and scales were unequalled among the rival corporations. From Hoboken to Austruweel and Merxem one met only their busy gangs of workmen. Their weighers and gaugers were transshipping grain imported in lighters of an invariable burden; their porters were shouldering sacks and bales and lining them up on the quays, or hoisting them into drays, their dockers were piling planks, beams and raw wood upon the shore in assembling the products of the same species.

Too long accustomed to working with their two hands to peg away with pen and pencil, it was to Laurent that, on the recommendation of their colleague Vingerhout, the syndic of the directors or *baes*, they entrusted the office work and the task of checking up, at the entrance or exit of the docks, the accounts turned in by the weighers and gaugers of other corporations.

If a coffee merchant, a customer of the America, bought up a part of a colleague's commodity, Laurent had to receive the stock from the rival Nation with which the seller had dealt. A day's weighing in the midst of a tumult, under the broiling heat of the sun, or in rain or snow, was frequently his lot. But he was absorbed in his work. Hundreds of bales, stamped and numbered from the first to the last, marched past him. He added up columns of figures as he kept a sharp watch upon the records of the scales. For beware of mistakes! If the buyer did not find what he had paid for he would hold the America responsible for the mistake, unless Laurent could prove that the loss emanated from the seller and his workmen.

Many times he had to watch shipments from the Dobouziez factory, and it was not without emotion that he saw the white cases slashed by a black brush with the decisive "D. B. Z."

But he did not evince the slightest regret at his change in position. On the contrary. He rejoiced in working for employers who were without any arrogance, these *baes*, who were so easy in their manner, instead of toiling in the gloomy salesroom of a Bédard or some other arrogant parvenu. In sight of the roadstead and the basins, the uninterrupted movement of landing and embarking, the gorging or disgorging of cargoes, the coming and going between the floating warehouses and the docks on shore, the constant fall of merchandise on the quay and into the bottom of the holds, commerce no longer seemed an abstraction to him, but a tangible and imposing organism.

Laurent often attended the meeting of the *baes* in the evening, in one of the cafés near the Port. Wagons and drays had been put in the sheds, mangers had been filled, litters had been renewed. The horses were chewing their oats, the accountant had closed his books, the huge buildings now sheltered no other worker than the stable watchman, and the great doors, real fortress gates, protected the fortune of the America from the attacks of thieves.

What clamorous parties, what epic unbosoming of yarns, what smutty stories! Gods! The rugged chiefs of the union, these *baes* who were hardly less ill-bred than their subalterns, let loose such stiff ones that, as they themselves put it, a peasant would have fallen off his horse had he heard them. It was fine to see them wash their mouths with a deep draught after an outrageous bit of wantonness that they had all enjoyed,

and which made them all rock on their stools and communicated to the table, the army of half-litres and the window-panes a tremor like that provoked during the day by one of their enormous wagons jolting along the street.

Laurent came away from these meetings dumfounded, overpowered, a little suffocated, as though he had been surfeited with strong quarters of beef, or even been exposed, like a ham, to prolonged fumigation. And in the face of these hurricanes of abundant humour, how could anybody charge the full-blooded exuberance and the almost brutal license of the colorists of the past with being exaggerated?

In busy times, when the stationary force of workers on the premises was not sufficient to carry on the abundance of work, Laurent had the opportunity of accompanying Jean Vingerhout to the Coin des Paresseux, the crowded thoroughfare bordering the Maison Hanséatique, so called because it was there that the perpetually jobless congregated. Very typical were the scenes of enlisting and recruiting which he attended there! The first time Laurent did not understand why *baes* Jean, needing a reinforcement of only five men, had bothered himself with twenty of these tramps, all very strong, certainly, and even built for gigantic labors, but who exercised their muscles only in fighting, and mixed too much alcohol with their rich blood.

"Just you wait!" said the *baes*, who knew his men, with a laugh.

After the most ridiculous negotiations they finally accepted his terms and started on their way, but reluctantly, and sighing in the most heartrending fashion after every step. About twenty meters away from their standing place, one or another of these lazaroni



of the north would stop short and declare he could go no further unless he were given a drink.

Vingerhout having turned a deaf ear to this demand, the thirsty one dragged along grumbling, ready to give vent to the same declaration a few steps further along. Although two other recruits had upheld the petition of their comrade by a suggestive smacking of their lips and gestures worthy of Tantalus, the recruiter paid no more attention to them than he had before.

At the third liquor shop, that is to say, the sixth house, the sufferer gave in, and, with an oath of despair, deserted the troop for the bar, which drew him more irresistibly than any magnet. His two partisans dragged along until the next temptation presented itself, and then, after a supreme but unsuccessful plea to their recruiter, they resumed their libations to the god Gin.

Laurent began to understand why Vingerhout had enlisted the contingent.

"Those three were drunkards and licensed loafers!" said the *baes*. "I engaged them more to ease my conscience than for any other reason, for I was sure that they would give me the slip at the first turn. And I am not sure of the others!"

Jean had good reason to distrust their force of character. The dockyard to which they were going being about a kilometer further on, a few more defections became manifest, one man debouching the other, so that when they finally arrived at their destination, there only remained to Vingerhout the five hands that he required.

"We ought to thank our lucky stars that even they did not give us the slip at the last minute, and so

make us return to their fishpond and commence angling all over again!" concluded the Polderian philosopher, without in any other way epiloguing this edifying episode. And in recognition of their kindness he treated them to a round of gin.

Laurent learned to know queer chaps, even more eccentric than these loafers, on his trips with Vincent Tilbak, who took one or another of the river clerks down to meet an arrival in his boat. Having weighed anchor, the oarsman could only scull at first, in order to make his way out of the basin and the roadstead without crashing into barges and boats at anchor. The yawl passed between two ships whose dead hulks resembled somnolent whales having the winking ship lights for eyes. Then Tilbak began to row quickly. An intermittent silence, more impressive than absolute calm, hovered above the earth and the sky. Laurent listened to the grinding of the oars in the oarlocks, to the drip of the water from the blades, to the plashing of the water under the keel. From time to time a "Who goes there?" came from a custom-house launch searching for smugglers. The name and the voice of Tilbak made the excise men more sociable. At Doel they passed the night, according to the season, in the common room of the frugal inn, a hut built of tarred wood, or beneath the stars, on the grassy dike.

There they met a fraudulent crowd of industrious time-servers whom Laurent had leisure to observe minutely. Unlicensed brokers, couriers, dragomen for places of ill repute, or, of a still lower rank, defaulting pilots' apprentices, discharged stewards' boys, wharf rats come from the reformatory, young fish from the penitentiary, usually called "runners." Beardless, sharp-witted youths, they were as greatly given to

prowling by night as tom cats, and as insinuating as girls; good bait for fishing in troubled waters.

"Don't be afraid, Monsieur Lorki," said Tilbak, misunderstanding Laurent's amazement at the sight of this bivouac of smugglers.

Laurent, however, was concealing a more than partial curiosity beneath a very plausible constraint and repugnance. They were chewing tobacco, cheating at cards, passing the bottle, behaving as loosely as they could, mixing with their Burgundian-Flemish dialect the terms of a cosmopolitan language, eructations of slang. Trickery, anger, the lust for gain, and vice ruffled faces that were comely when shaded by the large peaks of sailors' caps, and the Rembrandtesque light of the wretched little den, the fleeting moonlight and the coppery false-dawn without, such a false-dawn as usually graces an execution, lent them an added ambiguity.

The good Tilbak, whom they respected sufficiently to let his customer pass first, disliked them from his sailor days.

"They know how to gouge the seafolk!" he said. "Ah! How they used to make me swear, those sloppy tars. The temptations and the claptrap chatter that I had to suffer when they swooped down on my deck like a school of flying fish. Fortunately I was too smitten with Siska to let myself be caught by their bait. They used to have samples of it, and their favors brought a market price. I would never have been fool enough to pledge them my advance pay, my flesh and my welfare. Never mind; I was glad to get on dry land in order to escape their hooks. I tell you, Monsieur Laurent, those runners are the true agents of the seven deadly sins!"



Vincent Tilbak should have noticed that, instead of sharing his animadversion, Laurent was scrutinizing the young runners with unseasonable kindness.

One day he let his mentor hear of the affinity that he had discovered between these nasty little fellows and himself.

At this confidence the face of Vincent Tilbak expressed such pitiful consternation that the madcap hastened to disavow his misplaced sympathies, and declared, not without blushing, that he had simply wanted to joke. Perverted and obstinate instincts smouldered within him. From them arose, without his being able to explain them, the muffled desires, the enervating pangs, the painful curiosity, and the jealous and pitiable heartaches, at once timorous and tender, that used to torment him before the wild Stone Mill, the haunt, but also the asylum, of asymmetrical souls.

The hard-working and salubrious life that he led with honest and upright fellows like Jean Vingerhout, the friendship of Vincent and Siska, but even more greatly, the gentle influence of Henriette, should have deferred the hatching of these morbid germs. Laurent had become an habitual guest at the Tilbaks for meals. A fraternal confidence grew up immediately between himself and Henriette. Never before had he felt so greatly, the gentle influence of Henriette, should have charmed opposite a person of the other sex. He seemed to have known her for a long time. It was just as if they had grown up together. In the evening Laurent helped the children, Pierket and Lusse, to write their exercises and learn their lessons. The elder sister, tending to her housekeeping, coming and going through the room, used to admire the young fellow's knowl-



edge. After supper he read out loud to the whole family, or instructed them in talking to them. Henriette would listen with a fervor not free from uneasiness. When he talked of world issues and of the condition of humanity the young girl was much more impressed by the excitement, the restlessness and the revolt that talk betrayed, than by the actual sense of his objurgations. With the second-sight of an affectionate feminine soul, she guessed him to be fundamentally sad and troubled, and the more he showed solicitude for the unfortunates, the suffering and the misguided, the more did she become frankly absorbed in him, having a presentiment that among all this world's wretched people this one had the greatest need for charity.

On the other hand, when he was with her, the train of his thought took a less harassing turn. Under the protecting caress of her great blue eyes, ingenuously fixed upon him, he saw only the present quietude, the loyal ambience, and the smile of life. He ceased to look for difficulties where there were none, and doomed his stormy speculations to silence.

Formerly, at the factory, the pupils of Gina's eyes had injected a traitorous liquid under his skin; he could not contain himself, became bad, dreamed of ruin and reprisals, a rising of the humble and a revolt of the servile, after which he would have seized, as part of his booty, the proud and scornful patrician girl and subdued her to the outrages of his burning desire. It was as much due to bitterness toward Gina as to hate of the directors and capitalists that he had turned to the exploited. He was going to descend to the subversive pariahs when he met proletarians who were reconciled to their lot. He became a kind of dilet-

tante laborer. The wholesomeness, the placidity, the good humor and the philosophy of the people in his new surroundings, especially the sweetness and the charm of Henriette allayed his bitterness and his grief, made him complacent and almost an opportunist. The image of Gina began to pale.

## IV

### THE CANTATA

WHILE strolling about the quays Door Bergmans saw a fellow whose expression attracted him. He started with astonishment. "I must be mistaken," he thought, as he continued on his way. But, having gone a few steps, he turned back, and, making sure that it really was Laurent Paridael, walked toward him with his hand outstretched.

Laurent, who was busy superintending the loading of a cargo of bales of rice contracted for by the America, was a little disconcerted, and even tried to shun him, but, reassured by the simple and kindly greeting, left his post for the moment and let himself be drawn a few feet away. When he heard the news, Bergmans teased him gently about the whim that had made him enter the service of a Nation as tally keeper, and assist the stevedores. Why had he not come to him? Bergmans offered him on the spot a place more worthy of his talents and more compatible with his education. But, to his great surprise, Laurent refused to abandon his new position. He described his new surroundings and his new friends with such lyricism and in such enthusiastic terms that he almost justified his strange vocation, and Bergmans thought better of insisting any further. He abstained from speaking of Gina.

Put completely at his ease, Laurent hailed with delight the proposition that he, Bergmans, Marbol and Vyveloy should meet from time to time.

The artist Marbol, a little, dry man, all nerves, concealed beneath an anemic and delicate appearance, an extraordinary fund of energy and perseverance. Within the past two or three years he had gained something of a reputation for painting what he saw about him. Alone in this great city literally infested by daubers and studio painters, in this ancient hotbed of art now almost totally extinguished—a necropolis rather than a metropolis—he was commencing to exploit the local “plein-air,” streets, scenery and types. He had left the ancient academy founded by Teniers and the delicious realists of the seventeenth century, but now fallen in the hands of false artists, as timid painters as they were intolerant teachers, with a certain *éclat* on the eve of the *concours de Rome*. In so doing, the young man had made enemies of the official coterie, the dealers, the amateurs, the critics and the collectors, those who procure bread as well as those who award renown.

To paint Antwerp, its life, its harbor, its river, its sailors, its dockers, its luxuriant women, its rosy and chubby children whom Rubens, in other days, had thought sufficiently plastic and appetizing to populate his heavens and Olympuses; to paint this human mob in its own ways, its costume and surroundings, with the most scrupulous and cherishing care for its special customs and morals, without neglecting any of the correlations which accentuate and characterize it; to interpret the very soul of the city of Rubens with a sympathy bordering upon assimilation—what a program and what an objective! It was, from the point



of view of these makers and buyers of dolls and mannequins, the deed of a crazy man, of an eccentric radical.

One of Marbol's paintings, destined for a foreign international exposition, and submitted before being sent to the approval of his fellow townsmen, sent them all into shrieks of laughter, and made him the object of ironic condolence and bitter and distrustful silence. This picture was "Dockers Resting."

At noon, upon an unharnessed truck close to the docks, three workmen were lying down. One lay on his back, his legs spread slightly apart, his head resting between his bent arms, in his hands clasped beneath his neck. His face was swarthy, rough, but handsome, half asleep, his eyelids slightly parted and showing the velvety black of the pupils. The two other dockers had thrown themselves down flat on their stomachs; the bottom of their leathery, smoky coats tightened across their well-developed haunches; their chests were slightly lifted; their chins rested in their calloused hands; leaning upon their elbows, they turned their backs to the spectators, showing their curly heads, their ears, the powerful muscles of their necks and their broad backs as they gaped at a corner of the roadstead that glistened amidst the forest of masts.

In Paris this audacious canvas drew forth a studio war and ferocious polemics; for years past such a hue and cry had not been raised. Marbol made as many friends as he did enemies; a goodly number of each. One of the big dealers of the *chausée d'Antin*, having bought the scandalous composition, the dealers of *Antwerp* shuddered with rage and astonishment. What honest man could have consented to hang this

portrait of three ragged workmen, badly clothed, unshorn, fleshy, gross, with disquieting haunches and fists? To reveal the full extent of his horror, Dupoissy had written that the picture exhaled an odor of sweat and red herring and onions; that he scented its low debauchery.

Another exposition was held in Paris. Marbol entered a picture no less audacious than the first, and, to the redoubled stupefaction of the hostile and timorous clan, the jurors awarded him the grand medal.

Even though the high priests of painting maliciously ranged themselves in opposition to the young painter, these successes, shortly afterward ratified in Munich, Vienna and London, gave the amateurs and collectors of Antwerp high society something to brood upon. It could not be denied that the fellow was making a success. If he had been able to prove his superiority only by what is called fame; magazine articles, applause from the starving, who, when they lack food, find nourishment in dreams, had this been the case, practical people would have continued to shrug their shoulders at this blustering bungler. But from the minute that he was able to finger his gold pieces his case became interesting.

“Well, well! Surely a weird taste! Painting that isn’t at all decorative; pictures that one would not wish to hang in one’s home, at least not in a lady’s sitting room. But he is a clever business man, and very shrewd after all. He did not make his plans so very badly, either. And what difference does it make that he paints pictures that one would not touch with a pair of tongs, since we all entertain that nice chap Vanderzeepen, even though we all know that the

worthy man made his two hundred houses, his residence in the Place de Meir, and his chateau at Borsbeek out of the proceeds of a sewage collecting plant? Like Vanderzeepen, this Monsieur Marbol has found the philosopher's stone; with all due respect, he has made gold out of dung!"

Prejudice began to give way. The captains of high finance commenced to bow to this person whom they had formerly thought a mangy tatterdemalion; they even risked mentioning his name before their very prudish wives, a thing which, a few months before, would have seemed most unconventional. Not being decently able to extol his incendiary and anarchistic art, they pretended to praise Marbol's commercial genius and ability in raising cash with such facility upon his disagreeable daubs and scarecrows from rich Parisians, jocular Yankees, or Englishmen, who, as every one knows, are partial to monstrous and peculiar scenes.

The musician Rombaut de Vyveloy, Door Bergmans' other friend, brought to mind, because of his height, his robust build, his leonine head, and its abundant shock of hair, and his ruddy complexion, the figure of the chief of the gods in the Jordaens "Jupiter and Mercury at the house of Philemon and Baucis." This Brabantian was, if not a pagan, at least a man of the Renaissance. There was nothing about him, either physically or morally, that suggested the dull sanctity of the emaciated types to be found in the work of primitives like Memling or Van Eyck. He had transformed old Bach's Christian oratorio into one of pantheism.

The passionate and essentially plastic art of Vyveloy was bound to make a deeper impression upon Lau-



rent Paridael than Marbol's paintings, which, although strong in conception, were a little weak and a little frigid in realization, and which, 'as he began to feel more and more undeniably as time went on, were not vibrant enough.

That year Antwerp inaugurated the celebration of the tercentenary of Rubens' birth with a cantata by Rombaut de Vyveloy, sung one evening in the Place Verte in the open air. Laurent did not fail to attend this performance.

Near the statue of the great Peter-Paul, the chorus and the orchestra occupied a semi-circular grand stand, in the center of which the composer was enthroned. The square, which had been roped off, was allotted to the bourgeoisie. The common people, crowding into the surrounding places, respected the demarcation, and the converging streets vomited forth increasing mobs in vain; the appalling multitude appeared more dignified and more calm than the privileged spectators, and less riotous than the obnoxious police or the cumbering mounted gendarmes. There were no scuffling and no murmuring. For hours past workmen and poor people had stamped about in their places without losing any of their good humor or serenity. What fluid had silenced these riotous tongues and turbulent pates? Arms crossed themselves placidly on breasts that were panting with curiosity. Did not these Antwerpians of robust stock but lowly rank anticipate the unique splendor of the celebration which they were preludeing with such impressiveness? The infants on the housewives' arms abstained from wailing, and the street dogs circulated amidst the compact plantation of legs without being molested by their natural tormentors, the street boys.



And in this impressive and magnetic silence, above the flowing sea of curdling surges, upon which the blue shadows, descending gently, caressingly, had stretched an additional peace and solemnity, there fell from the highest gallery of the structure, where the eye tried in vain to discern the heralds at arms, the martial fanfare of trumpets playing in unison. And the soprani of the sister cities, Bruges and Ghent, hailed and acclaimed the Metropolis again and again. Their salutations, ever warmer and more strident, were followed by the hoarse blasts of the aerial fanfare. After this dialogue the carillon began to tintinnabulate, slowly and muted at first, like a covey awakening at dawn in the dew of a coppice, then springing into life, elevating their voices, darting forth in flight with a shower of chords of jubilation. A burst of sunshine. Then the orchestra and the choruses entered the lists. And this was the apotheosis of Wealth and Art.

The poet extolled the Great Market in virulent strophes, in hyperbolic and sonorous commonplaces to which the *mise-en-scène*, the ecstasy of the crowd, and Vyveloy's music lent a sublime import. The four quarters of the globe came to salute Antwerp, all the nations of the globe were paying her humble tribute, and, as if modern times and the middle ages were not enough to swell the triumphant sails of the proud city, the cantata went back to antiquity and enlisted the forty centuries of the Pyramids as mace-bearers and lictors. Everything, time and the universe, geography and history, the infinite and the eternal, blended, in this work, into a celebration of the city of Rubens. And in closing one's eyes one could have imagined the passing of a majestic cortège before the throne of the preëminently triumphant painter.

When it was over and the garrison band, at the head of the torchlight procession, took up, as they began to march, the principal theme of the cantata, Laurent, tingling to his very marrow, his nerves coursing with an indefinable and contagious enthusiasm, momentarily beside himself, locked step with the soldiers and pushed on with the equally enthusiastic and excited mob in which bourgeois and workmen, entangled arm in arm, struck up in full voice the dithyrambic chant.

Tirelessly Laurent marched with the procession over the whole of its route.

The flowing escort renewed itself with fresh relays at every corner, but in vain, for in his intense excitement he could not bring himself to leave it. Vyveloy's music would have carried him to the end of the world. Although others were used up by the heroic measures of the torchlight procession and disappeared in the cross streets, he was conscious of an even-increasing intrepidity in his legs and flame in his heart. New marchers, however, were always replacing those who had dropped out, and the character of the procession varied with the quarters that it traversed. Along the roadstead and the basins Laurent felt the elbows of sailors and dockers; in the heart of the city he became one of a crowd of salesmen and shop girls; on the boulevards of the new city he found himself again with young men of good family and the clerks of the largest firms; finally, in the labyrinths of the Quartier Saint André, the habitation of the beggars, waifs and strays, bareheaded wantons took his arm familiarly, and tawny young blackguards, perhaps runners, carried him off in their farandole. All for Antwerp, all for Reubens. Laurent heard only the cantata; he was filled and sat-

urated with it. He accompanied the bands to their last halting place, sad and almost frustrated when the gunners, having dismounted, blew out the Venetian lanterns hung upon their wooden lances, and trampled the last resin torches under their heels.

## V

### THE ELECTION

“AH! haughty city, wealthy city, selfish city, city of wolves so eager for their prey that they devour each other when there are no more sheep to shear to the bone! City conforming to the spirit of Darwin’s law! Fecund city, but harsh mother! In your hypocritical corruption, your blatancy, your licentiousness, your opulence, your greedy instincts, your hatred of the poor, your fear of hirelings, you conjure up Carthage before me. Were you of Carthage, too, not filled with the prejudice against soldiers that Antwerp still maintains? Even Antwerpians whose sons are in the army are pitiless and harsh with troopers. In no other part of Belgium does one hear of terrible brawls between soldiers and the bourgeoisie, of the ambushes where the slaughterers fall upon a drunken soldier on leave as he is returning to some barracks in the slums or a fort lost at the very end of a suburb.\*

“Who have we at the head of Antwerp? Vain, stupid councillors, as inflated as were the magistrates of

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\* Attention must be called to the fact that this book was written before the introduction into Belgium of compulsory personal military service. The same observation applies to important passages in the third part, notably the chapter entitled Contumacy. G. E.



Carthage. Do you know what their last stroke was, Bergmans; do you know it?

“One day, having nothing else to demolish and rebuild, always an annoying situation to municipal councillors, they decreed to tear down the Tour Bleue, one of the few specimens of the military architecture of the fourteenth century remaining in Europe. All the artists and connoisseurs of the city stirred themselves up, protested against it, sent petitions to the “Regency.” In the face of this opposition, what did our soothsayers do? They deigned to consult the famous expert, Viollet-Le-Duc. The archaeologist agreed with all the artists in favor of maintaining the old bastille. Look, then, upon their queer fellow who allowed himself to be of another mind than these omniscient merchants! And they had nothing more urgent to do than to raze the venerable relic without any form of trial. . . .

“And, nevertheless, a sublime city! You are right, Rombaut, to praise its indefinable charm, which closes the mouths of her detractors. We cannot bear her a grudge for having given herself to that brood of plutocrats. We love her as we would a wanton and flirtatious woman, as we would a treacherous and adorable courtesan. And even her pariahs do not consent to curse her!”

It was Laurent Paridael who was railing thus before Bergmans, Rombaut and Marbol, at the cabaret Croix-Blanche, on the Plaine du Bourg.

“Good! The young docker’s servant is taking the bit in his teeth,” said Vyveloy. “And all because he finds that I have put too much chauvinism in my cantata, at the expense of Bruges and Ghent. The devil! You can understand the shortsightedness of the parish bel-

fry when the belfry happens to be the pile of Notre Dame!"

"Absolutely," said Bergmans, approvingly. "And then, too, Antwerp will undergo a moral regeneration also. She will shake off the yoke that degrades her. She will be restored again to her true children. You will see it, Paridael; the oppressed masses are becoming insubordinate. I tell you that a new order will soon come into being! A breath of emancipation and youth has blown across the mob; there is something better here than a rich and proud city; there is a people no less interesting who are commencing to revolt against the representatives who do serve them badly and compromise them."

Bergmans' prediction was not long delayed in its realization. For a long time the air had been charged with electricity. Vyveloy's passionate cantata had contributed in no small measure to the reawakening of the population. The rich folk, in taking the initiative in a celebration in honor of Rubens, had not expected to raise up such a ferment. It happened that the painters of the Renaissance began to evoke the leaders of men of the sixteenth century, William the Silent, Marnix of Sainte-Aldegonde. They exhumed, as an ensign, the insulting epithet of the days of Charles V. and Philip II., the name of "*gueux*," which their valiant ancestors had been proud to bear as a badge of honor.

The mummified nobility, indifferent to all and ultramundane in addition, perhaps rejoiced at the dissension which the new current had in store for the upstarts, but did not dare to sponsor a party united under the name and the banner of the victorious adversaries of Catholic Spain.

The effervescence swayed, above all, the working population of the harbor.

Isolated conflicts had already broken out between Bédard and the Nations. At first there were disagreements over an account due from him to the America. The shipowner constantly refused to pay his bill. Then there arrived from Riga a grain ship with a cargo consigned to the recalcitrant debtor.

Bédard applied for the unloading of his merchandise to one of his creditor's rivals, but under such conditions the corporations made common cause, and the Nation sought by him refused the enterprise until he should have settled with their competitors. He applied to a third and a fourth Nation, meeting the same reply from both.

Obstinate and furious, he had dockers brought from Flushing, the nearest seaport. The Antwerpian dockers threw many of the Hollanders into the basins, and took them out half-drowned, only to plunge them in again, so that all of them took the train home for their country the same day, swearing that they never again could be forced to interfere with and oppose the the expeditious Antwerpians in their strikes. In truth, when these workmen, as even-tempered as they were vigorous, decided to become nasty, they did it in the fashion of felines.

Bédard, having heard of the desertion of the Hollanders after the treatment that had been inflicted upon them, foamed with fury and swore that sooner or later he would get even with Vingerhout and his insolent Nations. But since, as time went on, his grain threatened to rot in the bottom of the hold, he gave in to claims of the dockers.

A little later on, an occasion presented itself to



reopen hostilities against these much too rebellious plebes. There had just been invented in the United States elevators, apparatus which replaced cranes, lighters and computers, the adoption of which for the unloading of grain would fatally destroy a great part of the hand-labor, and in consequence would entail ruin for many members of the Nations.

So that there was great agitation among the people when it was learned that B ejard had recommended, in the councils of the "Regency," the acquisition of similar apparatus.

On the evening upon which B ejard's proposition was to be put to a vote in the meeting of the municipal council, the *baes*, deans and workers massed themselves in a compact and formidable array in the Grand' Place, in front of the Hotel de Ville. In their working clothes, their sleeves rolled up, their biceps bare, they waited there terribly resolute, their fists upon their hips, their noses in the air, their eyes fastened upon the lighted windows. With a jeering air, his pipe between his teeth, as radiant as though he were on his way to a dance, Jean Vingerhout circulated from group to group giving his instructions to the men. Although he needed no secretary for this night's work, he had with him young Paridael, who was enchanted by the little explosion that threatened the odious B ejard.

"We shall all laugh, my boy," said Jean, rubbing his hands so briskly that it seemed as if he would break the bones of his fingers.

Siska had kept her husband at home, not, however, without difficulty.

Several suspicious looking loungers, of the type of the young runners of Doel, had also approached the husky workers, but Jean did not intend to entangle



himself with compromising allies. He rejected all of them without snubbing them too greatly. Good folk would suffice for the business in hand.

Policemen had tried to disperse the assembled crowd, but they did not insist in the face of the dignified manner, portentous in its calm, with which they were welcomed by the mutineers.

A rather long street, the Canal au Sucre, separates the Grand' Place from the Scheldt, but two hundred meters was no distance for these fellows, and the policemen, sly but puny, would not be heavy to carry as far as the water.

"What are they going to do?" the police asked themselves. They were alarmed by the inertia and the resolute and slightly ironic air of the dockers. The loafers of the Coin du Paresseux were not more offensive while waiting for the *baes* who steeped them in drink. To those who questioned them the workers responded with a certain *vade retro* as brief as it was energetic, untranslatable in any other idiom than their terrible Flemish, and to which their manner of making it ring out added an eloquent savor.

The windows of the left wing on the second floor of the ancient Hotel de Ville were illumined. It appeared that they were still deliberating. The vote was imminent; all those people were hand in glove with each other.

Nine o'clock pealed forth. At the last stroke, at a whistle from Vingerhout, the workers leaned over and phlegmatically set about pulling up the paving stones beneath them. They went about their work rapidly, so rapidly that the alguazils got out of breath uselessly in trying to prevent them.

And then Jean Vingerhout, in order to show how

they were going to set to work, ardoitly sent a paving stone through one of the windows of the council chamber. Other arms rose, each hand grasping its paving stone with the steadiness and the vigor of a catapult. But at a sign from Vingerhout they replaced them upon the ground.

“Very gently. Perhaps one warning will suffice them!”

And presently an usher came running across the square, out of breath, and, spying Vingerhout, told him that the gentlemen of the Council were adjourning their decision.

“What are they waiting for, then?” asked Vingerhout, always attracted by the lighted windows.

Fundamentally, this terrible Vingerhout was a shrewd, but a good fellow. He knew the layout of the Hotel de Ville, and knew, too, that the stone which he had thrown would fall in an empty space in the room. But he admitted this only to Laurent.

The windows receded into the darkness. The burgomaster, the aldermen and councillors came out of the communal palace abashed, surrounded by a cloud of policemen; the reserves and the outposts had been placed in requisition, and the commandants of the barracks had been telegraphed. Béjard had even wanted to ask aid from Brussels. But the Nations thought that they had achieved a sufficient result from their little manifestation, and, leaving their paving stones behind them, they dispersed slowly, like the good giants that they were, contenting themselves with sending a significant jeer after the councillors, especially after Béjard, who had very seriously thought that they were going to treat him like Deacon Steven.

Intimidated, the Council very wisely decided to bury

the much too burning question until after the election for the legislative chambers.

The *baes* of the corporations violently exposed the campaign of Bergmans, who had frankly sided with the dockers and was running for candidacy against Freddy Béjard. Laurent had entered a society of fanatics of his own age, the *Jeune Garde des Gueux*, recruited from among the apprentices and the sons of minor employes.

As the campaigning period advanced, it became more and more fraught with bitterness. The plutocrats, owners of newspapers, devoted themselves to a debauch of posters, enormous, multicolored, eye-compelling, of brochures, of pamphlets, all printed in large type.

Restlessness increased among the lower classes.

"What matter?" stormed Béjard. "Those outcasts are not electors. I shall be elected just the same."

As a matter of fact, the majority of "copyholders" took sides with the rich. But the latter, fearing that Béjard's unpopularity would jeopardize the rest of their ballot, tried to obtain the shipowner's promise that he would postpone his candidacy until a more favorable time. He flatly refused. He had waited too long; the seat was due him as an indemnification for his long and precious service to the oligarchy. They did not insist. Moreover, he held them in the palm of his hand. A thousand compromising secrets, a thousand skeletons subsisted between them and him. His light-fingered hands held the reputation and fortune of his colleagues. And this diabolic man possessed the genius for organization to such an extent that he was indispensable. He alone knew how to conduct an electoral campaign and to manoeuvre the cohorts of



shopkeepers by tickling their interests. Without his assistance they might as well have declared themselves beaten in advance.

Not at all scrupulous as to the means that he employed, his agents multiplied trips to saloons and visits from house to house. They had been instructed to see the thwarted shopkeepers and to promise them capital or customers. To the more stubborn they went as far as to give half of a banknote, the other half to be delivered to them on the night of the count, if the director of the Southern Cross won.

Other employes in his imposing campaign organization, as complicated and as numerous as a ministry, prepared marked ballots for voters of whom they were suspicious; still others were busy compiling statistics of his chances, in dividing the voters in "good," "bad" and "doubtful" classes. The forecasts gave at least a thousand votes in majority to Béjard. He continued, however, to buy as many as he could, spending the party's money freely, drawing even upon his private resources. He would have ruined himself in order to win.

His assistants worked upon the imagination of the peasants of the district, orthodox people like the nobility, and superstitious besides. Ignorant of history, these rural folk took the name of *gueux* in its literal sense. The least landholder, having been confirmed in his terrors by the talks of old folk on winter evenings, saw his holdings already pillaged, given over to the torch, and himself trampled down as by the Cossacks, and by anticipation, the soles of his feet began to burn. He would not vote for foot-broilers and incendiaries. In the villages Béjard's heelers gossiped quite naturally about Bergmans and his people, venting



the most monstrous and extravagant calumnies, difficult to make city-folk believe, but which passed for truth among the rustics as if they had been articles of the evangel.

Door den Berg could oppose these underhand plots only with his character, his talent, his personal worth, his warm conviction and eloquence, his frank expression; in the battle of newspapers, posters and brochures, he got the worst of it; on the other hand, in public meetings, wherever the merits of the candidates were threshed out, he had the advantage. Moreover, one had to be infeudated into the clan of Bédard to take his, or rather Dupoissy's, prose and eloquence seriously, for it was Dupoissy who manufactured his speeches and articles.

Nothing could have been more disgusting than his humanitarian and long-winded confections; collections of commonplaces worthy of the worst departmental gazette, filled with *clichés*, hollow aphorisms, flat and redundant phrases, rhetoric so vile and so ranting that the very words seemed to refuse to cover his lies and obscenity any longer.

The night before the eve of election a monster meeting was held at the Variétés, an immense dance hall, in which political mass-meetings alternated with shrove-tide masquerades.

For the first time during the many years that he had been regaling the gulls and his creatures with doctrinaire harangues, always delivered in the same nasal, monotonous voice, Bédard was sharply hissed. He was not even allowed to finish his speech.

The heaving crowd, electrified by a hearty phillipic from Bergmans, rushed like a furious tide to attack the speaker's table on the platform, passed over the

orchestra pit, overturned the table, trampled and tore the green carpet to tatters, inundated the parquet with water from the carafes intended for the speakers, kicked about the jangling bell of the chairman, and barely refrained from hacking the organizers of the meeting to pieces.

Happily, as they saw the cyclone coming on, these prudent folk beat a retreat, candidates and bosses together, and left the place to the people.

Election day finally dawned; a grey October day. From early morning the drums of the civic guard beat out the call for voters; the city bustled with an unusual life that was not its every-day activity, the business of clerks and tradespeople, cartage and traffic. The voters, in holiday attire, left their houses, and under their stovepipe hats wore a grave and slightly strained expression, citizens conscious of their dignity. With their voting papers in their hands they walked quickly to the election booths, school buildings, foyers of theatres and other public buildings.

Young bloods, rich men's sons, wearing an orange cockade, the party color, at their buttonhole, hired hacks to bring feeble, sickly, or indifferent voters to the polls. They gave themselves airs of importance, consulted their lists, greeted each other mysteriously, gnawed at the pencils which they used to register the voters. Omnibuses left very early to pick up the rural voters in distant little straggling villages. Dumfounded and red with excitement, the peasants grouped themselves according to their parishes, and the black-coated priests went about among these blue-clad folk giving advice and counting the votes. Groups formed in front of the polls. They were reading posters still wet from the press, in which one or the other candi-

date denounced a last-minute manoeuvre of his adversary, and uttered a final, laconic and vigorous proclamation. Nearly all these manifestos began with the phrase: "Voters! You are being deceived!" Newsboys were crying the latest extras. On each side of the poll a ne'er-do-well was standing, wearing a sign-board inviting people to vote for one or the other ticket. The blue cockades in one group exchanged defiant glances with the orange rosettes of another; people who were ordinarily quite inoffensive assumed a belligerent air, and hands feverishly tormented the handles of canes. They talked a great deal, but in low voices, like conspirators.

However, each booth having been provided with a chairman and two watchers, the voting began. Answering to the roll-call in alphabetical order, the voters brushed a passage through the crowd, passed behind a partition, and presented themselves before the three grave men. The latter sat behind a table, covered with the traditional green cloth and bearing an ugly black, cubic box, pompously called the urn. The voter pushed his ballot, folded four times and stamped with the arms of the city, for a brief second beneath the eyeglassed and suspicious nose of the chairman, and then let it fall into the urn as if it were a poor-box, a money-box, or a letter-box. There were some upon whom this simple action made a profound impression; they lost their wits, dropped their canes, became confused in their bows, and persisted in trying to put their ballot into the watcher's inkwell.

On the partition, on the side of the waiting room, were displayed the lists of candidates; nearsighted men put their noses right up to it; dirty fingers travelled all over it as over the timetable posted up in



railroad stations. The classroom reeked with the stench of dog's ordure and the butts of extinguished cigars, and there lingered the musty smell of poor scholars who had fed upon delicatessen.

There were many absences. The "junior guards" of both parties, on picket duty at the entrance, identified their men, and kept sending carriages to get their absentees, in anticipation of the check-roll. The litany of names, the long procession of voters, kept passing in ruefully. From time to time incidents cropped up that relieved the monotony. A voter omitted from the list or challenged became angry; people having the same name presented themselves for each other; they persisted in summoning dead men whom they absolutely wished to see vote, or, on the other hand, they tried to persuade living men that they were no longer of this world.

Upon coming out from the booths into which only one man went at a time, their happy and relieved expression and their sprightly air would have lead one to suppose they had isolated themselves for other motives.

The taking of the vote, checking and counter checking, lasted until noon, and then the count commenced. No one knew anything definite, but they hazarded a reckoning of results. "Few absences!"

The orange cockades commiserated each other upon the abundance of blouses, gloved hands and shovel hats; on the other hand, the blues were worrying over the unusual contingent of *baes* from the Nations, of business people, and of patriotic officers.

Nobody went home; everybody ate badly at taverns crammed with patrons, and fever and anxiety having dried their throats, they became intoxicated with both beer and words,



People began to mass themselves, their noses in the air, in the Grand' Place, in front of the "Association," Béjard's club and that of other wealthy men, where there were just beginning to be displayed, in the eight windows of the first floor, the results of twenty-six polling places; and also down at the waterfront, in front of the Croix Blanche, where the "Nationalists," Bergmans' partisans, were gathered.

A fine rain drenched the onlookers, but curiosity made stoics of them. Hawkers continued to bawl the article of the day, blue or orange cockades.

There was a threatening storm brewing in the excited and taciturn crowd, swelled now by many laborers, minor employees, and students who did not appear upon the rolls. Enraged because they had not been able to vote for Door den Berg, they nourished deep in their hearts a violent desire to manifest their preference in another manner.

And, at present, the blue cockades dominated in the crowd. The laborers pinned them upon their woolen vests. Brawls had broken out in the morning outside the booths where the country-folk had cast their votes. And, intimidated by the look of hate thrown at them by their comrades of the waterfront, the peasants hastened, after voting in accordance with the wishes of their parish priests, to climb upon the roofs of the waiting coaches, and put miles of polders or heather between themselves and the ramparts of the metropolis.

The party men crowded into the salons of the "Association," where the party bosses and candidates sat waiting the results. The harsh, metallic voice of Béjard rose above the whispers of the talkers; Dupoissey, congratulatory and inspired, Saint-Fardier, tur-

bulent and aggressive, speaking in thunderclaps of Bergmans and the whole of the dirty common people, Dobouziez, sober in his judgment, aged, worried looking, little interested in active politics and grumbling to himself at the costly ambition of his son-in-law; finally, the young Saint-Fardiens, gaping till their jaws almost broke, tapping upon the window-panes, watching the crowd gather in the square.

At the Croix Blanche, Door did not have hands enough to grip the hands of every one who insisted upon shaking his. The affection, the exuberance and the sincerity of these well-worn and upright natures touched him keenly.

Laurent, the Tilbaks, Jean Vingerhout, Marbol and Vyveloy could not stay still, but went out, looked at the returns, ran to the central poll where the general count was being taken.

The first favorable results for Bédard and for Bergmans were greeted by hisses from the Association, by cheers from the Croix Blanche, or vice-versa. But the manifestations of the assembled plutocracy awoke a contradictory echo each time from the crowds in the square. Thus, when the figures of the majority attributed to Bédard appeared upon the sign at the windows of the Association, there was a little timid applause, promptly smothered beneath a chorus of groans and whistles; the opposite occurred whenever luck favored "Our Door."

Several times the votes balanced each other. The majority of the voters in the city declared for Bergmans. Already the crowd in the street and at the Croix Blanche trembled with happiness; every one began hugging every one else, and congratulating Bergmans. Paridael even wanted them to fly the

flag of the Gueux, orange, white and blue, with the two hands fraternally entwined, the two hands drawn and quartered upon the shield of Antwerp. Bergmans, less optimistic, had difficulty in preventing his friends from triumphing too early. Our enthusiasts did not reckon upon the country. Not only did the rural poll overwhelm the swerving results, but the total of the peasant vote grew greater, always distending, swallowing up, like a stupid tide, and submerging under its waves the legitimate hopes of the majority of urban citizens.

## VI

### TROUBLES

FIRST consternation, and then rage, took possession of the people of Antwerp at the final outcome of the struggle. The plutocracy had carried it off, but only with the co-operation of corruption and stupidity. The peasantry had opposed their veto to the will of the great city. The victors, who could not conceal from themselves the equivocal alloy of their triumph, committed the error of wishing to celebrate it, and, although inwardly somewhat crestfallen, they faced it out, feigned jubilation, and resolved the crowd, by their bravado and their grimacing challenges, upon the explosion of hostile sentiments that it had been containing with great difficulty since the morning. They did not, however, risk showing themselves upon the balcony of their club, whither they were ironically called by the mob, a sea of convulsive heads, pale and wan with fury, red and inflamed, grinning sardonically, tight-lipped, beating back their tears of rage.

Five o'clock. Night had fallen. The wealthy folk had returned to their houses in the new part of the city, sliding timidly through the crowd that was still keeping watch in the square.

They all stayed there, uneasy, not knowing what



to make up their minds to do, their fists clenched, certain that "it was not going to go on this way," but not knowing how "it was going on."

In anticipation of trouble, the burgomaster had called out the civic guard, posts had been doubled; the gendarmerie was under arms.

Bergmans, while crossing the square, had been recognized, cheered, and borne off in triumph. He freed himself as best he could from these ovations; since early in the morning he had exhorted all those who came in contact with him to calm and resignation. "We shall be victorious next time!" he said.

The orange flag floating from the balcony of the Association bearded and exasperated his friends. In the first moments after the news of defeat the consternation of the vanquished had given the victors an opportunity to hoist their flag with impunity.

Suddenly a pushing this way and that began in the crowd. Paridael and his young comrades of the "Jeune Garde des Gueux" jostled their way through until they reached the club.

Carried upon the shoulders of Jean Vingerhout, Laurent, as nimble as a monkey, using both hands and feet, clinging to whatever slight ledges he could, climbed to the balcony, clutched the flagstaff, tried to loosen it, and ending by hanging from it, pulling on the material. A cracking was heard; the wood snapped. . . .

The crowd yelled with anxiety.

The flag was conquered, but the daring conqueror tumbled into empty space with his trophy. He would have broken his neck upon the pavement had the vigilant and solidly built Vingerhout not been there. Vingerhout caught Laurent in his arms without flinching

as if he were catching a bale of rice or a sack of cereal in full flight. Then he put Laurent quietly upon his feet with an oath of approval. The young fellow, feeling the earth once more beneath his feet, began to wave his flag over the heads of the crowd. A burst of stormy cheers broke out and continued. The police tried to take Laurent by the collar. Hundreds of hands, following Vingerhout's fist, freed him, threw the policemen into disorder, and reduced them to impotence.

The young fellows took the head of a huge column that began moving after having sent three volleys of cat-calls toward the dismantled balcony, singing the "*Hymne des Gueux*," composed by Vyveloy, and a Flemish refrain improvised in honor of their leader.

From a distance came the song of the other party. Where could such a challenge come from? An electric tremor ran through the whole line.

"Down with them!" And the crowd rushed wildly across the Place de Meir.

At the corner of this square, where it becomes narrowest, the Gueux fell upon a crew of young revellers with blue cockades, with a band and torches. With a frightful clamor they threw themselves upon their provokers. In an instant the torches had been torn from their hands, a hole had been kicked in the drum, the whole crew had been thoroughly trounced and trampled upon without having made the slightest resistance.

And by the time that the middle and the tail of the line had come up to the place where the scuffle had taken place, the fugitives were already far away.

The Gueux, however, had heard that the rich people,

thinking themselves sheltered from the wrath of the mob, on the Boulevard Leopold, in the new part of the city, had illuminated their houses and decorated them with flags.

"To Bédard's!" howled the mob.

From the Place de Meir onward the demonstration took on a sinister aspect. The ranks of workmen, dockers and bourgeois disappeared to make way for a crowd of shameless fellows. They were no longer singing the "*Hymne des Gueux*," but were shouting incendiary refrains.

On the road, in the Avenue des Arts, a runner threw a paving stone through the door of the Saint-Fardier residence, the windows of which were decorated with lanterns. The panes of glass smashed to pieces. The wind, rustling a silk curtain, blew it close to the flame of a lantern; the goods took fire. The ferocious mob shivered and cheered the flames, an unexpected accomplice.

"That's it! Let's burn the whole caboose!"

But a half-company of gendarmes, the police, and a company of the civic guard prevented them from carrying this pleasantry any further.

While one part of the procession remained behind to annoy the gendarmes, the others made good their escape by passing through the side streets and coming out upon the Boulevard Leopold almost opposite Bédard's residence.

"Down with Bédard! . . . Down with the vendor of souls! . . . Down with the slave-trader! . . . Down with the torturer of children! . . ."

An outburst of bloodthirsty cries greeted the home of the oligarch. Whether or not he knew what was in the air, Bédard, the foreigner, the elect of the peas-



antry, had abstained from illuminating his mansion. The shutters on the ground floor were closed, and it seemed as if there were no light within.

But this discretion did not disarm the mob. They hurled themselves furiously upon the accursed house. Prowlers and vagrants, of which the greater part of the procession now consisted, especially excel in demolition. The barred shutters were torn from the windows, and the windows themselves shattered to splinters.

"To the death! To the death!" shrieked the rioters.

Confiding the flag to his faithful Vingerhout, Paridael came between them, and tried to prevent them from breaking into the house, for suddenly all his thoughts had returned to the wife of the unpopular ship-owner, his Cousin Gina. Let them tear Bédard to pieces or hang him! Laurent would not have cared at all. Let them not leave one stone of the house upon another! Laurent would have willingly helped the destroyers. But he would give his last drop of blood to spare Madame Bédard one fright or emotion!

Ah! luckless fellow, why had he had not foreseen this danger sooner?

He called Vingerhout to his aid. But they were swept aside. It was impossible to dam the furious mass. There was nothing to do but follow them, or, better, precede them into the house and bring help to the young woman. Laurent jumped through a window into the salon. Already a swarm of infuriated men were struggling in there like epileptics; shattering the furniture and bibelots, tearing down curtains, cutting holes into cushions, pulling pictures from the wall, reducing tapestries and hangings to lint, throwing the



debris out of the windows, pillaging and degrading everything that came to hand.

Laurent outran them into the neighboring room; it was dark and deserted. He penetrated into a third salon; nobody there; into the dining room. Again nobody; he ransacked the orangery and the conservatory without meeting a living soul.

Others, however, followed him. Weary of breaking everything, they wanted to do their business with Bédard. Laurent rushed out into the vestibule, saw the staircase, and mounted it four steps at a time.

He reached the first floor landing, penetrated into the bedrooms, a dressing room, and another room. Nobody. He called, "Gina! Gina!" Not even the ghost of Gina! He continued his search, rummaging all the corners, opening closets and wardrobes, looking under the beds. And still nothing! She was not on the upper floors, or in the garret. Coming downstairs in despair he ran into the ringleaders, who were still howling for Bédard. For a very little they would have accused Paridael of having let his enemy escape. Happily, Vingerhout came along just in time to take him out of their hands.

Outside the tumult was augmenting. Laurent walked out into the garden and visited the stables with no greater success.

Finally he resolved to quit the deserted house. In the street, where hundreds of spectators among the rioters watched the sacking of this luxurious home with sanctimonious curiosity, he learned from the servants that the master and mistress were dining with Madame Athanasius Saint-Fardier. Reassured, he was about to leave the theatre of the saturnalia when he heard a furious galloping resounding in the distance.

"The civic guard on horseback! Every one for himself!"

Pillagers and destroyers interrupted their business.

The platoon approached at a gallop. At a hundred meters distance from the rabble the captain, Van Frans the banker, an old friend of the Dobouziez family, ordered a halt.

All rich men and the sons of rich men, parade soldiers only, they were proud of their handsome dark green uniform, of their silver-buttoned tunics and black brandenburgs, of their trousers with the amaranthine stripe, of their astrachan knapsacks with the red shoulder-straps and silver tassels. Their mounts had shabracks matching the uniform, on the corners of which were embroidered silver bugles, and an ordonnance cloak was rolled up on the front of the saddles.

Pale, excited, their eyes glistening, they made their horses wheel and paw the ground. Seeing that they had stopped, the rioters were emboldened to mock them. "Cardboard soldiers! Buffoons! Sunday cavaliers!" Laurent recognized Athanasius and Gaston Saint-Fardier, and heard the former, who was pushing his horse forward, say to Van Frans: "Are we never going to charge that rabble, Captain?" In passing through the Avenue des Arts the two brothers had seen the havoc wrought upon their father's house, and burned with impatience to avenge the affront.

Until now the service of this honorary squadron had been a recreation, a simple sport, a pretext for walks and excursions and parties in the country. It was not the fault of the handsome dilettante in uniform that these loafers forced them to take themselves seriously.

"Draw . . . sabres!" commanded Van Frans in a slightly trembling voice. And the virgin swords, drawn

from their sheaths with a metallic clinking, added a livid flame to the gloved hand of every cavalier.

This was enough to throw the looters into a panic. The crowd broke in front, and flung themselves into the side streets to the left and right. The more daring hurried to get out of the way on the opposite pavement or beneath the trees in the center of the avenue.

"Charge!" ordered Van Frans, sharply. "Forward!"

And the squadron dashed forward at a breakneck gallop. Stirrups and scabbards clanked each other, the pavement sparkled like an anvil.

After having put the mob to flight and pretended to chase them, the soldiers halted, wheeled, and charged a second time, in the opposite direction.

The police succeeded in dispersing the last rioters, and by now, being in the majority, began to capture the ringleaders and put them under arrest.

Pursued from that side, the most infuriated members of the mob resigned themselves to making a demonstration elsewhere.

Turning the corner of a street, Laurent found himself face to face with Regina. The news of the riot had surprised the Bédards at the dinner table, and while her husband had gone to the Hotel de Ville to confer with his friends, Gina, in spite of all efforts to detain her, had walked out alone, curious to see for herself her husband's unpopularity.

Laurent took her by the arm.

"Come with me, Regina. You can't go home. Your house is a ruin, and even the street is dangerous for you. It would be better for you to go to your father's."

She saw that he was wearing the colors of Bergmans' party upon his cap.



"You are making common cause with them; you were among those who made that little expedition to my house. . . . Really, Laurent, that's the last straw! What a dirty deed!"

"This is not the time to recriminate and say unpleasant things to me!" said Paridael with an assurance that he had never before felt in talking to her. "Come with me!"

Frightened and overmastered by his air of resolution, she allowed herself to be led, and even took his arm. He lifted her into the first carriage that they met, cast the Dobouziez address to the cabby, and sat down opposite her before she had risked a remark.

"Excuse me," he said, "I shall not leave you until I know that you are in a safe place."

She did not answer. Neither of them opened their lips again.

Laurent's knees brushed those of the young woman; their feet met, and she withdrew hers with a terrified start, drawing back into a corner of the carriage, or pretending to look out of the window. Laurent held his breath in order the better to hear hers; he could have wished that the trip would last forever. Both were thinking of the last time they had met. She began to be afraid; he felt himself again becoming the lover of former days.

They passed drunken runners brandishing cudgels at the end of which were attached shreds of material torn from the furniture and hangings of the mansions that had been sacked. As they passed each street lamp Laurent caught a fleeting vision of the young woman. The alarm that he was causing his cousin sorely vexed him. Forever, then, he was to be an object of aversion



and scorn! When they reached the factory he got out first and offered her his hand. She stepped out without taking his proffered assistance, and said, for the sake of politeness:

“Won’t you come in?”

“You know that your father has sworn never to receive me. . . .”

“True. I almost forgot that. . . . However, I owe you my thanks, don’t I? . . . Monsieur Béjard has some chivalrous enemies. . . .”

“I beg you, cousin, don’t scoff at me! If you only knew how unjust your sarcasms are! Instead, believe in my unalterable devotion and my profound . . . admiration for you.”

“You talk like the end of a letter,” she answered with a faint air of having taken up her old bantering manner. But it lacked sincerity and good humor. “Very well . . . again, thank you. . . .” And she vanished into the house.

## VII

### SON-IN-LAW AND FATHER-IN-LAW.

FREDDY BÉJARD, the newly elected deputy, gave his political friends the great dinner postponed by the sacking of his house and the effervescence of the masses.

The disturbance had not lasted. The next day the peaceful bourgeois, whom the tumult had kept awake and shaking with fear in their beds, began to make the principal mansions ravaged by the populace the object of their promenades. And since the rich did not hesitate to impute these acts of vandalism to Bergmans, notwithstanding his protestations and energetic disavowals, Freddy Béjard benefited by the indignation of sober-minded and scrupulous citizens.

The newspapers, having been importuned by Dupoissey for weeks, published editorials dealing with "law and order," "the hydra of civil war" and "the specter of anarchy," with the result that many good people of Antwerp, detesting Béjard and foreigners in general, and inclining toward Bergmans, feared that by continuing to support him they were encouraging fresh disorder.

As it was incumbent upon the city to indemnify the victims of the mob, Béjard lost nothing, in

a financial way, and made a profit by overestimating the value of the havoc.

So that it was in a repainted and refurnished mansion, costlier than ever, showing no traces of the runners' visit, that monsieur de député feasted his trusty friends; his colleagues of the Antwerp "bench" in parliament, his equals the rich; Dobouziez, Vanderling, Saint-Fardier senior and the two young Saint-Fardier couples, Van Frans and the other Vans, the Peeters, the Willems, the Janssens, not omitting the indispensable Dupoissy.

The beautiful Madame Béjard presided at the dinner. She was more beautiful than ever. She was loaded with compliments and congratulations, and Dupoissy could not lift his glass without looking gallantly at Madame la représentante.

In truth, however, Madame Béjard was profoundly unhappy.

Her husband, whom she had never loved, she now detested and scorned. For a long time past their household had been a living hell; but her pride made her suffer tortures, and she succeeded in acting so cleverly before the world that she fooled all the gossips.

She knew that her husband was maintaining an English ballet girl, a great, common, vulgar woman who swore like a trooper, smoked cigarettes until they burned her fingers, and drank gin by the bottle.

Virtuous and upright, proud, but possessing a character to which any slovenly actions were repugnant, Gina had been forced to put up with her husband's cynical confidences. The infamy of the private and public life of the people of her world had been revealed to her by this aspirant. And, suddenly, she had seen clearly through this society, so brilliant from the

outside; she understood Bergmans' intransigence, she loved him for it so deeply that she, the proud Gina, espoused the cause of this revolutionary, or, as her husband termed him, this king of the wastrels, in the very depth of her heart.

And during the trouble, when she had met Laurent Paridael, she had been aloof and bantering because it was habitual, because of a certain reserve, because of a last false shame that prevented her from letting him know that she had been converted to the benevolent sentiments which she had so despised and carped at in him.

In reality, at the time of the election she had prayed ardently for Bergmans' success and cursed her husband's good fortune. So much so that the looting of their house on that evening of popular fury had corresponded with her mood of weariness, vexation and failure. But as she was never to be Bergmans' wife she would keep such feelings sealed in the bottom of her heart. She was living only for her son, a baby a year old, who was the image of her, and for her father, the only rich person she still loved and believed in. Those little sirens, Angéle and Cora, continued to waste effort in trying to inculcate in Gina their own special philosophy: to take life as though it was a perpetual pleasure party, never to conjure up dreams or ideals, to attach one's self but moderately so that detachment would be easy, to profit by youth and the smile of opportunity, to close one's eyes to all sadness and pain. They were at the dinner, alluring, in evening gowns, their bodies prepossessing, laughing and rattling like plants vivacious in the conquering breath of summer; bawling, cackling, irritating their neighbors, and from time to time darting a conniving



glance to one side of the table or the others. It was very naïve of their friend Gina to harbor blue devils and black butterflies!

Madame Bédard, suffering from an excruciating headache, presided with irreproachable tact over this dinner that seemed never to come to an end.

What would she have not given to retort to the calumny which, in order to flatter her husband, his friends, led by Dupoissy, were sprinkling upon the reputation of Bergmans!

“—Oh! very funny, very delicate! Did you understand it?”

And Dupoissy hurried to repeat the little scandal in veiled language. If Gina were not enthusiastic over it she must at least approve it with a smile or a nod.

Bédard was trying the fit of his new role. He was talking jargon in imitation of his colleagues, speaking at length of reports, investigations, commissions, budgets.

Dobouziez spoke even less than usual. The knowledge of his daughter's unhappiness had aged him. It was useless for her to pretend that she was happy and contented; he loved her too deeply not to feel intuitively what she was concealing. A year ago he had become a widower; his hair had whitened, his chest did not swell as proudly as it used to, his shoulders bent slightly. One would have thought, to see him, that some of his problems had remained unsolved, or that the algebraist had found their solutions inconsistent.

After dessert, the hostess was asked to sing. Regina still possessed a beautiful voice, supple and powerful as it had been that night at Hémixem, but made richer by the expression, the melancholy and the charm

of maturity that had invested her formerly too serene face. And she did not sing the bounding waltz from *Romeo* tonight, but an ample and passionate melody of Schubert, the *Adieu*.

Sitting alone in a corner, Dobouziez was hanging upon the sound of his daughter's voice, when he felt a hand upon his shoulder. He jumped. And Bédard whispered:

"Let's go into my study for a moment, father-in-law. I have something to say to you. . . ."

The manufacturer, a little disappointed at being thus torn away from one of the few distractions that remained to him, followed his son-in-law, filled with dismay at the strange intonation in his voice.

When they were seated opposite each other in front of his desk, Bédard opened a drawer, rummaged through a set of pigeonholes, and handed a file of papers to Dobouziez.

"Will you kindly take note of these letters?"

He leaned back in his arm-chair, his fingers drumming upon the leather pads, while with his eyes he followed the impression made by the letters reflected in Dobouziez's face.

The manufacturer's face fell; he paled and his lips moved convulsively. Suddenly, he broke off reading.

"Will you please tell me what all this means?" he said, looking at his son-in-law with more distress than anger.

"Simply that I am ruined, that in a month, or perhaps two weeks, I shall be proclaimed a bankrupt. . . . If you do not come to my assistance . . ."

"To your assistance!" And Dobouziez flew into a passion. "You wretch! Have I not already plunged myself in difficulties from which I cannot re-

trieve myself? And at this very minute, isn't the disaster that is striking you carrying me down with you? You must be mad, or very brazen, to look to me again!"

"Nevertheless, you had better get busy, sir. . . . Or perhaps you would rather be known as the father-in-law of an insolvent man? But you haven't finished reading those letters. Please continue. You will see that it merits at least some reflection. . . . Admit that it's not my fault. The failure of Smithson and Co., of New York! Such a well-established bank! Who could have foreseen that? And those copper mines at Sgreveness; the shares have dropped to twenty below par! But it was not I who persuaded you into it! Be fair, and remember your confidence in that little engineer, your brother genius, who offered to let you in on the business! . . ."

"Keep quiet!" interrupted Dobouziez. "For heaven's sake, stop! What about those wild speculations in coffee that swallowed up your wife's dowry in less than four days? I suppose you went into them on my advice, too! And that gamble in the public funds, in which you made use of Dupoissy! Maybe you think that the fellows on the Exchange are stupid enough to suppose for one minute that the hundred or two hundred thousand francs above the market paid by that lamb, who never had any wool of his own, came out of his own pocket! And that boot-licking rascal is very quietly letting go of you. You ought to hear how he talks about you behind your back! You have succeeded in nauseating even that nobody! On the exchange he doesn't hesitate to say out loud what he thinks of your new . . . industry, the emigration agency, which will involve you, in all probability, in trouble with the courts! Shame on you!"

"Sir! . . ." said Bédard, jumping to his feet; "Dupoissy is a blackmailer whom I shall put in jail!"

But without even listening to the interruption, Dobouziez was continuing:

"And you have gone from bad to worse! To stoop to becoming a dealer in human flesh! Really, I am beginning to believe the stories that they tell about you. First dealing in negroes, then in whites; it's quite proper! On my word of honor, I don't know which I should rather have, a slave-dealer or an emigration agent. You haven't even had enough shame to change the name of the "Gina," which now carries off all those poor wretches to Buenos Aires! And your political jobbery! I suppose that I borrowed from your cash-register all the goldpieces and banknotes with which you had yourself elected deputy. . . . I don't have to remind you with how much enthusiasm and sincerity! . . ."

And, terrible, regaining the commanding air and bitter tone of other days, Dobouziez threw all his grievances in his son-in-law's face.

"And as if all this were not enough," he continued; "not content with having stupidly ruined yourself, and having lost with criminal laxity the property of your wife and child, you are making Gina unhappy; you not only sacrifice her to your political ambition, but you have mistresses, too . . . you have to keep actresses . . . with the excuse that it's a man's privilege! And that's not all. The houses of ill-fame in the Riet-Dijk have no customer as frequent and as prodigal as Deputy Bédard! Look here! If I could follow my own inclination, I should take Gina and her child home with me, and I should let you give yourself all



your parliamentary airs before the empty cash-box and exhausted credit. . . .”

“Your daughter! You had better talk about your daughter!” sneered Bédard, pulling and chewing his reddish whiskers with temper. “Do you reckon as nothing Madame’s whims and her unreasonableness? Damn it! I had to resort to speculation and lucrative business to meet her harlot’s luxury. My income as a ship-owner would never have been enough. But that was to be expected, after the splendid education you gave her!”

“Why did you take her away from me, then?” asked Dobouziez. “I was happy and proud to see her well-dressed, radiant, surrounded by things that were expensive, but to her taste. Oh! if I had had to pay only for her clothes and her pleasures, her jewels and little ornaments, monsieur, do you hear me, my funds would not be as low as they are now, since I have had to defray the bills of your political sport, and cover your stupid and extravagant expenses with my signature. You had better not talk to me about what it has cost me; wasters and spenders like you don’t let me off so cheap. They take everything away from me; even my reputation! . . .”

And Dobouziez, exhausted, let himself fall into an armchair.

Bédard had been listening almost all the while, tramping up and down the floor, whistling softly at the most lashing truths.

Upstairs in the drawing rooms, the voice of Madame Bédard, low, rich and melancholy, continued to resound. And her voice stirred the manufacturer to the depths of his heart. For though his probity and his prudence as a business man suffered because he had

been so mistaken in his son-in-law's commercial faculty, Dobouziez was especially bitter with himself for having exposed the honor and the fortune of his daughter to the risks of this marriage.

Dobouziez had hoped for a divorce, but the child had come, and the mother feared that it would be taken away from her. In rehearsing the difficulties of his own situation, the manufacturer had not exaggerated. For a long time the factory had been losing money; it gave employment to but half its former staff. Dobouziez had drained his resources completely ten times to finance Bédard's deals. The suspension of payment of the American house, of which Bédard had received notice, affected him also. How would he meet this new complication? He could get out of the mess himself only by mortgaging the factory and his property.

But could he allow his daughter's husband, the father of his grandson and godson, to be declared a bankrupt?

Bédard waited his answer in silence. He had let him argue and vent his wrath, and now he was reading in the old man's contracted face the conflicting emotions that were struggling for mastery within him. When he thought the time had come to take up the subject once more, he resorted to his cloying tone of a crafty Jew.

"No more of these recriminations, father-in-law," he began. "And even though we throw our wrongs, real or fancied, in each other's faces for hours, what good is it going to do? Let's talk little, but keep to the point. It isn't so desperate, hang it all! It will come through all right if you don't persist in plunging me further and further in the scrape into which I feel

myself sinking. I have figured up on this paper—and you can take it away to verify my figures at your leisure—that my debts and obligations will reach two million francs. Please don't let's have any more electric shocks . . . so that I may be able to explain the situation to you! I have enough money myself to liquidate the first four notes that mature, amounting to about eight hundred thousand francs. That will carry us until the first of next month. . . .”

“And then?”

“And then I shall have to reckon upon you!”

“Do you seriously believe that I am going to find you over a million francs?”

“I couldn't believe it any more seriously.”

The same mortal and tense silence ensued, while Gina, upstairs, continued singing the beautiful classic German songs, accompanying herself at the piano. Dobouziez put his forehead between his hands and crushed it as if he wished to squeeze out his brain, then relaxed suddenly, rose, clenched his fists, and without letting Bédard know in any other way what extreme measures he had resolved upon, he said:

“Let me have two weeks to think it over . . . and don't involve yourself any further between now and then! . . .”

Bédard understood that his father-in-law would save him, and came toward him, his hand outstretched, smothered in sweetish formulas of gratitude.

But Dobouziez drew back, swinging his hands sharply behind his back.

“Useless! . . . If you are really capable of some gratitude, you owe it to Gina and the baby. . . . If it had not been for them! . . .”

He did not finish, but Béjard, not lacking perspicacity, did not persist.

They both went upstairs into the drawing rooms, pretending to carry on a trifling conversation.

Dobouziez started to go home. Gina went with him to the hall, helped him into his coat, and then offered him her forehead. Dobouziez kissed it lingeringly, took her head in his hands, and looked at her with pride and tenderness.

“Would you be happy, darling, to live with me again?”

“How can you even ask that?”

“Very well; if you are very good, and especially if you recover a little of your former gaiety, I shall arrange to come and live with you here. But keep my intentions secret. Goodnight, girl. . . .”



## VIII

### DAELMANS-DEYNZE

AT the end of one of the riverside streets in the Marché-aux-Chevaux, where great cold mansions, the homes of patrician families, are unwilling neighbors to the offices and stores of wholesale merchants, the scene of the continual passage to and fro of a prosperous crowd,—there runs a tawny wall, crumbling to dust beneath the weight of two centuries, but massive enough to do service for many years to come.

Midway along the wall a great carriage entrance leads to a vast courtyard enclosed upon three sides by buildings that date back to the time of Archduke Albert and Isabella, but which, during the intervening centuries, have undergone the rebuilding and restoration made necessary by their modern destiny.

One of the heavy black doors bears a large brass plate, conscientiously polished, upon which one may read in tall letters: J. B. Daelmans-Deynze & Cie. The engraver had wanted to add, "Colonial produce." But why? It had long been established in Antwerp, as surely as two and two are four, that Daelmans-Deynze, the only Daelmans-Deynze, had been in colonial produce, father and son, since the Austrian domination, perhaps even as far back as the glories of the Hansa.

If one passed through the carriage entrance, as dark as a tunnel in the fortifications, and came into the courtyard, one first saw an alert, but stout, old man, ruddy, with thin twisted legs that were buttressed more than was actually necessary, but which were in constant movement. He was Pietje the door-keeper, Pietje *de kromme*—the knock-kneed, as the clerks and journey-men of the firm irreverently called him. But Pietje took no umbrage at the name. As soon as he saw you, he would take off his black cap with the lacquered peak and, if you asked for the head of the firm, he would say, according to the hour of the day . . . “At the back, in the house, if you please, sir;” or, “To the right, in his office, at your service.”

The courtyard, paved with solid bluestone, was generally obstructed by bags, cases, casks, barrels, demi-johns, and leather bottles of all colors and dimensions.

But Pietje, amused by your frank expression of surprise, would tell you that all this was but a minor warehouse, a stock of samples.

“At the Saint-Félix warehouse, or on the docks at the Old Basins, you can see some of the merchandise imported or exported by Daelmans-Deynze!”

Heavy trucks, drawn by the enormous horses of the Nations, their powerful flanks glistening, waited in the street to be loaded or unloaded. Van Liere, the warehouse-keeper, thin and lanky in his jacket, clean-shaven, with the eye of a customs-inspector, a pencil and notebook in hand, was taking notes, adding figures, filling out blanks, seizing way-bills, looking over invoices, occasionally jumping, with the agility of a squirrel, upon a pile of merchandise, the condition of which he was examining, ejaculating questions, reproving his assistants, hurrying the truckmen in a

language as unintelligible as Sanskrit to one uninitiated into the mysteries of colonial produce.

The dockers, huge fellows with the build of antique gods, wearing leather aprons, the muscles of their bare arms twisting like strands of a cable, flushed, hurried, lifted the huge bales with lively cries, and, having balanced the burden upon their shoulders, seemed to be carrying only a load of feathers. The truckman, in blue blouse, brown-ribbed corduroy trousers, his felt hat misshapen and discolored by the rain, was listening respectfully to Van Liere's observations.

"Minus, move a little! Let the gentleman pass," said this potentate with a smile of condescension, seeing your embarrassing situation in the wink of an eye, as you were striding over bags and cases, not knowing how your gymnastics were to end.

One of the giants removed, as if with the back of his callous hand, a tormenting barrel, and with the "Thank-you" of a rescued castaway, you finally pushed a door in the corner made by the street wall and the right-hand building, a door on the glass pane of which was the word "Offices."

But you entered only the waiting-room.

A new swarm of people. Cheer up! The leather-padded door leading to the inner rooms slid silently. Twenty tireless pens were grinding on the thick paper of the account books, or brushing over the tissue on which letters were duplicated; twenty bookkeeper's desks, back to back, extended in a line down the whole length of a room, lit from the court, by six tall windows; twenty clerks perched on as many stools, their sleeves protected by paper cornucopias, their noses buried in work, seemed not to have perceived your

intrusion. You coughed, not daring a direct question.

“Foreign business, sir?” “Correspondence?” “Cashier?” “Corinthian goods?” “Dates?” “Prunes?” “Olive Oil?” the heads of these diverse departments asked you mechanically, without even looking up, until you reached the end of the line.

“No!” you would answer to the least imposing of this staff, a young man with the polite air of a novice, the office boy, clad in trousers too short for his long body, his arms doing a perpetual steeple-chase with the sleeve of his jacket, beating the short-winded goods by the length of a hand, a wrist, or part of a forearm.

“No!” you said, “I would like to speak to Monsieur Daelmans——”

“Daelmans-Deynze,” the terrified young man would answer. “Monsieur Daelmans-Deynze . . . the door right ahead of you. Let me go first, please. He may be busy. Your name, please, sir?”

Finally, the last formality having been complied with, you advanced, skirting the line of desks, and passing in review the twenty clerks, fat and lean, chlorotic or pimpled, pale or ruddy, blond or dark, varying from sixty to eighteen—the age of the distressed young man—but all equally busy, profoundly disdainful of the profane motive that brought you, a simple observer, an artist, an intermittent worker, into this environment of incessant activity, one of the sanctuaries consecrated to Mercury of the winged feet.

And it was hardly worth while for Monsieur Lynen, the old cashier, to raise his bald head and gold spectacles as you went by, or for Monsieur Bietermans, second to him in importance, the correspondent for foreign



languages, to adjust his Japanese eyeglasses on his diplomatically curved nose to ogle you for a second.

But did these supernumeraries count, now that you were admitted to the presence of the supreme head of the firm? He had bid you enter in his sonorous voice. He was there before your eyes, this man, solid as a pillar, a pillar maintaining upon its shoulders one of the oldest houses in Antwerp. He has looked you up and down with blue-grey, clear eyes, without impertinence; in a single glance he gauges his man as quickly as he transacts a bit of business on the Exchange; his eyes contain both compass and plummet; he knows what stuff you are made of, and can tell, with the certainty of a touchstone, if you are pure gold or but gold plate.

A terrible man for uneasy consciences, or for speculators, this Daelmans-Deynze! But a judicious friend, an amiable protector and a reliable support for honest people, and you must be one, for he has tendered his large hand heartily, and grasped yours.

His pen behind his ear, his mouth smiling, his face frank and cordial, he listens to you, punctuating your polite phrases with the kind, "Very well, thank you," of a man who knows that one interests oneself only in what concerns one. His health? You inquire as to his health. Could anyone carry fifty-five years more lightly than he? His hair is correctly cut, and divided by an irreproachable part; it is becoming grey, but has not yet deserted his fine head; later on it will be a white aureole, and lend an added attraction to his sympathetic face. His long, dark whiskers, which he keeps fingering mechanically, are beginning to show a few white hairs, but they are very aristocratic-looking as they are. And his forehead; can the slightest wrinkle

be discovered there? Is not his rosy complexion the healthiest of colors, the complexion of a man without any rancor, with a well-balanced temperament as far removed from consumption as it is from apoplexy? Daelmans-Deynze does not even wear spectacles. A little folding eyeglass is suspended from a cord worn around his neck. But that is but a simple fad. It renders him as little service as the charms that hang from his watch chain. His clothes are sober and fashionable. Very dark suits and very white linen are his sole indulgence in the matter of dress. Tall, large of shoulder, he holds himself as straight as a die, or rather, as we have already said, as a pillar upon which reposes the interests of one of the oldest houses in Antwerp.

Worthy Daelmans-Deynze! In the street, he has to bow at every step. From children on their way to school to factory hands, everyone doffs their hat to him. Even to the old and aristocratic Baron Van der Dorpen, who salutes him, often the first, with a friendly, "Good morning, Monsieur Daelmans." It is because his commercial escutcheon has never borne the slightest stain. If you claim his acquaintance, no door in the great business city, from Tête de Grue to Astruweel, will ever be closed to you.

In a matter that threatens litigation, it is with him that both parties prefer to consult before seeking attorneys. How many times has not his arbitration staved off ruinous lawsuits, or his intervention and guarantee prevented disastrous failures! You ask after his wife? . . . "She is very well, thank heaven! I shall take you in to see her. You will take luncheon with us, won't you? And in the meanwhile we shall have a glass of sherry."

He puts his great hand on your shoulder in sign of possession; you are his man, no matter what you may do. Moreover, it is impossible to refuse so cordial an invitation. He could take you directly from the office to the house through a little secret door, but he has still a few instructions to give to Messrs. Bietermans and Lynen.

"A letter from our London correspondent?" asks Bietermans, rising.

"Oh! from Mordaunt-Hackey. . . . Yes, yes! The sugar business, no doubt! Please write him that we abide by our conditions. Messieurs, I bid you a very good day! . . . Who is going on the Exchange to-day? You, Torfs? Then don't forget to speak to Monsieur Barwoets. . . . Excuse me, my friend. There! Now I am with you! . . ."

What an amiable man is Daelmans-Deynze!

His orders were given in the paternal tone that made his employes fanatic auxiliaries.

One of the causes of his popularity in Antwerp, and that not the least cause, was that the firm employed only Flemish workmen, and especially natives of Antwerp, while the majority of the great houses gave preference to Germans.

The worthy *sinjoor* did not even wish to accept foreigners as volunteers. He did not shirk additional expense in order to give bread and butter to the young men of Antwerp, the *jongens van Antwerpen*, as he said, proud himself to be one of them.

The other merchants found this way of conducting a business very eccentric. The Rhenish banker Fuchskopf shrugged his shoulders, and said to his compatriots residing in Antwerp, "Dot chap Taelmans is making boetry," but the worthy Flamand did good and



let others talk about it, and the Tilbaks spoke lovingly of the patriotism of the millionaire at the *Marché-aux-Chevaux*, and Vincent held this destiny before the eyes of his little Pierket, a good student, "One day you will enter the employment of *Daelmans-Deynze*."

He has led you to the end of the courtyard, and into the house, the ancient facade of which is overrun with ivy almost as old as the house itself. At the left, opposite the offices, are the stables and coach-house. You ascend four steps, and push open the great glass door, canopied by a *marquise*.

"Josephine! Here is a resurrected friend!"

And a hearty clap on the back from the hand of your host brings you into the presence of *Madame Daelmans*.

She has been working at a bit of *crochet*, but gives vent to an exclamation of surprise, and goes into raptures at the happy inspiration to which they owe your visit.

If the husband is charming, and a splendid host, what can be said of his wife? Pre-eminently the *Antwerp* housewife, she is solicitous, neat and diligent.

She is forty years old, this *Madame Daelmans*. Strands of glossy black hair frame a merry face wherein burn two dark, affectionate eyes, and whose lips smile maternally. Her cheeks are plump, and the color of a ripening apple.

The good lady is short, and complains that she is beginning to be too stout. However, laziness is not the cause of her corpulence. She rises at daybreak, and is always on her feet, as active and busy as an ant. She presides, so she says, over all the details of the housekeeping, but what she does not tell is that she puts her hand to all the work. Nothing goes quickly enough



to suit her. She instructs her cook in the art of making *pot-au-feu* repeatedly, and shows the chambermaid how the furniture must be dusted. She runs upstairs and down. She has hardly sat down and put her hand upon the newspaper or the knitting that she has just begun when she begins to worry about the fate of the ragout simmering in the casserole, or the store of pears in the cellar. Lise might have made too big a fire, and Pier would forget to turn the fruit that had begun to spot on one side. But she is never ill-tempered; the good lady is vigilant without being a meddler. She gives largely to the poor of the parish, but does not tolerate the waste of the slightest crumb of bread.

And how beautifully she maintains Daelmans-Deynze's old house! In the great room into which you have been led, you are not struck by new-fangled styles, a flaming new set of furniture, paintings to which the fashionable decorator has just given the last hasty touch. No; it is the substantial and simple room which you imagined in seeing its owners. Their furniture is not the companion of a day, bought in a moment of caprice and to be replaced by another whim. There are solid sofas and massive mahogany arm-chairs in Empire style, upholstered in pistache green velour. The upholstery is renewed from time to time with jealous care, and the time-honored wood is conscientiously polished; they are kept on like the old household servants, and will never be replaced.

The gilding of the mirrors, the picture frames and the chandeliers has long ago lost its native gleam, and the colors of the thick Smyrna carpet have been eaten away by the sunlight, but the old family portraits gain in intimacy and in a patriarchal poetry in their dulled

gold frames, and the fleecy carpet has shed its shrill colors; its striking bouquets have taken the tone of September foliage. For many years past the huge alabaster vases have filled out the four corners of the vast room, the walls have been hung in the same Cordovan leather, the round rosewood table has held the center of the room, the ornamental clock with a vibrating and silvery tone has struck the hours from its position between the ten-branched bronze candelabras. But these old things have an air of distinction about them; they are relics of the penates. And the antimacassars and tidies, examples of Madame Daelmans' diligent crocheting, hang upon the dull velour in the severe and charming folds of altar-cloths.

It was to Daelmans-Deynze that William Dobouziez presented himself on the morrow of Freddy B ejard's political dinner.

The two men, comrades at college, had always highly esteemed each other, and had seen each other frequently for many years; it was the too apparent luxury, the flashy style of living, and especially the bustling, cosmopolitan connections of the manufacturer which had alienated Monsieur Daelmans from a colleague whose solid knowledge, application and probity he had deeply appreciated. At one time, indeed, they had even seriously thought of going into partnership. Daelmans had intended to invest his capital in the factory. But that had been at the time of Dobouziez's greatest prosperity, and he had preferred to continue as sole proprietor of the business. Today he came to humbly propose that the merchant reconsider the proposition.

Daelmans-Deynze had long known that the factory was in jeopardy, he was no less ignorant of the sacri-

fices incurred by Dobouziez in establishing his daughter and helping out Bédard; he could have exhibited a certain astonishment at such a proposition, and disparaged the offer in order to obtain huge concessions; but Daelmans-Deynze behaved with greater discretion and less knavery.

At heart, he had no great desire to embarrass himself with a new business during a time of crisis and stagnation, but he had divined, from the first words of their interview, even from the measures upon which Dobouziez had resolved to take, that Dobouziez was in frightful difficulties, and Daelmans belonged to the ever-diminishing class of business men who come to each other's assistance. One may well admire the tact with which Daelmans discussed the conditions of the purchase. In order to set Dobouziez at his ease he evinced no surprise, nor did he employ that tone of compassion which would have so cruelly hurt the manufacturer; he did not even insinuate that, if he bought the factory, it would be only to oblige a friend in need. Not a recrimination, not a reproach, no air of superiority!

What a good man was Daelmans-Deynze! And his kindheartedness did not prevent him from examining and discussing the business at length. He knew how to combine his interests and his generosity; he was willing to oblige his friend, but upon condition of not running into debt himself. What could be more equitable? It was both strictly businesslike and broadly human. And they were about to finish the deal.

There remained one point which neither of them wished to touch upon, although both had it at heart. But Dobouziez was proud, and Daelmans, delicate. Finally Daelmans resolved to take the bull by the horns.



"And, without being indiscreet, Monsieur Dobouziez, what do you plan to do now?"

Dobouziez hesitated to answer. He did not dare express what he would have wished.

"See here," continued Daelmans, "you will receive my proposition as you understand it, and it is agreed in advance that you will forgive me, if it appears to be unacceptable to you. . . . Well! If the factory is to change proprietors, it would be disastrous for it to lose its director at the same time. Do you understand me? I would even say that such an eventuality would prevent me from buying it. Capital is replaced, money is made, or lost, or," he was about to say "frittered away," but refrained, "is made again. But what it is hard to find, and harder to replace, is a man of talent, intelligence, active, experienced; in short, a business man. . . . That is why I am asking you, Monsieur Dobouziez, whether you would find it inconvenient to remain at the head of a business that you yourself built up, and that you alone can maintain and improve. Do we understand one another?"

Did they understand each other! They could not agree upon more favorable terms. It was precisely the solution that Monsieur Dobouziez was hoping for.

Between men so honest and so upright, the salary of the director was agreed upon with as great facility, subject to the ratification of Saint-Fardier and the minor shareholders; a simple formality. It goes without saying that Daelmans put the director's salary at a respectably high figure. He even wished the director to continue his occupation of the house adjoining the factory. But the solitary father wished to go and live with his daughter.



Ah! nobody could have so completely assuaged the bitterness and the humiliation which this sacrifice cost Dobouziez! Who could have believed the merchant capable of such delicacy and such fine shadings of kindness? Dobouziez was forced to admit it in the bottom of his heart, so armored, proud, and inaccessible to emotions. And, as he was leaving M. Daelmans—his employer—as he was uttering some correct formula of gratitude, he felt as if icicles were suddenly melting in his breast, and thinking better of it, fell into the arms of his friend, his saviour.

“Courage!” said the other, with his habitual simplicity and heartiness.

## IX

### THE STOCK EXCHANGE

ONE o'clock! The usual hour for the opening of the Exchange is rung out by the clock, the last vestige of the former, fire-gutted building, the diligent clock which, when the flames had devoured everything around it, and were pressing it most closely, persisted, like a faithful servant, in dying on the field of duty while giving the official time to the mercantile city.\*

One o'clock! Hasten, laggards! Hurry and dispatch your lunch, take nothing but a mouthful, men of affairs and of money! Other combinations call you, players of dominoes! Finish sipping your coffee and gulping down fine brandy! Put aside the newspaper, concise though it may be, and printed for your benefit! Pay your checks and run, or beware the penalty!

One o'clock! They pour in from all parts of the city. The rich of today, the rich of tomorrow, and the rich of yesterday, struggling against disaster, fighting off ruin, millionaires who, having made hay while the sun shone, have well stored their nests, and other millionaires whose hay has flamed up like a rick of straw!

\* The Antwerp Bourse burned down on the night of August 8, 1858.

Come, run, fly, miserable tools of Fortune! The wheel is turning; catch at a spoke, try and control its movement! Watch them jostle and clamber over each other to grip the fatal wheel, cling to it with the stubbornness of birds of prey, today on top, tomorrow underneath! The wheel turns and turns, and the axle grinds and creaks. . . . And the creaking has a sinister echo! Crash!

Since early in the morning brokers and hangers-on have been coming and going, meeting each other in the street, busy, excited, not stopping, barely exchanging a greeting as dry as the ticking of their watches: *Time is money!* Before evening the best friends do not recognize each other. *To buy or not to buy? That is the question!* drones the sordid Hamlet of commerce. They see the universe only from the point of view of "bid" and "asked." Produce or consume; that is all!

One o'clock! Come, let the pack, avid for flesh, be swallowed up by the four doors of the beautiful palace. With its magnificent arches bearing the emblems, symbols and shields of all lands, beneath its arched iron nerves, this Gothic monument, varied by Moorish and Byzantine memories, half Aryan, half Semitic, presents a compromise well worthy of the temple of the god Commerce, the most furtive and versatile of gods.

The rites have begun. The dull murmur of incantations rises at times to an uproar. Standing up, their hats on their heads as if in a synagogue, the faithful are herding together and chattering. And gradually the atmosphere becomes vitiated. One can hardly see the metals or the coloring of the mural decorations; the massive beams are drowned in a dense,

misty fog of thick smoke! Filthy incense! Heads look as though they were detached from bodies and floating beneath the waves.

At first sight, as one comes upon this assemblage, one thinks of conventicles and witches' sabbaths. Never did a fen of thirsty frogs croak in so swelling a chorus its prayer for rain. But these batracians implore a heavy rain of gold.

Little by little one succeeds in being able to distinguish the various groups of business men and petty traders.

In one corner is the place where the great wholesale merchants habitually congregate on the Exchange. They transact business while affecting to talk of other things, or transfer that responsibility to some assistant, who, from time to time, comes up to the "boss" to receive orders. So does the plenipotentiary consult the potentate. Here, enthroned, the billionaire magis, the high-priests of finance, assert their sovereignty. Themselves are pillars of commerce, as solid as the columns of their temples. Philistine columns, alas, over which even Samson could never prevail. Employes, proprietors, ship-owners, ship-brokers, bankers, strut pompously, their hands in their pockets or clasped behind their backs, talking little, talking of gold,—actually and figuratively. Corpulent plutocrats, formidable augurs, their sibylline predictions depress or extend the credit of subordinate promoters. One word from their lips enriches or ruins. The weather-vane of chance is turned by their breath. Upon their caprices depends the fluctuations of an universal market. Their moons regulate these tides. With their allies of other great cities, they possess the power to deliver over the poor world to famine and war.



Successors to the Fuggers and Salviatis, to the supercilious members of the Hanseatic League whom a richly appavelled convoy of heralds and musicians preceded each day to the Exchange, they traffic in empires and peoples as simply as in rice and coffee; but, should they lend money to kings, less pompous and less artistic than the legendary *Focker*, they would not throw upon a hearth fed with cinnamon-bark, the bond of Cæsar, their great debtor, but their honored guest! In the old days they were patricians; today they are but parvenus.

Bulls and bears consult as an infallible barometer the wrinkles of their foreheads, the expression of their lips, the color of their look. They are vicars of the divinity symbolized by the five-franc note.

Thus, once when a frank talker so far forgot himself as to speak to the Rhenish Jew Fuchskopf about a noble character, a genius insufficiently provided with money, and to implore his aid for an unfortunate whose plight would move any more or less human mortal, the vile usurer, the dealer in souls, the provider of unsold shoes to the butchered soldiers of recent wars, the insatiable shareholder whom coal miners, caught by fire-damp, starved out by strikes, fired upon by the troops, cursed in their agony; the Jew drew from his pocketbook a shining five-franc piece and, instead of consecrating it to an exceptional charity, passed it two or three times beneath the nose of his petitioner, pressed it lovingly between his twisted fingers, moist as cupping glasses, drew it near his lips, as though he were kissing a paten, and, slightly bending his knee, addressed this untranslatable orison to the fetich:

*“Ach lieber Christ  
Wo du nicht bist  
Ist lauter Schweinerei!”*

Then, sneering, he replaced the offering in his purse and enjoyed the discomfiture of the unlucky intercessor, and the approbation of his hangers-on.

The exchange-brokers were loquacious and busy after another manner than that of the high priests of finance and commerce. Spruce and stylish, they whirled and rushed about, wormed and crept into crowds, gathering gold as they hovered. They were the sacred dancers, and their pantomime was a part of the ritual.

With a less dizzy locomotion, clad more soberly and more stiffly, the stock brokers moved about, shuffling sheafs of certificates carelessly rolled in pocket-books or old newspapers, and scrawling their memorandums on the back of an obliging customer.

Clad in lounging suits, merchandise-agents stored a quantity of packages of samples in their pockets. One made a little heap of Cheribon beans in the palm of his hand so that the grocer whom he hoped to catch and overreach could smell them from a distance. Another tried to persuade a customer of the superiority of his tobacco, Kentucky or Maryland, and ended by saddling another timid customer, who only wanted a single hogshead, with the whole crop.

Each specialty, each article had its own location. No one would have suspected the order lurking beneath this apparent confusion; the number of divisions, classifications, subdivisions. Refiners, distillers, importers of oil or rubber, customs-house brokers, insurance brokers occupied, from January first to Decem-

ber thirty-first, the few square feet assigned to them without encroaching upon their neighbors. Anybody familiar with the Exchange could play blind-man's-buff in the middle of this anthill and with no difficulty lay his hands upon any particular man whom he might need.

The subject of the conversations, the business under discussion, varied step by step. Proprietors of ships discussed the clauses of a charter-party with their charterers. Bonders jabbered of schedules and warrants. The air was full of barbarous and exotic phrases; hundred-weights, primage, loans on bottomry. There was talk of special felonies provided against by particular laws. A shipowner was complaining of the barratry committed by his captains. Elsewhere someone was reckoning the total tax on navigation. A shipper was consulting with his supercargo. Nautical assessors were drawing up statements of damages.

His hat in his hand, the dean of a Nation was offering his services to an importer of live beef from Argentina, and to another man who had received a cargo of preserved meat from the same country. A custom-officer was taxing the *baes* of one of the Nations with fraud and irregularity, and they, in turn, were blaming it upon the bonded merchant.

All around the ground floor, beneath the galleries, there were lines of high desks from which the calculators, figures turned men, climbed down only to climb up again, as if struck with vertigo, making themselves hoarse bawling out quotations that the reporters from financial newspapers were hastily taking down in their notebooks.

So many manœuvres to arrive at a single result; money! One man had a taciturn, almost funereal air,



and talked business with compunction; another was treating Mercury lightly, and mixing into his jargon a few shady stories.

Lightermen, owners of *beurts* and barges, their faces brick-red, silver rings in their ears, stood at one side, near the door, and, shifting from one foot to the other, spat, chewed, played tricks on each other, and exhaled a greasy odor as they waited for charterers. English captains quarrelled, raising their voices as if they were ordering a landing, and disagreeably annoying a group of young fops and old beaus snubbed by some speculators who, not far off, were whispering the latest scandal, enumerating the instances of yesterday's good luck, unveiling the secrets of the alcove and the counting house, making up select pleasure parties for the evening, and relieving the arid ritual of commerce with stories of the boudoir and the greenroom.

"With their god-damns, they would make a saint god-damn," declared the wittier of the two young Saint-Fardiens, looking at the flashy sea-wolves, and taking himself off as he said it. His brother left with him, as radiant as if he had been responsible for the joke. They were given time to withdraw some distance; then the circle came together again.

"Their wives are going it a nice pace! I'll bet they make their husbands 'god-damn!' Athanasius has nothing to envy Gaston; they look more alike than ever. And everyone is asking which of the two is the more duped. Have you heard about Cora's last escapade?"

"Our great Frederick Barbarossa?"

"No—the robin has been jilted! The military cap has supplanted the hat!"

"A Belgian military cap. . . ."

"Or almost. . . ."



"That means the civic guard. . . ."

"Eureka!"

"I don't know. . . ."

"The excellent Pascal who knows no Greek. . . ."

"Van Dam, the Greek consul? But he does not belong to the civic guard!"

"Who said anything to the contrary? O Pascal . . . lamb! It's Van Frans."

"And is that all you know?" asked a newcomer, De Zater, the man who was always gloved. "What old news! Here's something really new. Lucretia, the impregnable Lucretia . . ."

"Well, what about her?"

". . . has ended up by imitating her little fool friends. . . ."

"With whom? . . ."

"With her husband's new partner, the *Señor Vera-Pinto*, a Chilian, or Terra-Fuegian, or Patagonian; I don't rightly know which!"

"What! The imposter with whom Freddy Béjard is undertaking the transportation of emigrants to Argentina, and who proposed the cartridge transaction to him! Messieurs, doesn't this coincidence open up new horizons to you, as they say at the Palace?"

"You don't maintain that the husband is in connivance with his wife, do you? They detest each other too much for that!"

"Humph! Self-interest would bring them together. . . ."

"And their downfall is thus doubly warded off. For I suppose you know that Papa Dobouziez is selling his share of the factory, and even his house. . . . Hey, Tolmech, what's the quotation on metals?"

"What are you trumpeting there? Old Dobouziez,

that rigid knave, that get yourself out as best you can; sacrifice himself for some one else! For Bédard!"

"So! Perhaps you've all just come from the moon, eh? There has been nothing else talked of but this liquidation since early this morning, in the offices, on the street-cars, at the harbor. . . ."

"Daelmans-Deynze is to become the proprietor of the factory. Old Saint-Fardier is also quitting the manufacture of candles. He is dropping the father-in-law in order to become the son-in-law's silent partner. Saint-Fardier is to replace Dupoissy, who lacks 'punch,' in the office of enlistment for America, and he will take charge of the internal arrangements of the ships. There are thousands and thousands of francs waiting to be earned. They've announced the next departure of the *Gina* with five hundred heads."

"Instead of ebony, Bédard is setting out to sell ivory," concluded De Zater archly.

"By the way, De Maes, I'll take up those consols of yours, whenever they're due. . . ."

"Dobouziez consented to remain as manager at the salary of a cabinet minister, so the cashier at the factory told me. . . ."

"Two words, Monsieur De Zater, about the oils. Shall I buy, or sell?"

"Sell! You are pretty green, Tobiel! Telegraph without delay to Marseilles, and take on all you can get hold of. . . ."

"And that deal in coffee; I'm sending two hundred bales to Brand Brothers, of Hamburg, on the *Feldmarschall*, and at the same time, I've told my broker to buy leathers with the proceeds. . . ."

"Gentlemen, I have the honor . . . De Zater, I'm at

your service. . . . You were talking about the great self-denial of Dobouziez?"

"No, that's too much for me! . . . One isn't honest to that point."

"Honest!" sneered Brullekens, the maniac who had his small change cleaned every morning; "you would use another word, eh, Fuchskopf?"

"That Taelmans-Teynze, vot a queer chap he iss! An artist! *Dummes Zeug! Lauter Schweinerei!* Yes, you're lying!"

"Always explicit, these Teutons! . . . But, De Zater, to come back to Lucretia and her admirer . . ."

"What is that cartridge transaction?"

"Some highway robbery at the least!"

"Not bad, that!"

"Well, this is what it is: Bédard, the unique Bédard, himself and always himself, has just bought from the last Chilian dictator, and through the agency of and in partnership with Señor Vera-Pinto, a balance of fifty million cartridges, withdrawn from use as a consequence of the reforms of their armament. It appears that the worthy pair of friends acquired these refuse munitions for a song. . . . But our clever Bédard counts on selling separately the powder, fulminate, lead and copper that he will get out of those cartridges, and realizing on the deal the neat profit of over five hundred per cent."

"A stroke of genius!" decided all these players of neat strokes, with as much admiration as envy; they were constantly on the scent of an opportunity to make fortunes over night, but never had such a simple means occurred to them. Decidedly, Bédard might be a scoundrel, but he was confoundedly clever, and could teach them all a thing or two!

"Nevertheless, these difficulties remain," continued Brullekens. "To bring that colossal lot of cartridges here isn't all. It is necessary to declare them at the customs-house, and then obtain the city's consent to unload such a formidable cargo, amounting to between two hundred and two hundred and fifty kilos of powder; that is to say, enough to explode the whole of Antwerp and its forts. The Regency will hesitate all the more in such a litigious affair since Bergmans, the vigilant agitator, B ejard's bitterest enemy, having got wind of his intrigue, has not stopped intimidating the Magistrate, and threatens B ejard and his marvellous enterprise with the terrors of the anger of the harbor dockers, who have not yet forgotten the affair of the elevators. As unpopular as he is, B ejard has offset Bergmans' fiery assaults by reminding the riverside population, who are usually in want, of the easy and lucrative work that his industry will procure them.

"He has promised the city administration to extract a thousand kilos of powder from the cartridges every day, so that the business will be finished at the end of nine months. Moreover, he has bound himself to furnish all guarantees, and to conform to whatever precautionary measures the authorities impose. And you'll see—at heart I hope so, for the deal is too sublime—that that devil of a fellow will overcome all the obstacles raised up against him, and he will again make a fool of the city, the province, the government, Bergmans' thunderbolts, and even the *vox populi!*"

A movement evidencing itself from group to group near the west entry of the Exchange, near the corner in which were located the stock brokers and speculators, put an end to this edifying conversation. The loud outbursts of a bitter argument outvoiced the usual



psalmody. The tumult and pushing became so great that the wealthy Verbist, supreme admiral of a fleet of twenty merchant vessels, deigned to inquire of his broker the cause of the commotion.

“What is it all about, Claessens?”

“A shark whom they’re calling for his margins, sir. They say he’s a pretty hard case!”

Verbist, his face puffed and bloated, wan as a drop-sical star, smiled lugubriously, shrugged his shoulders in a singular way, and, as a spectator who was accustomed to this species of execution, and who no longer bothered about the bankrupts among his colleagues, did not ask the name of the hapless speculator, but continued to pick his teeth with the greatest possible comfort.

It was, however, the gentle, suave, unique Dupoissy who was being so sharply taken to task. Chance had willed it that he was to completely wreck himself on the very day that Bédard, his master and employer, was victoriously doubling the cape of ruin.

His intimacy with Bédard had given him faith in his own star. And the satellite had believed himself a planet. He had taken himself for an eagle, merely because he was volatile, had wished to fly with his own wings. On the day that rumors of Bédard’s imminent discomfiture began to circulate, Dupoissy had dropped him with the ease of a lackey. Moreover, Bédard, having been apprised of the slimy creature’s treason, did nothing to retain him.

During Bédard’s prosperity, Dupoissy had obtained large commissions, and he, who had never before had a penny to his name, either in his own country or elsewhere, found himself in possession of a quite considerable capital. Instead of establishing himself, for in-

stance, in the woollen or drapery business, in which he claimed his competency was unrivalled, he risked all he possessed in aleatory and long-winded ventures. While Bédard stood over him, the gambler profited by his advice and quit the game, if not without profit, at least without serious losses. But, abandoned to his own initiative, he allowed himself to be thoroughly trimmed. Things came to such a pass that he neglected the most elementary precautions; he hardly even asked the state of the market. Persuaded of his own genius, he speculated indiscriminately in foreign exchange, in metals, in public funds and industrial stocks. For a while he had been able to discount his notes and to continue his short sales; then, one after another, the bankers had refused him credit, and, with the exception of a few pigeons who were taken in by his sweet and oily manner, his hypocritical talk, his air of respectability, and who, taking his jeremiads for truth, thought him a victim of Bédard, he had no one to guarantee his signature but a few freebooters as badly rated as himself.

The forbearance by which he had formerly benefited was now costing him dear.

It happened that the day was one of huge liquidation on the Exchange. The speculator, at the end of his resources, had spent the morning in running from office to office, without finding anyone who would lend him a penny. That did not at all deter him from showing himself on the Exchange, exactly as usual, shining, curly, mild, greeting everyone hypocritically and pretending not to notice the rebuffs and affronts that he met with. Spying one of his partners whom he had properly fleeced, he greeted him with his most captivating smile, and began to converse with him, in a

sweetish voice and with enveloping gestures, about a superlatively splendid (he liked those words) deal that was to make them both rich.

This time he was unlucky.

"I wouldn't ask anything better than to go in on a new deal with you," the man answered; "but first, if you don't mind, we'll settle the little matter of the French bonds. You know what I mean. For three months you have put off paying up that little *bagatelle!*"

Dupoissy was still smiling as he replied:

"Why, of course! Willingly, my dear fellow! . . . I was just about to ask you to stop in and see me this evening. . . . I only spoke to you about the new deal because it is closely connected with the one we have just finished;—so closely that we could very easily combine them, I tell you. . . ."

"Excuse me," interrupted the other; "all that isn't necessary. I've had enough of your continual combinations. Before I go in with you on any more deals, I'd like to see the color of your money. . . ."

"Monsieur Vlarding!" exclaimed Dupoissy, giving himself the air of an irreproachable man whose sentiments have been outraged.

"Tut, tut! Don't 'Monsieur Vlarding' me! All that has nothing to do with the matter in hand. You are going to pay me two thousand francs right now, in exchange for this receipt!"

"But, my dear old friend, what a way to act, after all these years of mutual confidence!"

"A truce to your protestations. I have but one word to say to you: *pagare, pagare!*"

"And I repeat to you that I haven't so much money about me!" muttered Dupoissy in an undertone, squeez-



ing his companion's arm. "For heaven's sake, calm down . . . we are being overheard!"

A circle of people was, in fact, beginning to form around them. To the usual idle onlooking was added a malignant curiosity, the expectation of a scuffle.

And the more Dupoissy tried to wheedle Vlarding, the more did Vlarding yell:

"For the last time, Monsieur Dupoissy, are you ready to pay me the two thousand francs you owe me?"

"When I have them!" let fly Dupoissy, decidedly at his wits' end.

Vlarding jumped like a burned dog.

"What are you saying?" he cried in the face of the insolvent debtor.

Other dupes now joined the chorus with Vlarding. Each one was claiming his debt.

"Will pay! Won't pay," chanted the crowd hilariously, stamping with fierce joy.

"Messieurs, my good sirs, let me go, I beg you! I'm a French citizen, and I shall call my country's consul. It's an indignity . . ."

"Have you finished?" jeered the young Saint-Fardiens. "Shame upon the deserter! Shame upon the man of Sedan! Shut your trap! To the door with him!"

But the creditors were getting angry and threatening him with their fists, canes and umbrellas. Vlarding has just knocked his hat off.

"No! No! No violence!" the majority of the onlookers interposed hypocritically. "Let the pleasure last!"

Trembling with fear, haggard, livid, perspiration and melting pommade rolling down his forehead and ears, the big man did not budge. But, not having the



luck of a polecat, his odor did not keep his enemies at a distance! How should he escape from their combined efforts? The signal had been given. They would not hit him; they confined themselves to jostling him. The game had rules consecrated by many earlier precedents. More than one dishonest speculator had been served in the same way. Their hands plunged in their pockets, the tyrants used only their elbows, knees and backs. Just so do the waves roll and cast about a castaway, tormenting him everywhere, and pitch him from one to the other, doing him the least possible injury.

Dupoissy was indeed a shipwrecked man!

He was whirled from right to left, pitched for a moment or two in one direction, then tacked about fantastically. Hardly had one crowd of his torturers flung him forth than another shoved him back. Again, he stood motionless, torn between two currents of equal force, almost reduced to pulp, three-quarters exhausted. Those who were nearest him took the risk of sharing his fate.

"Stop! Not so hard!" they cried to their comrades.

A carnivorous joy fed upon his distress. A single cruel emotion possessed these hundreds of brokers venting themselves upon an unskillful gambler, as if they were college boys hazing a butt. And, as is usually the case, those most in debt and most suspected were the leaders of the orgy.

Gouty millionaires were represented by their brokers or heirs.

The policemen watched discreetly. As long as the victim's skin was uninjured, and they limited the sport to jostling him, the policemen had no authority to in-

terfere. Tradition allowed the assembled business men to punish a defaulting speculator in this fashion.

Between the arcades of the first floor, leaning upon the balustrades of the balcony, hanging over this veritable arena, the little messenger boys were making merry, not without evincing some astonishment at the sight of bearded and usually well-regulated personages playing pranks like rogues of their own age. And they were racked by a desire to go down into the crowd and participate in the savory sport. But, notwithstanding the fact that the placid policemen would not have granted them the immunity accorded to the brokers, a feeling of terror and pity found its way into the hearts of the boys; they still looked on, wide-eyed, but they had stopped laughing.

The rough boatmen, so prone to buffet each other, were petrified with amazement at the "fashionable gentlemen's" unchained fury, and forgot to puff at their short pipes or even to chew their quids.

None of Dupoissy's former friends, none of the hosts who had in other days entertained him at their tables, ran to his rescue. The more tender-hearted among them, seeing what a critical turn the altercation between Dupoissy and his creditors had taken, had prudently stolen away, either for fear of being mixed up in the scandal, or to spare themselves the sight of so painful a scene.

During a raging storm a fishing smack tries to thread its way through the narrow mouth of the harbor. The skiff vainly strives to make its way, but each time the helm bears it into the drift or threatens to break it against the sea-wall. The human hurricane ensnared the pitiable Sedanese in just such a fashion, and drew

him near one of the doors of safety only to send him reeling inside, and in so doing shattered him almost to pieces against the columns.

When, after many vicissitudes and a prolonged agony, a strong propulsion sent him flying for a twentieth time toward the entrance, a late-comer pushed open the padded door.

"Hold the door open, Bédard!" roared Saint-Fardier, senior, who had enjoyed the game as much as an Oxford lad enjoys a football match, as he mopped his face.

Expensively clad, buttoned into an overcoat of irreproachable cut, a flower in his buttonhole, haughtier, more poised and more the leader than ever, Bédard realized the situation, and, having nothing more in common with his former creature, wishing above all to show that he had utterly repudiated him, he ceremoniously did as he had been told.

Drawing himself close up to the wall, he flung the door wide to let the victim pass. His face shone with a satanic joy. Truly, he was a pretty sight, this mean coward!

On his part, Dupoissy recognized his former associate. To be mauled about before him was the last straw, the supreme opprobrium. Frankly, he did not merit this excess of ignominy. He concentrated all that he had left of energy, fire and vital force in one look of cruel malice, a mute imprecation. A toad, crushed by a clodhopper's boot, must dart forth such a look as he gave. Bédard never flinched beneath his fluid vindictiveness. On the contrary, nothing could have flattered him more. Just as a final push was speeding Dupoissy's flight, and he swept past Deputy Bédard with the speed of a projectile, the latter made

the profound bow of a notary who receives an important visitor.

Dupoissy rolled like a torn package into the middle of the street, between the two sidewalks. Béjard saw him pick himself up, dust himself, and take himself off, like a slug, keeping close to the walls of the houses.

Then, slowly and accurately, without paying any further attention to the derelict, the great man released the swinging door, and entered the temple where he was being awaited by the felicitations and the homage of a mob ready to treat him as they had treated Dupoissy on the day that Fortune should cease to so patiently choose him as her favorite.



PART III  
LAURENT PARIDAEI



## I

### THE PATRIMONY

LAURENT had just attained his majority, and the manager of the factory had written him a strictly polite letter asking him to call in at the office. Laurent found his guardian just as he had left him four years before, at least in respect to his manner, his bearing and his greeting. His smooth, impassive face was slightly wrinkled, his hair had become white, and he held his commanding head a little less high. On the desk, which the unlucky *Swiss Family Robinson* had disgraced years before, were placed a sheaf of bank-notes and a sheet of paper covered with figures aligned in columns.

The manufacturer, always the man of business, hardly replied to the "Good morning, cousin!" which Laurent was trying to make as respectful and affectionate as possible.

"Kindly take notice of this sheet of paper and verify the exactitude of the figures. It sets forth my account of my stewardship; on the one hand your income; on the other, the expenses of your maintenance and education. You will concede that I have abstained, as far as possible, from making any inroads upon your little capital. When you have examined it, if you are

satisfied, I beg that you will sign here. . . . You may have a duplicate of it. . . .”

Laurent made a movement to seize the pen and sign immediately.

Monsieur Dobouziez caught his arm, and said, in his even voice: “None of that! . . . You’ll only displease me. . . . Look it through, first.”

Since he felt that way about it, Laurent sat down at the desk and pretended to attentively look over the account of transactions. While waiting, his guardian turned his back upon him and looked out the window, strumming upon the pane.

Laurent did not dare make too short work of his sham verification. He waited five minutes, then risked attracting his relative’s attention.

“It is absolutely perfect, cousin!”

And he hastened to affix his best signature to this paper, drawn up so distinctly and with such minute detail.

Dobouziez came back to the desk, blotted the receipted sheet, and locked it in a drawer.

“Good! There is due you thirty two thousand, eight hundred francs. Kindly see whether this is the correct amount.”

Vexed and chagrined, Laurent started to pocket the bills and the gold pell-mell.

“Count it, first,” said Dobouziez, stopping him.

The young man again obeyed, even counted out loud; then, choking, before he came to the end of his reckoning, he pushed away the neatly piled bills and cash with an abrupt gesture.

“What’s the matter? Is there an error?”

The ferociously honest man!

Laurent would have liked to say to him: “Keep this



money, guardian. . . . Place it yourself. I don't need it, and will only spend it; it will get away from me because I am not used to it. While you are the man to manage and make use of it as it should be done. . . ."

But he was afraid that the proud Dobouziez, accustomed to playing with millions, would accept such an offer of his laughable capital, the legacy of the late Paridael, that poor clerk, as an insulting familiarity.

And yet with what good will Paridael, junior, would have lent, or even given, the savings of the defunct clerk to this employer of yesterday, himself become, in his turn, a clerk.

"Come, hurry up!" repeated Dobouziez in an icy tone, after having consulted his watch.

Laurent was compelled to take his money. He still delayed going to the door: "At least, cousin, allow me to thank you and to ask you . . ." he mumbled, pushing his conciliation to the point of repenting his involuntary wrongs and reproaching himself for the antipathy he had inspired, in spite of himself, in the sage.

"All right! All right!"

And the imperturbable gesture and expression of Dobouziez continued to repeat: "I have done my duty, and I don't need anyone's gratitude!"

The transaction had been exact. The inheritance had been administered in an irreproachable manner. The result had been foreseen. Everything was foreseen!

But the rational Dobouziez did not expect the anomalous way in which the orphan was soon to testify his gratitude! He forgot, this perfect calculator, that certain problems are capable of many solutions,

Otherwise he would perhaps have called back the young man whom he was dismissing so categorically, and would have said to him: "So be it, unfortunate child! Leave me your little hoard, and above all never consider yourself the debtor of Gina and her father, the fated avenger of my daughter. . . ."

Neither did Laurent suspect, at that moment, what was going to happen, but, nevertheless, he felt a dumb and thick distress rising in his heart. Before coming to the factory, he had rejoiced in the idea of becoming his own master, of possessing a real capital, almost a fortune! . . . And now that he held these bank-notes and this gold, they were burning his pocket and disturbing him as if they did not belong to him. Really, a thief could be no more anxious than this gentleman of independent means.

He had been confident and cheerful after a different fashion the last time he had parted company with his guardian. What illusions and what hopes had he not cherished, then! With the hundred francs that he drew every month he had thought himself the richest of mortals, and now that his fortune was figured in thousands of francs, he had never been at such an utter loss to know what to do with himself, so undecided, nor had his mind ever been so agitated.

Arrived in the street, the Ditch seemed to him to be exhaling a prophetic miasma: the Ditch itself was turning against him! Paridael scented occult menaces in these emanations, but without being able to decipher their vague presage. While waiting, his ill-humor rebounded upon the manufacturer.

"What an iceberg!" he murmured, feeling a shock in every affectionate fibre. "He received me as if I were the vilest of criminals. At the end, if I had not

contained myself, I should have thrown the dirty money in his face . . . the dirty money!"

And feeling very lonely, very much abandoned, afraid of himself and dreading his first tête-à-tête with his heavy fortune, the idea came to him to visit the Tilbaks, so that he might dispel his black thoughts.

The other time, too, he had gone to them immediately after leaving the factory. Immediately regaining his self-possession, his serenity half recovered, he hurried along. As he walked he conjured up the vivifying and salubrious environment in which he was going to gain renewed vigor.

For some time past he had been neglecting his good friends. Honorable scruples were the cause of this apparent indifference. Henriette was no longer the same toward him; not that her affection for him had grown less,—quite to the contrary—but there was something febrile and constrained in her manner that made him think, without being in the least fatuous, that he was the object of a more vibrant feeling than mere fraternal friendship. But, incapable of forgetting the superb Gina, Laurent feared to nourish this passion, for which he could see no hope, for he would have killed himself rather than abuse the confidence which Siska and Vincent placed in him.

But today, as he wended his way toward The Coconut and his spirit succumbed to a gracious reaction, the image of Henriette appeared sweeter and more touching than ever, and, at this evocation, he experienced, or at least encouraged himself to experience, an inclination toward her less quiet and less platonic than in the past. Why had he wandered for so long? He held happiness in his hand. He could inaugurate his new life and break with his old associations in no



better way than by marrying the upright and wholesome daughter of the Tilbaks.

The state of mind into which his interview with Dobouziez had plunged him contributed to accelerate this resolution. Nothing seemed to him more reasonable and more realizable. Her parents' consent he had in advance. They would publish the banns immediately.

Caressing these matrimonial perspectives, he came to The Cocanut, and, crossing the shop, entered directly, like a familiar friend, into the room at the back. He found all the members of the family together, but was struck by their melancholy expressions. Before he had time to ask for an explanation, Vincent drew him into the front room, and after a fit of nervous coughing, said in a throaty voice:

"It's decided, Monsieur Lorki! We are going to emigrate; we are leaving for Buenos Aires."

Laurent thought he would drop.

"But, my good Vincent, you're losing your wits!"

"Not a bit of it! It's a very serious matter. I took passage this morning at Monsieur Béjard's, on the quai Sainte-Aldegonde. We're going to sail. For months the idea has been running around in my head. There is nothing left for us to attempt here. The shop doesn't pay any longer. Bread is rare with us now!

"The business has been spoiled. What with the runners who seize upon the sailors at the mouth of the Scheldt and drag him, drunk and besotted, to their dark cellars where they skin him and fleece him to the marrow, the little shopkeeper has to give up the struggle. . . . Unless he wants to consort with them, use their methods and fight with them over the prey with



fists and knives! I'd as lief join a band of downright thieves!

"And then, too, the invention of steam lighters has forced me to sell my boat for kindling wood. And, to finish the matter, here are our sons who can no longer find positions. The heads of the big firms here engage only Germans. The best disposed toward their poor fellow-citizens, for example, Daelmans-Deynze and Bergmans, are besieged with demands and have already taken on more than twice as many employees as they need! As a special favor they have been willing to take on our Felix. And they are talking of sending him to their Hamburg branch. We should have to wait until a place became vacant for Pierket. But between now and then we have plenty of time to starve. . . . You can see that it's the end. Antwerp doesn't want us any more. So we have made up our minds to leave—all of us! And, if we must die, at least we shall have struggled valiantly until the last effort to live! . . ."

And Vincent forced back, with a frightful oath, the emotion that was strangling him.

"No, no!" cried Laurent, clapping him on the back to comfort him. "You shall not go, my brave old Vincent! And I doubly bless the inspiration that brought me here! Since this morning I have become rich, my dear man! I have more than enough to help you and yours. I have more than thirty thousand francs at your command, dear friend. You never suspected me of it, I suppose. Very well, then! Come, come, cease your lamenting. . . . But before going back to Siska and the children, let me complete the project. The money which it would be repugnant to you to accept at the hands of a friend, you will be forced to take

from a son, yes, from a son—has not Siska always considered me as her eldest?—or, if it pleases you better, from a son-in-law. . . . Vincent, give me the hand of your daughter Henriette!”

Tilbak put his hands upon Laurent’s shoulders and looked deeply into his eyes:

“Thank you, Monsieur Laurent! Your generous offer touches us no less profoundly than your request, but we cannot grant it. . . . For a long time past my wife has read our daughter’s heart and struggled against the unreasonable feeling that is concealed there. To hide nothing from you, that love is itself one of the reasons for our departure. All of us, here, need a change of air. . . .

“I tell you, also, Monsieur Laurent, that this marriage is impossible. Even were I to consent to it, my wife would oppose it with all her strength. You don’t yet know our Siska! Her ideas of duty are perhaps very singular, but very fixed. When once she has said that this is white and that is black, you can preach to her in vain, you cannot make her retract it. . . . Do you know that she would think she were lacking in respect for the memory of your dear parents if she ever were to consent to an alliance between her family and yours? You are young, Monsieur Laurent, you have a nice little capital, you have had a good education, rich relatives may leave you their fortunes . . . and you will make a match worthy of that fortune, of your education and your name; a match in accordance with the hopes that your poor, dear, dead parents cherished for your future. Can you not see that your wealthy family would reproach Siska for having harnessed you to her daughter, would consider her an intriguer, a wretched intruder? . . .”

"Vincent!" cried Laurent, putting his hand over Vincent's mouth. "Be sensible, Vincent. I disregard my good family entirely! It would be very foolish of me to refrain for the sake of the few remaining. You will finish by making me hate them in talking to me this way! It's a pity you were not present to see the welcome I received from that Dobouziez! Old age and disappointments have made him colder and fishier than ever! I am no longer one of them! I wonder whether I ever was! I owe them nothing. Our last links have been broken. And it is to those relatives who deny me, that you would have me sacrifice my affections? Come, come! Your refusal isn't serious. . . . Siska will be more sensible than you."

"Useless, Monsieur Laurent! If my wife had foreseen this love affair, she would never have allowed you here! Spare her the pain of having to emphasize my refusal. . . ."

"So be it!" said Laurent. "But if my visits are a nuisance to you, if a false honor,—yes, I say it advisedly, and so much the worse for you if you take it amiss—prevents your accepting me as a son-in-law,—I who had hoped to make your Henriette so happy—at least nothing can prevent you from accepting me as a creditor, and then it will be unnecessary to emigrate!"

"Thank you again, Monsieur Laurent, but we do not need it. To make all plain to you, Jean Vingerhout, the *baes* of the America, and your friend, is coming with us. He has realized his last cent and is going to try his luck in a new America. . . ."

"Ah! I see it clearly, now! You are going to give Henriette to him! . . ."

"Well, yes! . . . Jean is a good chap in our sphere whom you appreciated from the first. And I must ask



you a favor, Monsieur Laurent. Our friend has never for a moment suspected Henriette's love for you. . . . Please let him always remain ignorant of her extravagant whim!"

"That is too much!" Laurent interrupted. "Do I have to enter your plans to the extent of making your daughter hate me?"

And within, he was saying to himself: "Too poor for Gina; too rich for Henriette!" Then, giving free rein to his bitterness:

"Really, my dear Tilbak, you are all the same here in Antwerp! You reduce everything to a question of greasy pennies. My worthy cousin Dobouziez would unreservedly approve of you. The ties of the heart and emotions have no weight. Everything is wiped out by business considerations. Gold alone joins and sunders. You all have money-tills instead of hearts. There! Even you, the Tilbaks, whom I have always considered as my own, are no better than the rest! And I am destined to live always alone and misunderstood. . . . Eternally declassed, a creature of exception, I shall never anywhere find my equals, people of the same temperament as myself! . . ."

And, in the clutches of a nervous crisis that had been smouldering since that morning, his body shaking from these reiterated emotions, he threw himself into a chair and burst into tears like a child.

Siska, however, having been attracted by the sound of their voices, had half opened the door and heard the end of the conversation. She came to the young fellow and tried to calm him with her motherly words.

"You naughty child! What a way to talk about us! Listen to me, my dear Laurent, and don't be angry. We'll talk this all over again before our departure, but



not today. You are too excited. Who knows? Perhaps I can open your eyes to your own feelings!"

A bit intimidated by the solemn tone in which the good woman had said these few words, Laurent restrained himself, and after a desultory conversation, went into the back room and took leave of the family.

A few days later Paridael came back to the Tilbaks'. Siska was valiantly busying herself with the preparations for their departure. Laurent having asked her for the promised explanation, she interrupted her work, and piercing him with an inquisitorial look:

"What I have to say to you, Laurent," she said, "is simply that you have never loved Henriette."

Laurent tried to protest, but while the clear, steady eyes of the worthy woman continued to look into his he would only blush and hang his head.

"And that because you are in love with another!" pursued Siska. "I can even tell you who she is: your cousin Gina, become Madame Béjard. You need not deny it! Did you think you could hide that secret from me? Your troubled air when anyone talked of Madame Béjard; your own affectation never to talk of her, would have revealed it to diviners less adroit than myself. Yes, even Henriette knew in which direction your real love was tending. Surely, you are fond of our daughter. Under the impulse of your generous feelings you are even ready to marry her. But, at bottom, you would have continued to prefer the other one. The memory of her would have come between Henriette and yourself. And neither you nor your wife would have met with the happiness you both deserve. As soon as my child suspected your passion for Madame Béjard, I succeeded in completely opening her eyes, and cured her of her love for you. . . . Ah! it

was necessary! I should lie were I to say the cure was easy. . . . Laurent, if you swear to me that you really love Henriette, and that she is the chosen of your flesh and of your spirit, I am still ready to give her to you! In doing otherwise, I should be twice a bad mother. . . .”

For his sole response, the boy threw his arms about his clairvoyant friend and confessed to her at length his contradictory desires and griefs.

## II

### THE EMIGRANTS

BÉJARD, Saint-Fardier and Vera-Pinto had well chosen the moment to begin their traffic in white flesh, or, as De Zater called it, ivory. Much money was to be made in this filthy commerce. In their narrow offices a continual procession was constantly marching by. Saint-Fardier was in command, and made the hordes and tribes of poor devils run the gauntlet. It was he who sent out recruiters to beat the woods and drain the land.

Originating in Ireland, emigration swept over Russia, Germany, and then the north of France. Thousands of foreigners had already expatriated themselves before the Belgians were inoculated with the fever. The contagion first spread among the laborers of the Borinage and the district about Charleroi, coal-miners whose merciless subterranean slavery was unrelieved by death, fallen cyclops, torn between the intolerance of labor-leaders and the harshness of the capitalists, worn out by strikes and enforced idleness, and, when spared by the fire-damp, dispatched by a soldier's bullet.

And, after having depopulated the Walloon, the fever of expatriation consumed Flanders. Weavers of Ghent, their lungs clogged by the fine flues of thread,

packed off to America as, centuries before, their ancestors had gone to England.

Finally, the impulse spread to the district about Antwerp.

For a long time past the dockers, working on the very banks of the river from which heavy cargoes of exiles, penned up like sheep, were constantly departing, resisted the general enthusiasm. Suspicious and skeptical, they had no desire to fatten with their carcasses the land of the celebrated guano, after having given up their last farthing to the emigration agents, whom they saw swelling and prospering all around them, leeches fattening upon the blood of fools.

Previously, the departure of a peasant or of a laborer would have stupefied the whole quarter or the whole parish. Such a thing would have been considered an act of desperation, an apostasy, the deed of an unnatural being. The only people capable of such an act were occasional unskilled laborers, farm-hands who had been dismissed everywhere, riff-raff who, no longer knowing to which *baes* to hire out, ended, under the influence of a last debauch, by selling themselves to the crimp who enlisted volunteers for the Dutch army in the East Indies.

But now expatriation began to enter into the customs of respectable people. By the hundreds, urban and rural folk, from the banks of the Scheldt, from the waste dunes of the Campine, navvies from the Polder, brush-trussers of Bruyère, fled the land as if pursued by the surge of an occult inundation.

A restlessness beneath the ancestral roof, a distrust of the good will of the native land, a nomadic impatience, an instinctive need for change penetrated and consumed the most distant and lonely localities.



The same pioneers who never, never would have changed their labor, no matter how fruitless and painful, for a lucrative position in the city, suffered overnight the vertigo of exodus and exiled themselves in masses.

How many, however, of these inveterate dwellers on the land, their bodies bent almost double over the bare earth, more obdurate at home than anywhere else, undergoing with fanatical voluptuousness the crafty effects of atmosphere and climate, their plump hovels sticking to plowed fields as tawny as their breeches, had formerly suffered from a sharp nostalgia when conscription had brutally transplanted them into the tumultuous and turbulent city, deprived them of their laborer's garb to harness them in military livery, detained them in putrid barracks far from their balsamic native fields, or spewed them forth, on certain days, confused and dreary, into the snare-ridden street? What desolation; what desires for the wretched homeland! How many hours there were in which to ruminate trifling memories!

Ah! the stealthy homecoming of the soldier; the minutes exactly calculated, the road travelled at a fugitive's pace!

The day-long furlough, the short respite employed to pass one hour, but one brief hour, at the natal hearth; the unexpected apparitions conjured up on the hasty trip, breathless and panting like a hunted tramp; only time enough to go and come, to put foot upon the delicious home fields, to embrace the old folk and the loved one, to again breathe the odor of the land in the emollient humidity of twilight!

And now these same hardened rustics, seeing themselves confronted by a sinister dilemma, filled with

a poignant and sullen resolution, consented to cut themselves off forever from their native land.

For a long time their faithful hearts had resisted. As long as they had succeeded in being able to divide among them a crust of black bread and a porringer full of potatoes they had been inflexible, stinting themselves, as strong in their attachment to the land as Christians are in the faith; but when the day came when the women and even the children had nothing to eat, their heroism had given away, and one morning they had resolved upon exile as if they were resigning themselves to suicide.

It is all over. The household leaves the ancestral farm; its head gives up the leased land, sells the cattle, horses, the wagons, the agricultural tools! . . .

The defeat of the most tenacious partisans of the land, of the best among the peasantry, excited the rest of the population and set them in motion; the panic propagated itself from village to village.

Farmers who could have held out for a few years more and withstood the crisis took fright, and sent off their laborers and poor, half-starved wretches. They remembered so many of their richer neighbors, who had always been hoping, who had moved heaven and hell against repeated proof, against chronic distress, until the insufficiency of the crops, aggravated by the competition of transatlantic granaries, reduced them in their old age to taking service on the farms of which they had formerly been the masters.

The far-sighted took their tools and the beasts of burden with them. They went bravely to the fertile fields, the promised lands and eldorados, the kingdoms of Cockaigne ruled over by Prester John, America bursting with grain and fruit, the produce of which, fat

beef, tasty meat, prolific wheat, was inundating, from over the sea, the markets of Europe, submerging the ridiculous flora and fauna torn from our pasturage and fallow fields. No! rather than wait for the coup-de-grace, the harvesters of decadent Europe were leaving for the plethoric continent.

And, to complete the defeat and transform into nomads the hitherto underacinated peasants, recruiters with the gift of the gab, adroit and insinuating, went from market town to market town, visited the inns on the days of fairs and sales, and took advantage of the poor fellows' after-taste and lassitude on Sunday evenings, or on the mornings following a kermess, to excite their minds with troubling mirages of prosperity. In order the better to hearken to the honeyed voiced tempter and his glittering gabble, cowherds and haymakers, horny and innocent, their mouths wide open, their eyes ecstatic, allowed their clay pipes to go out. The electricity of wonder played upon their tanned and shiny skins, tickled their ingenuous feelings to the marrow, stupefied their cunning senses, and held them breathless, hanging upon the lips of the rascal from which fell, like fireworks, descriptions more dazzling and more fiery than the chromos on a mercer's bale or ballad-monger's screen.

A swarm of these jobbers recruited from among the lowest class of procurers had pounced upon the country like jackals upon a battlefield. They had the suspicious manner, the air of familiarity, the gawky movements of cheap peddlers which would have set less simple minds against them.

Thus, they examined the sturdiest of the laborers, inspected them from head to foot with an almost embarrassing persistence, going so far as to pass their



hands over the legs and thighs, feeling and testing them as they would test cattle or poultry on market days, taking their chins as if it were a question of telling a foal's age by its mouth. A little more and they would have asked the unsuspecting rustics to undress in order to examine and auscultate them more easily. Slave dealers behaved hardly any differently with the negroes at the slave markets. They operated especially among young, vigorous men, gaining their confidence, jesting, bantering paternally, as free in their pleasantry as military surgeons presiding at a board of appeal.

These crimps, fugitives from the country or emaciated denizens of the slums, broken to unclean business, knew well how to beget eager desires in these primitive but complex hearts; they stirred up the vague need for enjoyment that slumbers in the hearts of brutes; they enticed these illiterates, warmed them up, worked them up morally, as they did physically.

Deceived and ravished as if in a dream, our rustics inhaled the honeyed discourse, lent themselves to insidious caresses; never had so much attention been paid them, never had such flattering opinions so highly extolled them to themselves, the louts! They became slack, became the lieges of their magnetisers, and no longer moved, fearing lest the lethargy and long enervation should cease! And presently, the crimp would but have to pull the string in order to catch a plentiful and flourishing haul.

Ah! they were not squeamish, these emigration agents! After having operated throughout the rest of Europe, draining prolific but degenerate races, here they were casting their spell upon the best blood of Flanders, choosing strong and well-built fellows as patient and hard-working as their dogs. "We must



have a hundred thousand Belgians, and we shall have them in six months!" had declared Bédard, Saint-Fardier and Vera-Pinto. And their hired crimps set to work with a will. Go it, impostors! To the prey, vampires! The commission is worth taking some trouble for. It is fifteen to twenty francs, according to quality, for each Flemish head turned over to the shipper of human flesh.

But the beaters and their subaltern trackers were carefully silent about their profits. To listen to them, they were the most disinterested of apostles, purely philanthropic, particularly devoted to the peasantry.

Their clap-trap speeches gushed with gold and sunshine. The brokers in lies led their hearers through the promised land, gardens of paradise and palaces of faery. The warmth and the brilliant sun of the tropics kindled and illumined the melancholy horizons of these visionaries; it was as if a magic fire-screen had appeared in a dark room. Ripe corn, crowned with ears as large as their golden wigs, lifted its sheaves to the height of the roofs; trees were bent beneath the weight of gourds that were apples. The sands yielded tobacco; rivulets of milk irrigated the newly-opened land; the chimney smoke rose gently toward a sky more blue than the garb of the holy Daughters of Mary; and that purple, suddenly burnished and scintillant, which clothes the hill-sides until they are lost to view, is not that of your heather, oh, stout drinkers of beer, but the purple of your vines, oh, future bruisers of grapes!

From time to time the charmer interrupted himself, as much to catch his breath as to give the simple folk, whom he was heaping with promises, time to sniff and to taste the perfumed visions he had conjured up.

Then he vaunted the good temperature, the clement climate, the eternally smiling seasons. There were no visitors, no tempests to disconcert the foresight of the farmer and ruin his crops.

There, work was a diversion; there were no landlords, no masters, no cares; no servitude and no rent.

Alternately tender and sportive, the impostor absolutely intoxicated his audience. To the pomp of a florid description, to the hyperboles of a dentist, the instrument of the dealers in souls added the wit of the street-corner; he spiced his eloquence with the gross jests of the peasantry; he flattered the weaknesses, kindled the brutal sensuality, fed the carnal desires of these shameless lovers, conjured up willing subjects for a frenzied passion excited by prolonged continence. The bumpkins were tempted, as they listened, dry-throated, quivering, to the smutty visions, harassed and quickened by the subtle viciousness and perverse ribaldry of this rogue, as scaly as any siren.

Finally, as a last resort, the procurer proposed to read letters from those adventurers who had tried and gained fortune in the promised land:

"Ah! they are as authentic as the Evangel, these epistles! Look them over yourself, schoolmaster; you can read! See the postmark on the letter. . . . And these stamps, these "little heads," as you call them, do not bear the features of our king 'Liapol!' Why don't you read them, schoolmaster? I'm not trying to force you into believing them! Here is what I've told you, in black and white!"

The letters flowed with coarse eulogy, dictated in Europe or elaborated in the *facendas* of the purveyors across the sea. The collusion would have undeceived more lettered listeners,

"Yes, boys, I'm going back myself in a few days. As sure as there is a God I shall never again be able to live in our little Europe!"

And the jolly fellow wheedled them, urged them, and took them all in. Sometimes, in order to emphasize his talk, he would roll, with pretended carelessness, a handful of gold upon the table, sticky with the slops of many glasses. They were foreign, enormous coins. Over there one paid only in goldpieces as large as our wretched five francs silver coins. At the clinking of the gold, the little cowherd's eyes would sparkle; he already saw himself a *conquistador*; his mistress would order about hundreds of servants, clothe herself only in laces, and sprawl upon a bed of down.

When they reached home, the young fellows ruminated these visions; if they slept, they found them again in their dreams. Husbands talked it over in bed with their wives; at first grumbling and refractory, their wives allowed themselves to be convinced and fascinated.

In the fields, beneath a sullen sky, in the midst of flat, broken fields, while they disembowelled the earth that seemed more recalcitrant than ever, the mirage returned to haunt them and, sluggish at their work, their elbows and chins resting on the handle of the hoe, or idly whistling their oxen, the laborers recalled the fabulous lands, and dreamed of the crimp's promises.

And the gold that he toyed with! One of those yellow disks alone represented triple the value of the white coins that they earned from their *baes*. . . .

And that is why, on this January morning, the bowels of *The Gina*—that big craft, once so rakish, but long since painted the uniform black of a poor



man's coffin—should have been elastic to accommodate all the human flesh that was being stowed therein, all those pariahs for whom wily thaumaturges evoked, out of the leaden fogs of the Scheldt, the gleaming, distant Pactolus.

However, two huge trucks of the American Nation, requisitioned by Jean Vingerhout, drove down to the quay. Out of honor to him, two pairs of Furnes horses, enormous, epic palfreys, stately, slow-paced workers, whose equal and solemn step bettered the trot of a racer, had been harnessed to them. The proud beasts had never drawn such light and pitiable merchandise; the baggage piled up, but was not heavy. So very little that in order not to humiliate the powerful horses, the emigrants themselves rode on the drays.

In the midst of the confusion, the disorder of white cases tightly nailed and roped, of opened sacks, of shabby outfits tied up in checked cotton scarfs, there lounged about groups of young emigrants from Lille, Brasschaet, Santvliet, Pulderbosch and Viersel.

A few were boisterously laughing, noisily skipping about, questioning the curious onlookers, seeming to exult. In reality they were forcing themselves to self-deception, to renounce the fixed idea that was gnawing them as keenly as remorse. Under the pretext of heartening their less cheerful and exuberant companions, they clapped them stoutly on the back. Among these villagers there were at most one or two whose immoderate and demonstrative joy was sincere. The others were trying to excite themselves. But, now that the gamble had been taken, and they could neither change their minds nor extricate themselves, as the mist of illusion began to dissipate, and their con-



sciences began to awake, they drank huge bumpers of alcohol as on the day when military lots were drawn.

Wide-eyed and flushed, dressed in their best, but dishevelled, they would, at first sight, have been taken for those young servants and farm-hands who, on the feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, were trundled about from dawn until night in carts covered with flowers and green leaves.

The majority were silent and apathetic, lost in meditation. If, perchance, they were won over by their neighbors' frenzy to bawl out a kermess-song, the "*Nous irons au pays des roses*," of the *Rozenlands* of Saint Peter and Paul, or the "*Nous arrivons de Tordle-Cou*," of the mardigras *Gansrijders*, the notes were quickly strangled in their throats, and they fell back into reflection.

Before their journey began, their thoughts were already soaring through the boundless space of cloud and tide to the distant shores where new lands awaited them; or their spirit was travelling back to their native villages, left but the night before, to the slate belfry of the church, whose melancholy voice would never again exhort them to resignation. Oh, those chimes that in former days had awakened a guerilla cavalry to arms against the regicide foreigner, and whose tocsin was no longer sufficiently eloquent to stave off the invasion of Hunger! In memory the already repentant fugitives returned to their precarious heritages, among their little crops, pitifully rotated and won only after a struggle with the wild heather (adorable enemy, so cursed, and already so regretted!); or again, to the banks of the *vennes* and *meers*, where they fished with worms while watching their thin cows; or around the *scaddes*, or bonfires, fighting off the marshy mois-

ture of October evenings with its resinous perfume.

Oh, the fair hamlet in which they would never again set foot, where they could not even go to sleep their last and best sleep in earth twice sanctified, beside the rebellious folk of the past!

Laurent plumbed their mental reservations. His compassion for the Tilbaks extended to their companions. Among many touching episodes, one especially stirred him forever and seemed to be the quintessence of the distress and heart-breaking grief of this prologue of exile.

At least thirty households from Willeghem, a straggling little village on the farthest northern frontier, had agreed to leave their wretched land all together. They had not taken their places on the trucks, but a little after the arrival of the bulk of the Flemish emigrants, they presented themselves in good order, as if in a holiday procession. They were anxious to make a good showing, to distinguish themselves from the mob, hoping that after their departure people would exclaim, "The bravest showing was made by Willeghem!"

First came the young men, then the women with their children, then the young girls, and last of all the old people. Some of the mothers were still suckling their last-born. How many old folk, leaning upon crutches, and hoping for a mysterious renewal of youth, were destined to die upon the way and, having been sewn in bags ballasted with sand, would be rolled off a board as food for the fishes? Men with navvies' outfits, clad in heavy curduroy, were carrying pick-axes and hoes on their shoulders, and wallets and flasks at their hips. Tilers and brickmakers were get-

ting under way for lands where tiles and bricks were unknown.

A young girl, with the air of a simpleton, her face bloated and beaming, was carrying off a tarin in a cage.

At the head of the line marched the village band, with banner flying.

The band and the flag were also emigrating. The musicians could boldly carry off their instruments and their flag, for there was no one left in Willeghem to employ the band.

Laurent spied a white-haired ecclesiastic, the village priest, marching next to the flag-bearer. Despite his advanced age, the pastor had insisted in accompanying his parishioners to the dock just as he had accompanied them each year upon the pilgrimage to Montaigu, for the many past years during which the famine had lasted! Why, oh, mistress of the Campine and of Hageland, were you deaf to their cry of distress? Instead of ascending, as in legendary times, the turbid streams of the land, in barks without crew or pilot, to disembark on shores chosen by their divine fancy and have miraculous sanctuaries builded there, the madonnas were now deserting their time-honored resting places and had travelled back over the same rivers that formerly had brought them, unknown saints, to the heart of Flanders. Nevertheless, the simple folk of the Flemish plains had built you a basilica on one of the only mountains in their land, as much so that the resplendent starry cupola of your temple of compassion might be seen from the far distance so as to bring you nearer to your Heaven. Fickle Virgin, did you give the example of emigration to all the homesick folk from the moors of the Scheldt? . . .



But that evening, after having seen the ship disappear behind a bend in the river, and the spirals of smoke become indistinguishable in the mist lying over the polders, the good pastor would journey back slowly to his fold, as sad as a shepherd who has just delivered to the formidable unknown the half of a flock branded with a red cross by the drover.

If, however, the aristocratic and noble landowners, county-squires and baronets, had consented to reduce the rents, these lovers of the land would not have had to depart. They would be in a pretty pickle, when there were no longer any hands to clear their wide lands!

Some of the emigrants from Willeghem wore a sprig of heather in their caps; others had tied an armful of the symbolic flowers to the ends of their sticks, to the handles of their implements, and the most fervent among them were carrying off, with touching childishness, a handful of the native sand tied in a little box, or sewn in a bag, as an amulet.

Ingenuously, not to recriminate against the unnatural antipathy of their mother country, but to render her a last filial honor, these peasants flaunted their national costumes, the most local and characteristic attire; the men, their high and puffy caps of silk, coarse breeches, smocks of a peculiar cut and color, of dark blue bordering upon the slate grey of their sky, so that one might differentiate by their blouses the peasants of the North from those of the Midi;—the women wearing large winged lace caps tied to their chignons by a flowered ribbon, and those bizarre hats, shaped like a truncated cone, that have no like in any other country on earth.

At the moment of finally deserting their native land,



it seemed as if they hoped to extol her and anoint themselves with her in an indelible fashion. So they talked loudly, rolling out the fat and sticky syllables of their dialect with a certain ostentation; they insisted upon making the diphthongs reverberate in the atmosphere of their origin.

And they found still another means of accentuating the tender and unconscious irony of their demonstrations.

When they came under the shed, before walking down the gangplank of the boat, steaming up for departure, those at the head of the line halted and faced about, turning toward the tower of Antwerp, and putting the brasses to their lips, their flag hoisted high, they began, not without false notes, the supreme national song, the "*Où peut on être mieux*" of the Liégeois Grétry, the simple and gentle melody of which brought together, in the accents of the noblest language, Flamands and Walloons, sons of the same Belgium, differing in temperament, but not enemies, in spite of what politicians say. And so the colliers of the Borinage were stretching out their hands to the Flamands.

In just such a way two orphans might embrace and become reconciled at their mother's deathbed!

The pathetic implications of this final aubade to the fatherland brought a rush of thoughts to Laurent's mind. He heard in that tender hymn, scanned and modulated in so beautifully barbarous a fashion by these loving exiles, the hoarse cry of all the repressed emotions and disillusiones of his life. The scene before him rendered the world of the downtrodden and misunderstood dearer than ever to him.

How far he was already from that carefree day of

the excursion to Hémixem, and how far, too, from the day of his return to Antwerp and his long contemplation of the banks of the well-loved river!

On that Sunday of sunshine the air had rang with music, but none of the peasant phalanxes had left the shore never to see it again!

The arrival of the Tilbaks and of Jean Vingerhout carried Laurent's excitement to its paroxysm. He tottered like a sleep-walker when the master-docker touched his shoulder. His heart was too full for utterance, but the convulsed expression of his face told them better than words the world of sorrow that he was undergoing.

He embraced Siska and Vincent, hesitated a moment, then consulting brave Jean Vingerhout with a look, pressed a long fraternal kiss upon Henriette's forehead, crushed the former *baes* of the America Nation against his breast, and, taking Henriette's hands, put them in those of her husband and clasped them both in his, as if to unite them in an almost sacramental clasp.

Then, feeling the emotion choking his throat, he could only turn to Lusse and Pierket, who were stretching him their hands and lips. And, beneath the tears that Laurent could no longer withhold, Pierket, who adored his big friend, burst into tears and clung to his neck as though he wanted to carry Laurent off beyond the seas.

The lugubrious and ironic coincidence that brought about the departure of Henriette and her family upon *The Gina* had wrung Laurent's heart far too much. He recognized in it the evil genius of Béjard and his wife. This Gina was ravishing him of Henriette and of all whom he loved!

Other bizarre and unsuspected correlations also presented themselves. The village of Willeghem, emigrating in a body, was precisely the one of Vincent's and Siska's origin. As they had left it as children, they knew nobody. But in asking the crowd, they discovered a few names, distinguished some family features among the mass of faces and ended by discovering some cousins. These acquaintances had the one good quality of astonishing and diverting the emigrants. Jean Vingerhout said laughingly:

"Willeghem will be full over there! And we shall found a new colony and give it the name of the dear village! Vive New-Willeghem!"

And all echoed him.

But other comrades than the peasants monopolized the Tilbaks' attention. The America Nation in a body; deans, *baes*, comrades, wagoners, measurers, stevedores, stable-watchmen, loaders, carters and many of the chiefs of other corporations had made an escort for the worthy Jean, the best liked of the chiefs and colleagues. How many efforts they had made to retain him! For, when he offered as protests his hatred of the business, his wish to see other lands, hard times, the more perspicacious of them knew that the worthy fellow, having been the ringleader of the last troubles, feared, by remaining at their head, to draw down upon them the ire of the wealthy folk, and so do the union a disservice.

Among the mob of dockers could be found loiterers from the Coin de Pasesseux, athletic do-nothings, as proud as they were indolent, who so often had disarmed Jean Vingerhout by their superb phlegm, when they did not make him furious by their inertia and desertion from work. These triflers were jostling each



other to grasp heartily the hands of the emigrants, and for once quitting their habit of pure acting, they even helped put the baggage on board.

The shopkeepers in the neighborhood of the Coconut likewise crowded about the Tilbaks. The maritime and working population of the harbor and the basins joined as a body in this manifestation of regret and sympathy. In the crowd Laurent thought that he even recognized a few young runners who were perhaps not as black as they had been painted, and who were determined to show their sympathy for these poor folk.

These demonstrations brought a happy diversion to the farewells by stupefying those in whose honor they were made. The workers on the docks, healthy and joyous fellows, the blackest thing about whom was their quid of tobacco, affected a rather forced gaiety, exaggerated their frank humour, tortured their spirit to find mirth-provoking sallies; but more than one of them blew his nose too frequently, or wiped his face with his sleeve when there was not a sign of sweat to dry away.

Nor would Jean Vingerhout allow his spirits to lag; clever in his answers, he succeeded in telling the biggest fibs, and faithful to his reputation of being the life and soul of the Nations, delivered a debauch of aphorisms and stupefying monologues in which cropped up the spirit of Père Cats and Uilenspiegel.

He absolutely had to drink a few more glasses with his comrades in the nearest café. Nor could Paridael refuse the hospitality of his worthy employers and fellow-workers. And in front of the bar, where round after round was drunk, amidst the hot fire of their jokes and volleys of oaths and blows upon the table,



Laurent could not help but imagine himself back at the "local," after work, on the evenings when accounts were turned in. Several of the dockers had brought gifts to "their Jean," this one a pipe, that one a plug of tobacco. One of the good fellows had hit upon the idea of giving Vingerhout a box of paper in three colors. They had to provide against interception by the *facenderos*. If Jean wrote on white paper, it would be a sign that things were going well; the rose-colored paper would signify precarious, but supportable conditions; the green, profound distress. And that in spite of the fact that the letter would contain only optimistic and reassuring news.

The hour was at hand. Laurent disappeared from view to install the women between decks with Tilbak. At first some difficulty was made about Laurent's going on board. Access to the emigrants' quarters was strictly forbidden to the curious, and for good reason. Once on board the boat, the travellers were forbidden to return on shore, under penalty of losing their places and the price of their tickets. Nevertheless, thanks to the assistance of a sailor with whom Tilbak had formerly sailed, Paridael was allowed to inspect the new domicile of his friends.

*The Gina* contained over six hundred camp-beds, or rather, badly joined frames that folded up, coupled and piled one above the other in groups of a dozen. The bedding of these hammocks consisted of a bag crammed with fetid straw upon which a hog would have refused to stretch, a true receptacle for vermin.

In spite of the long airing, the corridors reeked with the indefinable smell of a badly kept hospital, a mixture of bottles and of rank stench. What was it going to be later, after all these stray mortals had piled

within, their bodies and their rags exuding as evil an odor as a swarm of deer; especially in bad weather, when the port-holes were battened down.

The rules prescribed the separation of sexes and the separation of small children from adults. But B ejard and his partners were not men to be bound by prescriptions; they were to be observed only while in the harbor.

Before even gaining the open sea all these arrangements were overturned; promiscuity was not hindered, an increase of passengers brought from the shore in smugglers' boats during the night was fraudulently received on board. Runners and smugglers had no better customer than B ejard and Company.

The store-rooms were furnished with lard, smoked beef, ship's biscuits, beer, coffee and tea "in quantity more than enough for twice the duration of the voyage," set forth the prospectus, the last literary work of Dupoissy. In truth the fresh water alone could hardly last the trip! The wretched passengers were rationed as though they were a besieged garrison. Each of them received a little iron bowl like those given to soldiers. Eatables and drinkables were distributed twice daily; the former measured by the pound, the latter in tots, a special measure used on boats. Naturally a piercing cold reigned incessantly below decks; the draught coming through the chinks brought on colds without ever sweeping out the inveterate odor.

And this was where his good Siska and dear Henriette were to lie!

"Damn!" said Tilbak, seeing Laurent's uneasy expression, "the voyage isn't long. And I've seen many others!"

They went up on deck again. Laurent remarked

some wooden stalls containing eleven draught-horses, the stable of some wealthy farmer who had been frightened by the panic and was emigrating before ruin came. Looking at the provision made for them, it seemed that he might just as well have thrown his horses into the Scheldt. Their owner must have been very unsophisticated to think that they would endure a voyage under such conditions. The exploiters had arranged to transport them very cheaply. The maintenance of the horses would cost their owner heavily, and in the end he would barely realize the price of their hides. Above the summary stables, without the least shelter, wooden boxes held straw, hay and oats.

The ivory, however, was crowding on board hastily. The deck had the look of a bivouac of tramps, of a gypsy encampment. In jostling these pariahs from every country, carrying heaven knows what special color and odor in their belongings, Laurent noticed that they were very lightly clad, and that already there were many whose teeth chattered and who were trembling with fever. One of Bédard's agents was passing among them, and to comfort them was telling that the cold would last but for a few days. Once past the gulf of Gascony, perpetual summer would begin. The agent did not add that between Africa and the shores of Brazil they would bake so that they could not come on deck, and that calenture and furious delirium would carry off some of those who could have borne the marsh-fever. He especially concealed from them the horrors of the crossing; the despotism and brutality that awaited them upon landing, and the numerous miseries not to be endured in such incompatible surroundings.



"It is time to take in the gang-plank, for we're off, comrade!" the sailor said to Paridael.

The strident whistle alternated with the noise of the engine. Laurent tore himself away from the embraces of his friends and regained the dock.

As if there had not already been enough distress and horror, a lamentable incident came up at the last moment.

A tattered wretch, yellow and livid at the same time, his eyes haggard, his hair in disorder, under the dominion of a violent alcoholic excitation, was forcing toward the gangway of the boat a poor woman with a kindly face, but no less stricken, thin and illy-clad than himself, who was struggling, shrieking, resisting him with all her might, two wretched brats clinging to her knees. Without doubt the unfortunate mother did not intend to follow her drunkard husband to America, regarding as worse than the famine endured in her native land exile far away from all friends, from all familiar faces and things, in lands where nothing would console her for the disgrace and the debauchery of her husband.

Sickened by this scene, Laurent and several of the *baes* and comrades of the Nations quickly delivered the mother and children. While some led the poor woman, almost dead from exhaustion, to a nearby café, the others led the scamp toward *The Gina* and put him on board more quickly than he would have wished, throwing him across the gang-plank at the risk of plunging him into the water.

The drunkard, completely besotted, seemed to resign himself to this unlooked for divorce; besides, communication with shore had just been cut off. Without worrying further about his family, he came



near the rail, and the lookers-on saw him take a half-full bottle of gin from the pocket of his overcoat.

"See here," he stuttered, as he reeled about brandishing the bottle above his head, "here's all that I have left; the last money I had was drowned in this bottle . . . and I drink this in farewell to Belgium! . . ."

And putting the bottle to his lips, he emptied it at one gulp; then he threw it with all his force against the side of the dock, shattering it into splinters in the water. And with a vacant laugh, he yelled:

"*Evviva America!*"

However, the sailors drew in and rolled up the hawsers unloosed from the dock, the screws commenced to churn the water; on his bridge the captain was hurling repeated orders to aft and stern, and talking through a tube with the men in the engine room; and beneath the touch of the helmsman, the boat turned slowly from the bank, and seething little waves licked the sides of *The Gina*.

At the shock of the start, the drunkard collapsed at the feet of his fellow-travellers.

Laurent turned his eyes toward more sympathetic people.

The Willeghem band waved its velvet flag, embroidered and tasselled with gold, and again took up the "*Où peut-on être mieux,*" which both Borains and Campinois shouted in chorus.

Among the mass of ruddy or wan faces, Laurent ended by seeing only the Tilbak group. Until the last minute he had thought of taking passage, without telling them, on board *The Gina*, to share their destiny and face the unknown with them; only the fear of displeasing Vincent and Siska, of opening up a

freshly cauterized wound in their daughter's heart, of awakening suspicion in the heart of honest Vingerhout, of being an object of constraint and annoyance to them had retained him in Antwerp.

Then, too, a vague magnet prevented him from saying farewell to his city; he had a presentiment of a fatal duty that had to be fulfilled, of a rôle necessary for him to play. He did not know what they were. But without worrying about the future destiny had in store for him, he was awaiting his hour.

On *The Gina*, shouts, cheers, a scuffle and a tumult of yells drowned the sound of the band. They were answering, with heart and lungs no less dilated, from the mob banked on the dock. Boat and shore answered each other, contending in bluster, verve and vigor. Caps flew in the air, colored handkerchiefs waved like the variegated banners at naval parades.

Women who looked as if they were crying and laughing at the same moment held their children up in their arms. And the further off the boat drew, the more frantic became the gestures. It seemed as if arms were extending themselves to clasp each other again across the intervening water.

Because of the great amount of water it drew and because of its more than full cargo, the boat remained for a long while within view of the onlookers. Laurent profited by this to run a little further toward the end of the Tête de Grue, to the beginning of the basins, that he might follow the boat until it turned. Henriette had already gone down to the cabin with Jean Vingerhout. Siska and Pierket continued to throw him kisses; he heard the strong male voice of Vincent throwing him a last injunction with all the force of his soul.

But with each turn of the screw Laurent felt himself losing a little of his security and confidence. The "*Où peut on être mieux*" receded, died away in the distance like a murmur.

It was the same promontory from which Laurent had watched the faery sunset on the Scheldt some years before. Today it was gray, foggy, overcast; instead of jewels, the river was rolling in slime; the embankments of the Polder sent down yellowed grass; the sadness of the season harmonized with that of the people. The carillon seemed heavier to him, and the seagulls of former days, the hieratic and welcoming priestesses, shrieked and cried like sybils of misfortune.

When the hulk of the boat has disappeared behind a bend in the Flanders shore, Laurent continued to watch the smoke-stack, a travelling landmark above the dikes; then, gradually, it became only a black line, and finally the last banner of smoke was lost in the desolation of a January fog.

When an insidious and glacial fine rain awoke the young man from his coma, he noticed that he was not the only observer at the end of the promontory.

The curé of Willeghem was still looking for the track and the backwater of *The Gina*. Two big tears fell slowly down his cheeks and he traced in the air the sign of the cross. But the scattering flight of the seamews, their shrieks of hailing scorcereesses seemed to parody that gentle professional gesture in the four corners of the heavens. Unnerved by this final sarcasm, Laurent turned back toward the city. The noise of pickaxes and of crumbling blended with the grumbling of the harbor cranes, with the rumble



of merchandise being thrown into the bottom of holds, with the continual fall of calkers' picks.

In order to enlarge the docks, the demolition of the old quarters had been ordered, and the wrecking had begun. Already large pieces of wall were lying crumbled into plaster at the corners of streets; tumble-down houses, disembowelled, cut away from their gables, showed their carcasses of bleeding brick from which hung, like strips of flesh and skin, sad, flapping decorations. They looked like carcasses hung up in butchers' stalls.

Here and there breaches had been made in the blocks of buildings dating back to before the Spanish dominion, in these decaying and unsteady old houses that swayed toward each other like cold old women, brought to light still older constructions, unmasked vestiges of mediæval donjons, unearthed the Roman forts of the first ages of the city.

On a part of the line of the quays that had to be repaired the trees beneath which the two Paridaels had so often walked had already disappeared.

Not only was the glorious Carthage rejecting her surplus population, exiling her people, but, not content with having turned loose her pariahs, she was demolishing and undermining their hovels. She was behaving like a parvenue who rebuilds, and transforms from cellar to roof a noble and ancestral lordly home; discarding or destroying all the relics and vestiges of a glorious past, and replacing picturesque and blue-blooded ornaments by a flashy new garb, a showy new luxury and an improvised elegance.

The news of the crimes and vandalism to which the imbecile Rich had delivered over his natal city had chagrined Laurent to the point of making him move



away from the theater of demolitions, the progress of which would have afflicted him too keenly.

Chance had willed it that he should witness this devastation on the very day when he had just attended the departure of his friends. The contrast between the activity of the docks and the ruin that was beginning to border the river was not of a nature to console him.

At the moment when the tumbrils were carrying away the plaster, the broken stone and the materials of the house to take them to far distant dumps, *The Gina* was also carrying away as much refuse material, good-for-nothings, cumbersome parasites, workers without work, peasants without land, the broke, the down and out, poor devils from the land and business.

For many of the people and of the Antwerpians of the old school, it was as if the proud Scheldt was repudiating his first wife. He was replacing old Antwerp by a harsh stepmother bringing new unreasonableness and customs, a foreign language favorable to the breeding of other customs. She was gradually repudiating the children of the first marriage-bed, brutally proscribing the descendents of the primitive stock, in order to draw near her arrogant bastards, to substitute in the paternal favor a population of mongrels and foreigners.

There had even been talk, in the meetings of the Regency, of tearing down the Steen, the old castle, just as they had already torn down the Tour-Bleue and the Port Saint-Georges. In truth, they had damaged the admirable arch of triumph in spite of themselves. Had not these good idiots made up their minds to tear down the gate in numbering the quarters, block by block, as in a game of patience? But our eagles did not reckon with the work of centuries, and at this

game of architects in their second childhood, what was their consternation when they saw the ashlar crumble away to dust in their profane fingers!

Ah! it was high time for the Tilbaks to expatriate themselves. It was as good to go as to remain for the havoc and depredation. Those who might ever return ran the risk of not knowing their land.

The wreckers had already torn down the first houses in the savory quartier des Bateliers. Navvys were already beginning to fill in the old canal Saint-Pierre.

Laurent dived further and further into the city, wandering with filial devotion through the threatened streets, according to the agonized walls a little of the sympathy and clemency that he felt for the expelled.

And, beneath their hollowed gables, the sorrowful facades possessed the emotions of human faces, of faces solemn with approaching death, and the cross-barred windows, the dusty panes of glass, cried like blind eyes, and here and there, in the far-off and discordant music of some hovel, wailed the last "*Où peut on être mieux?*" of the Willeghem band.

### III

## THE RIET-DIJK

AMONG the many quarters on the point of disappearing was the Riet-Dijk: a narrow alley throttling itself behind the curb of the houses on the quai de l'Escaut, meeting at one end a canal, a wet-dock and storing place for boats, at the other, a wider and longer artery, the Fossé-du-Bourg.

In the Riet-Dijk and the Fossé-du-Bourg, agglomerated the houses of ill-fame. It was the "corner of joy," the Blijden-Hoek of ancient chronicles. In the alley were high-priced houses; in the main street less costly ones for modest purses. There were, in this district, brothels consistent with every class and caste of customers; rich men, naval officers, sailors, soldiers.

In the evening, harps, accordions and violins vied with each other, scraping and screeching in this supreme beguinaige of hospitalers, and intrigued and allured from a distance the stray passerby or traveller. Hurried melodies, rhythms of the rabble, in which were blended, like strokes of the lash or the rope's-end, the crash of brass bands and fifes: street-walkers' music.

On the street, the whole length of illuminated ground-floor windows, there was a kermesse-like oscillation; street-walkers slouching along, loungers loitering about.

Until eleven o'clock the girls from these brothels had permission to roam the streets in turn in the quarter itself and even to go and dance at the Waux-Hall and Frascati, two dance-halls in the Fossé-du-Bourg.

After that hour, a partial curfew, only serious habitués wandered there, upon whom, little by little, the dives finally closed their doors. The screeching of fiddles was hushed. Soon one could hear only the lamentation of the river at full-tide, the plashing of the water against the piles of the docks, the intermittent grumble of a boat being fired up in anticipation of its early morning departure.

It was the hour of stealthy parties, of concealed obscenity. Noctambulists, their collars turned up, their hats pushed down over their eyes, slid along the yellow houses and tapped masonic signals on the secret doors of byways.

All banquets and celebrations terminated in a pilgrimage to the Riet-Dijk. Strangers had themselves taken there at night after having visited, during the day, the printing house of Plantin-Moretus and the Rubens' in the Cathedral. Orators at banquets took their last toasts there.

The ups and downs of this peculiar quarter coincided with the fluctuations of commerce in the metropolis. The period of the Franco-Prussian war was the golden age, the apogee of the Riet-Dijk. Never had so many fortunes been suddenly made, nor had parvenus ever sprung up in so great a hurry to enjoy them.

Their contemporaries told over and over again, while waiting until legend should have immortalized them, of the Iupercalia celebrated in these temples by crafty and sedate looking nabobs. On certain days of record the habitués would requisition all the staff, after the



fashion of speculators who had cornered the market.

Béjard, the slave-dealer, and Saint-Fardier, the Pasha organized, in the multicolored little salons of Madame Schmidt, especially in the red room, celebrated for its Boule bed with groove and sliding piece, a true state bed, orgies in which both Phœnician pranks and Roman exuberance were resuscitated.

On these occasions Dupoissy, the jack-of-all-trades, fulfilled the platonic functions of manager. It was he who conferred with Madame Adele, the housekeeper, prepared the program and paid the bill. While the ever headier allegories of these "masques," worthy of a Ben Jonson struck with satyriasis, unrolled, the smooth factotum sat at the piano and strummed circus jigs. At each pause the actresses, nude or clad in long stockings and black velvet masks, begged the approbation of their disordered masters, and, crouching like kittens, rubbed their moist and rice-powdered flesh against the funereal dress-suits.

Such was the bewildering renown of these brothels that, during the days of carnival, the chaste wives of regular customers came masked to these diligent hives—during free hours, let it be said—and, escorted by the patron and the patronne, inspected the delicately tufted little cells, gilded like reliquaries, the beds contrived, even to the erotic pictures, to fold up like altar pieces.

And, were one to believe the scandal spread by their little friends, the Mesdames Saint-Fardier had not been the last to put the docility and amiability of their husbands to so extravagant a test.

At the Riet-Dijk the interloping compounds produced by the gamy civilization of New Carthage afforded him pessimistic subjects for observation. After

white nights, he watched these girls at their toilette, saw them go through their paces, surprised their instinctive terror at the imminent visit of the doctor; he noted, in return, their easy air of familiarity, almost that of woman to woman, with the androgynal hairdresser.

More than any other familiar or purveyor to these places, Gay the Dalmatian interested him. This industrious celibate, clerk at one hundred and fifty francs a month in the office of a ship-broker, drew annually fifteen to twenty thousand francs in commissions from the chief houses in the Riet-Dijk. He brought to the better houses the captains to whom his employers, the brokers, had attached him as guide during their stay in Antwerp. Gay spoke all languages, even the dialects and idiom of minor countries and the slang of the most distant people. Gay brought to these delicate transactions a probity that was highly appreciated. There were never any errors in his bookkeeping. When he came, every three months, to collect his commissions, the procurers paid their intelligent and wide-awake recruiter unhesitatingly. On these occasions Gay would accept a glass of wine or a liqueur, to drink the health of Madame, Monsieur, and their boarders.

Gay's discretion was proverbial. With his little red mustache, his broad grin, his neat appearance and his affable manner, Gay had no enemies among his colleagues. To him they respectfully applied the English adage: *The right man in the right place*; the man worthy of his place, the place worthy of the man.

One month after the departure of the emigrants, Paridael was accosted one morning on the Plaine Falcon by Gay, who, rushed and out of breath, threw this terrible news full in his face:

"*The Gina* has sunk with all on board, off the coast of Brazil! . . . It's posted at Lloyds!"

And the Dalmatian passed on without turning, anxious to inform as many people as he could of the sinister news, never for a moment suspecting the blow that he had just dealt Paridael.

Laurent reeled, closed his eyes, and ended by collapsing on a doorstep, his legs refusing to support him any longer. The syllables of the fatal words tolled a knell in his ears. When he came to his senses again he said to himself:

"The blood has gone to my head! Apoplexy is giving me a warning. I've had a moment of delirium, and thought I heard somebody tell me that . . . horror. But things like that don't happen!" But he found himself remembering all too clearly Gay's voice and exotic accent, and blinking his eyes and gazing down the Docks, did he not see the Dalmatian hurry-off into the distance?

Laurent dragged himself to the quai Sainte Aldegonde, where the offices of Béjard, Saint Fardier and Company were. In turning the Coin des Paresseux he found that even the ineradicable and carefree loafers had moved farther on to obtain the news. Worthy Jean Vingerhout was popular even with this phlegmatic tribe. And they knew him to be on board the ill-fated *Gina*.

The air of sorrowful commiseration among these rebellious loafers who were crowding upon the quay and joining the mob in front of the emigration office prepared Laurent for the worst. A feeble ray of hope, however, continued to tremble among the sudden shadows in his soul. It would not have been the first time



that ships given up as lost had returned to the port where they were being mourned!

Laurent broke through the mob of dockers, sailors and tearful women whom a common grief had brought together, a mob made even more tragic by the presence of many wretched looking families of emigrants, designated for the next sailing, perhaps marked for the next wreck! Lamentations and sobs arose at intervals above the black and suffocating silence.

Laurent succeeded in worming himself through the crowd as far as the counter in the office.

"Is it true, Monsieur, what they are saying in the city? . . ."

He stammered each word and affected a doubtful infonation.

"Oh, yes! . . . How many times do I have to repeat it to you? Long enough to die of hunger, at least! . . . Get out, now, and leave us some peace, and be hanged to you!"

At these abominable words that only a Saint-Fardier could be capable of pronouncing, Paridael hurled himself against the partition between himself and the inner offices.

The door burst inward.

Laurent followed it and struck the individual who had just spoken to him, and who was none other than the former partner of Cousin William, full in the face, with the fury of a mad bull.

The Pasha had always had the soul of a convict-warden or a slave-driver, and the ex-slave-dealer Béjard had found in him the implacable brute whom he required to plan and expedite his traffic in souls.

Had it not been for the intervention of his clerks, who tore him away from his aggressor, the miserable



man would have been killed on the spot. Laurent had half strangled him, and in both of his clenched fists he clutched Saint-Fardier's pepper and salt whiskers.

While several of the employes were overpowering Laurent, whose rage had not been satisfied, some of their comrades had hurried the wounded man, mad with fear, into Bédard's private office, where he did not stop moaning and calling the police.

The provoking and unnatural words of Saint-Fardier had been heard by others beside Laurent, and, learning what was taking place, the crowd outside partook of his indignation and would have torn to shreds the policeman who dared try and arrest him. It threatened even to drag the partners from the retreat and execute immediate justice upon them. So that Bédard, hearing the thunder of hoots and calls from the crowd, thought it prudent to push Laurent into the street and return him to his terrible friends. Then, in the excitement produced by the reappearance of the hostage, Bédard quickly shut the door behind him. Dismissing his men for the rest of the day, he dragged the pitiable Saint-Fardier through a back door into a little deserted alley bordered by shops and warehouses, from which they regained, not without tacking about to avoid the quays and too frequented streets, their residences in the new city.

"We shall catch that loafer again!" said Bédard to Saint-Fardier, who was rubbing his bleeding cheeks with his handkerchief, as they hurried along. "We can't think of locking him up. We can't even think of it for a long time to come, old fellow, for this little accident has already made too much noise, and it wouldn't be good to have the law prying too closely into our business. Wait till these dogs have finished

howling! If they continue barking the way they have been this morning, they'll be hoarse by tonight! And then we shall settle our account with Master Laurent!"

"After all, the affair isn't so bad for us . . . (here the execrable trafficker forgot himself so far as to rub his hands). . . . The ship wouldn't have lasted so much longer. The rats had already left it because so much water leaked into the hold. An old wooden shoe, the insurance on which will net us double what it was worth! And if we lose the bounties paid in advance to some of the vigorous and flourishing emigrants, like that Vingerhout—you remember, Bergmans' tool, the leader of the elevator riot. And now he's with his fathers!—after all, we collect the insurance on those of the crew who were drowned. There's some compensation in that!"

The ship-owner came in for dinner as if nothing had happened. Gine thought his expression bestially jovial and crafty. At dessert, as he meticulously cut a succulent melon and poured himself a glass of old Bordeaux with the ceremony of a taster, he announced in a hardly detailed fashion the shocking and complete loss of the ship which she had baptized.

Without noticing the sudden pallor that overspread his wife's face, he entered into details and figured up the number of victims. She begged him to stop; he insisted, and pushed his sarcasm to the point of conjuring up to her that launching at the Fulton Dockyards. Then, utterly sick, she left the room and took refuge in her own suite, where she thought of the evil presage which certain onlookers had found in her hesitation and maladroitness when the boat was to have been cut loose upon the ways.

Laurent, after having escaped from the hands of

the crowd that questioned him about the affair, ran bareheaded—he had forgotten to pick up his cap after the flight—without seeing or hearing anything, to his garret, and, tumbling upon his bed as he used to do at the Dobouziez's, shed the tears that his fury had driven back into his bosom. He paused in his crying only to repeat these names: "Jean! . . . Vincent! . . . Siska! . . . Henriette! . . . Pierket! . . ."

Afterward, no day went by that did not find him murderously humming to himself, as though inoculating himself with a sweet, but very powerful poison, the "*Où peut-on être mieux?*" of the Willeghem band.

Without suspecting the transformation that his haughty cousin was undergoing, Laurent henceforth confused the two Ginas, the woman and the boat; it was Madame Béjard who, in order to kill his good and sainted Henriette, had dedicated the ship, her godson, to shipwreck. And to think that he had for one moment been in love with that Regina, on the night of Béjard's election! At present, he flattered himself that he would always curse her!

His devotion to the dear dead soon became confused, in his hatred of the oligarchic society, not only with his love for the simple working-people, but with an extreme sympathy for the poorest and the most disgraced, even for those wretches who had fallen to the very dregs of society. Finally he gave himself up to that need for anarchy which had fermented within him since his earliest infancy, which rent his heart and entered into his deepest spirit.

It was toward the condemned of earth that his vast desire for communion and tenderness oriented itself.

## IV

### CONTUMACY

LAURENT began by procuring lodgings at the farthest end of Borgerhout, near a railroad cut, not far from a siding used only for baggage cars. It was a corner of the suggestive region that he had formerly observed from the Dobouziez's garret. The urban agglomeration here degenerated into a suburb of doubtful character, sparsely sown with houses, as if the blocks had broken ranks, pot-houses of all kinds, pounds, the workshops of marble-cutters, figurists and knackers. Soot on the walls, grass between the cobblestones. For monuments: a gasometer whose huge iron bell moved up and down in its masonry cage, equipped with jointed arms: an abattoir towards which drovers led their unsuspecting flocks, and a despotic barracks that swallowed up no less passive victims; all dirty red buildings, of a blood-tinged color.

From hour to hour the whistle of locomotives, the horn of the crossing-guard and the factory clock echoed each other, or the bugles of pitiable conscripts were wedded with the death rattle of flocks of sheep. Out to the ramparts of the fortifications empty lots alternated with yards in which itchy dogs were rooting; embryonic gardens adjoined insipid cottages strayed



into this harsh neighborhood like a sunny disposition amongst grouches.

Little rag-pickers had long ago picked the tar away from the boards of fences, or broken them down. Armed with deep burlap bags, they scaled the fence, after having explored the abandoned enclosure with their eyes. Searching about with their sticks and their feet, they rejoiced when they found the skin of a carrion. They fought over their find as if it were a gold nugget, or tore it away from the puppies who were gnawing it growlingly.

The vicissitudes of this gang were for a long time the only distraction of Paridael's mornings. Later he discovered more abstract subjects for study.

Near the gatekeeper's, a tall, well-set man, dark and husky, whose straightforward face stood out in relief against the grimace and convulsions of the district and of its knavish natives, had been paying court to a plump blonde girl, as radiant as a field of corn, the rose of whose flesh was slightly streaked with russet, with delicate red lips and coaxing eyes. Her fresh clothes betokened her a lady's maid, and her pretty white cap and spotless apron told Paridael immediately that she was a stranger to the quarter. Without doubt, it was on a chance stroll that she had passed this way and remarked the handsome youth. She was not the first to be attracted by the black eyes, the curly mop and the serious, but not sullen, manner of the gatekeeper. He had, besides, a military manner of wearing his cap that was simply irresistible, and his velvet jacket set off his figure like a hussar's pelisse! The girls of the neighborhood, and not only those who lived nearby, passed by regretfully as they ogled the busy worker. The more daring made advances to

him, did not refrain from telling him their whim, all the while pretending to joke, and barbing with a covetous glance the joke that they cast at him.

The line being unimportant, he filled the offices of crossing-keeper and switchman. The upkeep of his little station kept him as busy as though he were a simple workman in a gang. The flighty girls invariably found him busy. Deaf to their lures, perhaps a little proud, and judging them to be too free and too trivial, he worked harder than ever, and when he had finished blowing his horn, presenting, unfurling and planting his flag, opening and closing the crossing-gate, he hurried to fill his wheelbarrow with sand, reballast the tracks, and oil his switch.

The white-capped lady's maid did not allow herself to be rebuffed by his disdainful and bizarre manner. Prettier and of a better type than the girls of the quarter, at the same time more discreet and more alluring, she gently tamed the savage. He began to straighten up when he was bending over, working on the tracks, and slowly lifting his cap in answer to her greeting; the following week he came over to her, blushing and somewhat foolish, to talk about the rain; the next time, leaning upon the gate, he told her cock-and-bull stories, which she swallowed as though they were words of the gospel. One would have said that in order to plague them the blustering trains ran by in greater numbers on that day. But she waited until the young man had finished his many drudging tasks, followed his movements, won by his graceful carriage, and they took up the interrupted conversation. . . .

The gradual union of these two simple people greatly amused Laurent Paridael, conquered as he had

been by their tempting blonde and dark beauty, so harmoniously different.

A while before he had become acquainted with the guard; in off-hours he offered him cigars and treated him to an occasional drink, and had him explain the details of his work. He complimented the guard upon his conquest, and when he found them together, inquired with a quick look about the progress of their affair, and the slightly embarrassed laugh and lively look of the guard answered him eloquently. As for the girl, she was so busy making sheep's eyes at her gallant that she never saw the signals of intelligence and interest that Paridael brought to their love. This happiness of others, this idyll of two young and handsome people both beautified and tortured the whimsical Paridael, the unacknowledged lover of Gina.

However, they could no longer restrain their desire for each other. She finished by joining him in his little wooden hut on the nights when he was on duty. One winter night of snow and gale Laurent saw them, through the half-opened door, crouching coldly in a corner, the girl on the fellow's knees. There was no light, but the red glow of the cast-iron stove betrayed the union of their silhouettes.

A spree on the other side of the city separated Laurent from his friends. Upon returning from it he was surprised to find that the young man was neither in his little house, nor on the tracks. If Laurent remembered rightly, this was the week during which the boy was on day service. Was he ill? Had they replaced him? Paridael worried about his unaccustomed absence as though the poor devil had been bound to his heart by the ties of long friendship. It was worse when, at



nightfall, another than the waited-for person came to relieve the day-watchman. Giving in once again to his timidity, to the bashfulness that entered his slightest sympathies, Laurent did not dare inquire for the deserter. Moreover, Laurent did not know his name. He would have had to describe him, enter into explanations, and he imagined that his overtures would seem strange. He went home again, but the thought of the absent one tortured him all night, and the horn, blown by another, seemed to call for help and sound an alarm.

The next day, the guard was not at his post. Laurent decided to speak to his substitute.

Then he heard a dismal epilogue.

In flagrant disobedience to all rules, under threat of fine and discharge, at the risk of being found by the travelling inspector, the lover had not quit his mistress. But, one night, they were so tightly enmeshed, so absolutely lost, lips against lips, that he had neither the strength nor the presence of mind to signal a train and bar the crossing. Perhaps he, too, counted upon the utter solitude and loneliness of the road at that late hour! A frightful rattle of distress, followed by a volley of oaths, aroused him from his ecstasy. When he had rushed to the gate, he found that a train had just stopped a few meters away from his post after having crushed an old couple to jelly.

Certain of having to pay dearly for his negligence, the guilty man had not awaited the result of the inquest, but had disappeared while the police and detectives were looking for him. He had so much the more reason for fearing the severities of the law since the two old people killed during that night of love were very rich and very miserly, and their hypocritical



heirs owed it to their memory to relentlessly pursue the agent of their massacre, although at the bottom of their hearts the heirs doubtlessly were blessing the interesting homicide.

The unlucky girl disappeared at the same time as her lover, and no one knew where they were hiding. Laurent never saw them again. But, after that fatal adventure, each time he heard the hoarse cry of a crossing-keeper's horn or saw the black tank of a gasometer overhanging a surly suburban district, there rose before his eyes the two young people leaning against the crossing-gate; he, swarthy as a faun, clad in a reddish-brown smock, his brass horn hung over his shoulder by a red woolen band; she, blonde, rose ready to swoon, and, with her white cap and apron, as appetizing as the cloth at a banquet.

To shake off his sorrow, Laurent instantly changed his lodgings, and travelled about exploring the Antwerpian country made dear to him by the peasant emigrants. Willeghem became, even for him, the object of a pilgrimage.

Without leaving his country, without ceasing to bathe in its sunshine and breath its atmosphere, Laurent experienced the deadly devotion, the voluptuous martyrdom of an exile. He saw and perceived the smallest objects of the land with a sensuous intensity known only by those who return after a long absence, or who are leaving forever; those who are resuscitated or who are dying. It is only on native shores that the three kingdoms of nature are adorned with this freshness, this youth, this eternal resurrection.

His fervent piety extended from the overworked beings and the eccentric quarters of the city to the sloppy or arid country, to the hallucinating sky, to the

taciturn peasants, to those plains of the Campine which the tourist avoids as he would remorse.

Braving hurricanes and tempests, he was out in all weathers.

In the full autumn drizzle he often stood watching a peasant pacing the fields with long steps, and sowing with a full and rhythmic gesture. In summer, a reaper gravely sharpening his scythe on the grindstone held him fast, like one of the faithful watching a symbolic episode of the divine office. He wandered about all the villages near Willeghem, where he had seen that vision, often returned to the same place, but always suffering from the same vague shame, did not dare approach the sculptural peasant.

He was deeply moved, too, by the slight odor of manure, that April evening when a peasant walked about with his pail sprinkling his tardy soil with ladle-fulls. The contempt of this rustic for the tender, delicate spring, the phlegm of this large-breeched, tanned, tow-headed peasant busying himself with his inelegant, but useful job, the violent contrast between the substantial lout and the ambient archness of the season conquered Laurent Paridael there and then, and in the same minute, the view that he had been enjoying seemed insipid and sophisticated. He could but look at the young farmer. This same rustic, accosted by Laurent, stopped mixing his compound and stimulating the soil, and brightening up, spoke to Laurent quite simply as he scratched his ear:

“Yes, Monsieur, four of us, all like me, made our first communion the same day that we were drawn for service!”

And this coincidence of the holy sacrament with the brutal conscription never left Laurent's brain, and

was inseparable from a mixture of paschal incense and of filthy mixture, like the odor of day upon which this remarkable fact had been told him.

With this impression was closely linked that of a morning spent in the pasture with a crowd of cow-herds and milkmaids. A large hoydenish girl commanded the tattered band and supervised the cooking of the frog's legs, for the dressing of which she had requisitioned all the butter in the group. Alert little hands heaped up under the pot faggots and dead wood as though in a camp. The roasting of the stew seemed an artificial murmur of the leaves.

Paridael frisked that day like a savage; he had even forgotten his mourning and his rancor, but this rare gaiety fell away in less than an instant. One of the children, glutted with gin by a waggoner, slept against the hedgerow; in vain they shook him, he only snored, slobbering and besotted as an alcoholic; shaggy caterpillars produced a little quiver beneath his red skin, and raging, moist gad-flies that, a little way off, were making a troop of chickens sneeze and squawk, drew from time to time a little drop of blood, the color of crushed mulberry, from the sleeper, or a squeal that cried to heaven for vengeance.

Many times Paridael ascended or descended the long, straight Flemish canals on canal-boats. He lived the life of the lightermen, partook of their meals and slept in their cabins, small and neat as a doll's boudoir, lent a hand to his hosts, but spent the greater part of his time doing absolutely nothing, tasting the joy of wasting time and of gliding with the stream without moving and of being, in his turn, the immobile, passive, irresponsible thing before which filed the willows, bowed the osier beds, trooped the villages and belfrys.



And the manœuvres, always the same, repeated at different stops, in lock-chambers constructed all on the one model, the halts while waiting for lockage, the trade boats lining up, touching each other in the waiting place, while the lock-keeper worked the sluice and the boats descended on the lowering water! And the same jocular conversations were begun from bridge to bridge, by the lock-keepers and the boatmen.

Sometimes an unforeseen modulation intruded itself into the doleful flourish.

As soon as the boats had found their places in line, one of the men profited by the delay to jump to the shore, root up a clump of turf with his pocket-knife, and, regaining the boat, busied himself with putting the live earth into the cage of the inevitable lark. Sensible of this attention, the lovable captive welcomed the feast with a deafening trill. But at this unseasonable joy, the old boss, who, never being able to finish a job, had been scolding and storming at his helper, spied him at the stern of the boat and called him down at the very moment when he was hurriedly closing the cage. Ah! the do-nothing! For him that taunt and that blow! The quitter pocketed the scolding and took the blow, reeled stoically without a complaint or a retort. His large mouth trembled nervously, he reddened beneath his tan, but his great eyes did not tear. He was disarmed less by the joy of the bird than by the affectionate and pitying look cast him by the boss's wife. Ah! to win that dear woman, he would willingly undergo the boss's brutality. He cared as little for the husband's rage as for the barking of a dog.

And without bitterness, he went on with his work. He went on, too, with his song. Brave boy! The



locks opened again, the tow-boat again fished up its endless hawser, and from one boat to the other the sailors bent over their oars.

The boat began moving, taking up the line again. Slowly, straight on toward Rupel the file descended.

Laurent also wandered by stage-coach through the far-away and, nevertheless, near-by districts. Between Beveren and Calloo in the Waes district he saw the rhythmic fall of the flail threshing wheat. A girl, her dress unfastened at the bosom, shining as the apple of the district, ran up and climbed on the bank to the roadway, just in time to catch the package flung her by the driver. With a quick movement she broke the seal, hesitated a moment before unfolding the letter, then decided to look it through.

Not a muscle of her face moved; but Laurent thought he heard the panting of her heart. And the motionless threshers—two bronzes rose-tinged in the half-light of the barn, bathed in a sweat more volatile than liquid—the threshers waited for the news with a certain solemnity. A letter from “our Jan,” her brother, the “son of the house,” or “my Frans,” the betrothed, a soldier at Antwerp? Had he had an unlucky hand in a scuffle, was he languishing in the military hospital, did the letter come from the prison of Vilvorde? Laurent posed all these questions to himself. He burned to ask the young girl. She entered the farmhouse. He would have always to wait for the answer. The diligence pursued its course. The little bells tinkled laughingly on the collars of the horses, the whip cracked without shame; it was tediously hot, one of those noonday heats that make us curse the sun and lament winter. The clock of Calloo rang out its melancholy midday, the most tedious hour

of all to peal, it seemed to say. . . . The crickets were rasping their wing-shells ragingly. And Laurent would always see, tomorrow, afterward, fatally; the unique farm of the trip, the crushed peasant-girl, the two half-nude bronze-colored boys. . . . For his second look had told him that the news was bad news. He would have liked to retrace his road, console the beautiful girl; he felt himself capable of watching, with them, the shade of the dead. But it was over. Far, far back already; he would never come over this road again in his life. But he had one memory the more to weigh down his heart during the suffocating heat of the dog-days. The tolling of a village bell, the rapture of the flies in the sunlight, the grinding of crickets' wings would always reproach him with the vision of folk whom he could have pitied and loved. . . .

Thus, a quantity of scenes, to which the crowd and professional observers would have been indifferent, a face barely glimpsed, a passerby jostled, a look intercepted, a typical manner, left ineradicable impressions upon his life. He sorrowed over the loss of companions of a short journey, over meetings without a sequel; inconsolable for the bifurcation of roads which destiny imposes upon the best matched travellers.

Continual nostalgias plagued him. He was seized with a shooting desire to conjure up, at no matter what cost, these fleeting visions; he craved for these beloved apparitions, and time, far from effacing them from his memory, only improved them and gave them new strength, like noble wine.

A handsome and noble face of the people, a tall, swarthy lad with deep, inquiring eyes, leaning upon the door of a third-class railway coach, in a train

which passed his. And no more was needed for Laurent to link to him this being whom he would never see again. For eternity he would relish that too rapid minute; not one jot of its atmosphere would be lost: it was near a viaduct, and in the air undulated an odor of stagnant water and the song of a track-walker. A foul effluence and a sad melopœia framed the supreme nobility of attitude and great affective eyes of the unknown. . . .

Such incidents became for Laurent powerful pictures, of a magnetic color, of a highly conceived relief, but with, in addition, perfume, music and symbol, and the indefinable that differentiated from all others the chosen object or person. What masterpieces, he thought, if anyone could succeed in rendering these pictures as he himself reviewed them and ruminated them, with closed eyes!

This one also!

A farm-hand was taking back to the stable his unyoked, but not yet unharnessed horses. The fore-parts of the team had already disappeared into the darkness; only their rumps shone in the half-light within the barn-door. Outside, the pole clenched in his fist, the farm-hand, a hardy fellow, wide of shoulder, in shirt sleeves, seen from the back, was bending over slightly toward the right, in the action of holding back his too impatient animals. One could have heard his "hiuho!" or the chatter of his coaxing words, or his imperative oath, but one remembered, above all, the pattern of his gesture so unique, harmonious and almost sublimated, and inseparable from the man himself was that muscular pose.

With the mental image of this gesture, Laurent recreated the scene in all its accessory details. In truth,



it wholly resided in the movement which he had tried to illustrate to Marbol.

Despairing of making himself understood, he dragged the painter by force to the farm where the capital pose had manifested itself. They stood lying in wait toward evening, but after having vainly watched for the model, Laurent inquired for him from the farm people.

They could hardly recognize their equal, or at least one of themselves, from the exalted portrait that he drew of the fellow.

"Oh, yes! It's 'Curly,'" said one of the women with an hypocritical indifference,—for she must have closely known and admired her fellow-workman. "The master dismissed him a week ago, and we don't know where he has hired himself out."

"To have such a mime under one's eyes and discharge him!" cried Laurent with an indignation of which the materialistic laborers understood nothing.

Marbol tried to persuade his friend that they would again find the same attitude, the same practised play of muscles in other subjects of the same type as the unique discharged hand. And, in order to acquiesce in Paridael's mania and compensate him for the deplorable loss, they watched the return of many gangs of workmen. But, at the awaited moment, their appearance, their pose and their awkward gestures were but a parody, a pale counterfeit, an almost stupid and pitiful symbol of the posture of "Curly." Marbol would have been satisfied with them and even took his pad from his pocket in order to note down this characteristic moment of farm-labor, but Laurent would not let him begin the sketch, and, when Marbol teased



him about his exclusiveness, he replied with conviction:

"Laugh all you want, my friend. But I'd have you know that in order to secure for my eyes the voluptuousness and the caress of that young blackguard's gesture of the other day, I'd willingly become a farmer myself, in order to hire that helot. Perhaps he is a bad lot, an intractable character, a dishonest servant, but, though he were a drunkard, a thief and a rake, I'd pardon his vices as little peccadilloes because of his superior plasticity. He and the others whom we have been watching do not lack grace, and I agree with you that their movements are identical. Briefly, it's the same receipt, the same broth; only the marrow-bone is lacking."

"Well, it's a good thing you don't know in what kitchen this marrow-bone, as you call him, has gone to give a relish to the soup!"

"Yes, because I should be capable of engaging him at once."

And, as Marbol began to laugh harder than ever:

"Oh! keep quiet," begged his friend. "If you were really an artist, you would understand that!"

And in returning, downcast and sullen, he did not again open his lips the whole way.

Little by little the poise, the good sense, the wholesome mind of Bergmans displeased him. He began to weary of his friends. He now went so far as to find his inseparable triumvirate too indifferent, too prudent. He reproached the painter with the thickness and the opacity of his pictures, his lack of curiosity and comprehension. The wholesomeness, the luxuriance, the glad optimism of Vyveloy's genius no longer procured him the joy of former days.

His outbursts greatly amused his little circle. They treated their censor like a spoiled child and cared for him as though he were a dear convalescent. Their protective kindness and forbearance, far from calming Laurent, only put him beside himself, and, not succeeding in damaging their serenity, blasted their civility, only to return to them within a few days. They cherished no bitterness toward him, and forgave his thoughtless insults and passionate harangues as being the paradoxes and sophisms of a large heart.

But, haunted by his outlandish ideas, Laurent dreamed of conforming his conduct to them. The moment was coming when he would strip himself of his last prejudices and violate social conventions. His eccentric habits finally wearied the tolerance of his intimates, and, as people who had a reputation to sustain in the world, they hazarded a few observations. One day they had met him accompanied by a couple of picturesque fellows, prowlers on the quays, bad laborers, well modelled, but of a much too excessive originality, to whom, nevertheless, with the best faith in the world, he expected to present them. Having freed themselves in haste from this compromising acquaintance, they were severely taxed with philistinism.

This time Bergmans replied sharply. Paridael was asking too much of them. His jokes were turning sour. To interest himself in folk who worked and suffered; nothing could be finer. But to take a deep interest in blackguards, to rub elbows with criminals and with the riff-raff; that was to behave eccentrically, to say the least! Then, softening, Bergmans tried to show the stray sheep the abyss toward which he was slipping; he reproached him with being out of work, with his solitary life, his dreams, offered him a posi-

tion in his offices, or a place with Daelmans-Deynze.

Paridael refused point blank. The slightest dependence, the least control was as repugnant to him as a chain.

Sometimes, affected by a friendly word, he promised to take to regular habits; he would make an effort to content himself with the commonplace existence of sedate and more sober people; but these good resolutions left him at the first vexation which bourgeois platitudes and self-sufficiency caused him.

The prognostications of Cousin Dobouziez weighed upon him like a malediction; that positive and clear-sighted man had fathomed the future of his exceptional relative.

Laurent began to wish himself irresponsible, to envy the shut-away, criminal or insane, who were not tormented with the worry about daily bread and the struggle for existence. His almost saintly goodness of heart, an hysterical excellence like that of the Franciscans of Assisi, unbridled him and pushed him to the ultimate consequences of fatalism. He believed himself predestined; without will, without faith, without object, he wished to die and sink himself again into the great all, like a defaced coin which the minter puts back into the crucible. After his atoms had been scattered and his elements dispersed, the eternal chemist would again combine them with more profit to creation.

The visit which Laurent paid, at the height of this crisis, to a penitentiary, aggravated his deleterious desires.

"Sick, irresponsible, unfortunate people!" he pleaded, on his return from this excursion, before the politician, the painter and the musician. "People who

stare, who are bewildered, dazzled and aghast with great visionary eyes that understand nothing of life, law or morality,—the weak, the hopeless, lambs that are always shorn, passive instruments, dupes who have jostled every infamy, and remain as candid as children; easy-going folk who would never have killed a fly had not ruffians taken them in; vitiated but not vicious, as greatly torn by life as they are wreckers of life. . . .”

“Are you speaking for yourself?” interrupted Marbol.

“You an artist!” sneered Paridael, without answering his question. “What have you suffered for your art; what have you sacrificed to it? It was there that I met a true artist! And a sincere one, mind you! After having led me from workshop to workshop, the director took me into a model smithy. Imagine three tiers of anvils, as many bellows beating out, with their Aeolian breath, the rhythm of the red dance of the flames; a hundred men, their chests and stomachs protected by leather aprons as inflexible as armor, hairy, bearded, black, strong, their arms bare to the bulging muscles, quickly tapping hammers; the thunder and the temperature of a crater in eruption; a maddening whirl of filings in human sweat; the flash of tests alternating with bursts of flame; and, splashed in sparks, torsos comparable to that in the Vatican.

“Apart from its huge dimensions and more complex apparatus, nothing distinguished this smithy from any other; the magnificent and robust smiths looked like all the other blacksmiths in the world. The activity and the fever of emulation that pervaded this immense hall were neither more nor less edifying than those of a workshop full of free workers, and many a criminologist, versed in the science of Gall and La-



vater, would have been shocked by the faults and the divergences of these almost superhuman athletes.

"Passing between the files of anvils, one of the hammerers especially interested me; a hoary, strapping fellow with a gentle and wistful face, at the most thirty years of age. The director had shown me, in his rooms, admirable pieces of wrought iron, recalling, or rather perpetuating the exquisite ironwork of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

"Here," he said to me, "is the maker of those pieces!" and to the hammerman who did not stop puddling the flaming iron: "Karel, this gentleman has been good enough to find some merit in your slight work." "Not some merit, but the greatest merit," I hurriedly corrected. "Those window-grilles, that fire-gate, the candelabra, the banister are superb, and I heartily congratulate you upon them!" At my convinced tone, and the explicit expression of my praise, his serious face lit up with a pale smile, his tempestuous eyes radiated; he thanked me in a gentle and moved voice; but smile, intonation and look were so poignant that, had I persisted, and touched the same chord, his expression of gratitude would have become a burst of tears. I, too, felt myself as much overwrought as he, and after having furtively touched his callous hands, I moved away quickly, a lump in my throat and a mist before my eyes.

"'And to think,' the director said to me, when we had left the room and I had turned away to hide my emotion, 'that I have placed that hardhitter very nicely with the village farrier. He earned a good salary, and his employer treated him well. Moreover, I had been able to recommend him very highly. He had undergone infinite affliction; the death of his family, carried

off during the last epidemic of typhoid, brought him to desperation, drunkenness, misery and stranded him upon our doorstep. I prided myself upon having reconciled him to life and society. However, didn't he get the notion to suddenly leave his employers and return to our door? Called before me, he begged me to take him back. You cannot imagine under what pretext. That original thought it beneath his dignity to hire out his arms to the village blacksmith, who employed them in rough work, and he believed himself happier in working here as a prisoner at work of his choice, at the craftsmanship undertaken here.

“Naturally, I refused to lend myself to such a singular whim, and thinking that I had demonstrated the absurdity of his proposition, I sent him away, promising him that I would find a workshop more worthy of his talent. He did not once object to my reasons, seemed to submit, but he said goodbye to me in a sarcastic tone quite contrary to his nature.

“Two months after this interview he returned to me, this time escorted by gendarmes in the coach-load of prisoners sent us daily by the judicial authorities: he had had himself admitted not by favor, but by law, well furnished, as a letter of introduction, with a commitment as an incorrigible vagrant. And when he had done his time I consented to keep him on, in order to spare him a second offence. Only don't repeat this story, for if it came to the ears of the Minister, my kindness might be severely judged! What means did I have of treating that devil of an aristocrat differently?”

“Would you believe it, far from blaming him, I sincerely congratulated the official and thanked him for his kindness to one of the only complete artists, of the only true aristocrats—that was my word—that

I had ever met with. . . . Oh! sit down again, Marbol, and you, too, Bergmans; I haven't finished. . . . Our walk ended in a long silence of thought.

"I reproached myself for my pusillanimity in regard to the man whom we left behind in the smithy. I should have embraced that victim of social stupidity and cried to him: 'I understand you, proud wretch. How greatly plausible is your so-called aberration! I share your predilection for this refuge where you can give yourself up to the creative impulse without hindrance, where the person who pays you does not set your conscience and your liberty by the ears. How many artists are pigmies compared to you! Then, also, my good fellow, I divine in you a character too impressionable for you to repatriate yourself among geometrical humanity. A slight swerving would put you without the ban of ostensibly virtuous people. A false step would alienate you forever from those austere equilibrists. You prefer to this hypocritical and rectilinear society your strange equals, your comrades of the hulks. You live without mortification; you create according to your own fancy. That bread which you eat; no competitor will tear away from you, and you still less will steal from your brother in distress. No more struggle for existence, that struggle which finishes by taking all the color out of the artist's soul. No dealers, no exhibitions, no public. Around you poor beings who, without necessarily understanding your work better than acknowledged connoisseurs, excuse and respect your art, your vice, your rare vice, because you, on your part, do not think of wronging their subversive originality.'"

After this vindication of the defaulting and the downtrodden, a fierce argument arose between Lau-



rent and his companions, although the latter did all they could to call off the dogs. These scenes repeated themselves, tearing away each time a shred of their former intimacy, and Laurent ended by no longer seeing his former faithful friends.

He once more plunged himself deeper and deeper into the extreme quarters exemplified by the loves of the crossing-keeper, frequented the haunts of the city boundaries, the cut-throat dives of Looibroek and Doelhof, the slanting streets of the Stone Mill and of Zurenborg, the sight of which had touched his heart, when he was a child, and inspired him with a curiosity blended with anguish and an unhealthy pity; that eccentric district to the east of the city, actual vestibules of the reformatories, waiting room of the prisons, swarming with moral lepers.

He loafed also about the immense region of the Basins, beginning at the former Palais des Hanséates, stripped of its campanile and imperial eagle, and presenting an uninterrupted succession of quadrangular reservoirs, enormous and solid as the arenas inundated for the naumachies of the Cæsars. However, sometimes the boats flocked together in such compact masses that Paridael crossed the docks, dry-footed, as if it were the deck of a boat. Others were being built, larger, deeper, without any delay. Hardly opened, they were already insufficient for the merchant fleets that met there from the four corners of the earth, and anew the metropolis, glorious Messaline of commerce, insatiable and unsatiated, enlarged her bosom to receive these arks of abundance, and, always spurred forward, contested in expansion and in vigor with her copious tributaries.

And navvies from the Polder incessantly struggled



to dig a bed that would fit her lovers, for the queen of the Scheldt.

But, though they were exacting, at least these loves were fecund.

Around each basin, the whole length of the quays, cranes and hoists driven by water power and steam, and tended by gangs of Herculean dockers stretched far and wide. As alarming as the ballistic engines and siege machines invented long ago by Gianibelli, the Antwerpian Archimedes, to shatter to bits and sink the galleons of Farnese, their immoderate arms brandishing a perpetual threat toward heaven, they no longer tore ships from their element, but, after having plunged their hooks, like hands armed with forceps, into the depths of the hold, they hoisted out, without too much grinding of chains or teeth, the cargoes stowed away in these wombs perpetually in travail.

Communicating with the docks and the roadstead by means of powerful locks provided with gang-planks and revolving bridges, were lined the dry-docks, like convalescent homes next to maternity hospitals. There all sick and wounded ships were recruited. A swarm of operators, calkers and painters, took charge of the damaged boat, skinned it, repaired it, plated it, paved it, painted it freshly; and the reverberations of hammers, mallets and picks drowned the wailing of the cranes, and the whistle of sirens and the crash of cartage.

Then, beyond the hospital, the pound and the morgue. Waste fields where carcasses of ships, lying upon their sides, eaten up with sea-wrack, cracked, with the air of incurable or stranded whales, waited for the wrecker, or finished by rotting like carrion among the refuse and minor wrecks.

Then he pushed his exploration farther on. He

came to the warehouses for inflammable substances. Storehouses of petroleum and naphtha immersed like islets in marshy flats. Here the industry of the great city had halted for the time being. Barring the entrance to the country toward Austruweel rose the glacis of the old Citadelle du Nord, a discarded fortress, a bulky and antiquated rampart, a decayed bugbear, a wretched poultry-yard of which the utilitarian city had obtained the cession and which she was hurrying to sap in order to convert it, like her other annexations, into docks, basins, dry-docks and warehouses. Ah! why could she not do the same with all the other ramparts and intrenchments with which they persisted in surrounding her! For the city, essentially mercantile, reluctantly suffered her rôle of fortified town, although she had been predestined to it from her origin, by the Roman fort, her cradle, of which vestiges can still be seen today and whose despoiled and travestied poetry awaits its cavalier, as in the early days Elsa of Brabant, countess of Antwerp, conjured up the apparition of Lohengrin, her champion, from the dazzling track of the fatal swan.

Having in her heart a last filial scruple, instead of tearing down the ancient donjon, Antwerp contented itself with scoffing at it by flanking it with two galleries as shabby as the practicable bridges in a comic opera.

But she did not manifest even such debatable attentions to more recent fortresses.

She cursed as a detestable slavery the belt of fortifications which her princes consented to demolish from century to century only to transport them further out and make them inexpugnable.

The maid of Antwerp, more haughty than belli-

cose, would gladly trample beneath her feet the crenelated crown that she had been forced to wear.

History does not hesitate to justify the repugnance of the metropolis for this martial garb. Instead of preserving her, these walls and ramparts had always attracted the worst scourges toward her. Besieged for months, bombarded, then forced, invaded, pillaged, sacked, put to fire and sword, devastated from cellar to roof by foreign soldiery, notably during the Spanish Fury, so well named, she was nigh to never again recovering from it, to never rising from her ashes, but to disappearing with her fortune. But, thanks to her faithful Scheldt, which for her took the place of Pactolus and the fountain of youth, she was reborn each time more beautiful, more desirable, and recovered her ravished fortune tenfold. As she grew richer, however, she grew more surly and more selfish. Did she have a presentiment of fresh disasters? She spread out so insolent a luxury, and so much misery surrounded it! And the more her commerce flourished, the more inveterate became her hatred of these inauspicious fortifications, which not only thwarted her growth, but destined her, in case of war, to be the theater of desperate struggles and supreme disasters.

Her ramparts charged with cannon and her barracks crammed with soldiers continually evoked the spectre of ruin and death before these Cræsus, as insolent as they were cowardly. And the city came to envelop in the same animadversion the bastions that strangled her and the idle, parasitic garrison that seemed to insult her activity, and with whom she vied even in patriotic courage. In the same way Carthage used to detest her mercenaries.

The manner in which the army was recruited did not

contribute to elevating it in the eyes of the oligarchs. It was composed, for the major part, only of poor devils and vagabonds; of conscripts and paid volunteers. But millionaires brought up in the cult of money recognized no difference between poverty and vagabondage. The army had good reason to think the garrison of Antwerp the most inhospitable. Soldiers sent into these unsympathetic surroundings soon presented a constrained expression. In the street they instinctively effaced themselves and ceded the right of way to the bourgeoisie. They wore, not the uniform of warriors, but the livery of pariahs. Instead of representing an army, of emanating from the patriotism of a people and incarnating the best of its blood and youth, they were conscious of their position of pensioners.

The people of Antwerp confused these soldiers of a neutral country with indigents succored by public charity, with the inhabitants of orphan asylums and almshouses.

And, by a strange anomaly, the prejudice of the bourgeoisie of Antwerp against the soldier blinded the common people, even those who intended serving or had served, and fathers whose sons were or were to become soldiers.

It was no longer a question of class hatred, but of a true incompatibility of habits, of an historic hatred that Antwerpians imbibe, as if from a tradition inherent in the air they breathed, or the milk with which they were suckled.

In roadside inns, working women often refused to dance with soldiers. In other lands, in the eyes of the women military uniform lends an irresistible smartness to any gallant; here it is a blot upon the most



attractive cavalier. When they knew themselves to be in the majority, the rebuffed soldiers did not swallow the insult, but, touched to the quick, raised their voices, took the offensive, turned the ball topsy-turvy, took the first weapons that came to hand and revenged themselves upon the men for their doxies' scorn. Nearly every week a brawl broke out between civilians and soldiers, especially in the ill-famed blocks of houses bordering the barracks of Berchem and Borgerhout. This antagonism between civilian and soldier raged even outside the belt of fortifications, in the country about Antwerp. Unfortunate was the stranger who travelled back alone in the evening to one of the outlying forts. Ambushed peasants fell upon him, peppered him with blows, beat him unmercifully and dragged him along the road. This ambushade called forth a frightful reprisal. On the next furlough, the victim's brothers in arms descended in force upon the village, and if they could not succeed in laying hands upon the guilty, invaded the first cabaret in their path, broke up the furniture, smashed the glasses, battered in the heads of casks, slashed the drinkers and abused the women. It came to pass that whole streets of Berchem were delivered up to the excesses of these madmen. At their approach the inhabitants immured themselves under lock and key. Drunk with rage and liquor, the madmen buried their swords in doors and shutters and did not leave a single window unbroken.

The next day the colonel vainly consigned the regiment to barracks, and forbid them thenceforth the privilege of entering the dives of the neighborhood; after these night attacks the hatred continued to smoulder, latent and dull, and at the next opportunity would break out in fresh and murderous brawls.

Naturally, Laurent, in the majority of cases, took sides with the soldiers, provoked beyond endurance by the butchers and slaughterers of the Stone Mill.

He made friends, above all, with the newcomers, the novices, those who were most rebuffed and out of their element. For they suffered not only the affronts of the bourgeoisie, but also served as butts for their seniors in service. Butts for butts, they were, for the most part, unsophisticated and massive peasant literally uprooted from their villages in the Campine.

Laurent followed the poor conscripts from those grey afternoons when lots were drawn and the militia-board met, when, muddied up to their loins, they fidgeted and bellowed in the mud and the mist of the streets, their caps decorated with red ribbons and colored papers, with the falsely foppish air of cattle, their eyes humid and vacant, arm in arm, beating out extravagant quadrilles.

Then he saw before his eyes these falsely joyous fellows during the first few days in barracks; instructors chosen from among the substitutes abused and molested these peasants, bewildered to the point of no longer being able to tell their name or that of their village. And the tortures to which they were put in the dormitories! Then their walks in the street, in their new uniforms, in coteries made up of men from the same district, coming together like chicks from the same litter; their admiring halts in front of shop-windows; their rocking gait, their rustic awkwardness; their vaguely troubled and begging air of lost dogs; the puerile travesty of a soldier accommodating himself badly to the handling of his weapons and stress-

ing the contrast between his muscular body and his placid, frank face.

Perhaps, real Samaritan that he was, Laurent would have preferred, to the passive and submissive soldier, deserters, the refractory, even the disgraced who were driven from the army and punished with the yellow badge.

In memory of the poignant enigma between Beveren and Calloo he harbored and concealed for a week, time enough to throw the gendarmes off the scent, and procure him enough money to leave the country, a deserter who had escaped punishment, an inoffensive and bewildered conscript who had been condemned, for a trifle, to stagnate in a fort in the marshes, and young and brave as he was, to endure the despotism of a disgraced officer. At the hour for fatigue duty he had upset his wheelbarrow, pitched away his mattock, and taken to flight under the eyes of the guard who aimed at him. He even told Laurent that he hoped less for freedom than for death. And as all the muskets discharged without touching him, he thought the clumsiness of the sentinels, his brother peasants, had been in the nature of mercy.

## V

### THE RUNNERS

LAURENT even began to make friends with the river-pirates, fresh water sharks, the blackguards or runners whom honest Tilbak had held at a distance, models whom the painter Marbol repudiated as too tainted.

A peculiarly local breed, the majority of whom first saw the light of day, or whatever took its place, in little waterside alleys, at the back of some fish-factor's shop, or beneath the roof of some cosmopolitan *herberge*. Blind alleys and culs-de-sac in which these brats swarmed and multiplied to such an extent that one would have thought the dealers in eels and mussels as prolific as their merchandise. Marsh fever and contagious diseases swept away whole litters of these urchins, the heavy trucks of the Nations ran over at least a couple of them each week; but the next day they again swarmed in crowds as compact as those of the day before. Legitimate unions between fishermen and fishwives did not always suffice to foul the floors of these hovels with this human seaweed. Loves as fleeting and as capricious as those of plants presided over the propagation of the species. The sons of a blonde servant like the blonde Germanie inherited their lemon-colored complexions and black eyelashes from their father, an Italian helmsman stranded overnight in the



house of the German lodgings-keeper, the *baes* of that Gretchen. These fat, dumpy children of an apparently northern complexion sprang from the furtive crossing of a Dutch harbor-pilot and a boarder in a Spanish *posada*.

The feverish, mercenary atmosphere of the harbor emancipated this progeny of sailors and girls at an early age. They would avenge themselves upon their three dozen fathers by fleecing the poor devils of sailors as best they might.

The suspicious nature of their business complicated their indeterminate origin. Their lives flowed with the tide of the river. By dint of filling their eyes with lubricating visions, the water communicated its power, its untoward magnetism, to their eyes. Muscular, but graceful, sly, but daring, adroit as Florentine *bravi*, they were like nixies with alluring voices, greedy fangs and sharp talons. They spoke, as if intuitively, a dozen languages and as many dialects, each one with the local accent, heightening it with a popular raciness, with a slangy timbre with which they spiced their own patois and by which they could be distinguished from their comrades of other great ports.

Sprung from all races, their disparities harmonized and amalgamated in such a way as to create an autochthonous physiognomy, to brand them with a trademark without analogue, with an indelible and vigorous seal of the land.

Laurent highly valued their feline elegance, their affected indolence. This species of the Antwerpian people quintessentialized the vices and even the perfections of the great city.

Finally, Paridael contracted their mannerisms, their twisting walk, their habit of stretching, their stuffed

and slow locution. The raciness of this underworld of the flourishing metropolis seasoned his life, for so long past merely insipid. He adapted himself to his surroundings. On certain days he clad himself in old leather breeches and mangy coat, opened his old wide-skirted overcoat above his short docker's blouse, donned a sailor's cap with a saucy peak, or the pear-shaped silk balloon dear to rural corn-chandlers, or a picaresque wide-brimmed felt, or a comically shaped straw.

Clad in this topical rig he lounged about, disordered, untidy, shuffling his feet along, knocking one shoe against the other. Leaning against the wall of some warehouse, his cheek swollen with a quid, his arms bare, he caressed his biceps with the air of an itinerant tumbler, or, with his hand on the flap of his trousers, pulled up his perpetually falling socks with a cynical gesture, or, looking for some blackguardism, mused and gazed for hours at the stream of passers-by.

Fights were no longer distasteful to him; he scuffled in the streets with a comrade, suffered and distributed blows at random, he provoked and continued scraps that ended in tumbles head over heels. When he came out of these tourneys one would have taken him for the muddy carter whom he had just been rolling about in the gutter.

During the day the runners usually went their own ways. Stretched out upon a pile of bales, upon a light truck, upon a heap of boards or in the bottom of a launch, they slept with one eye open. Toward dusk the decks were suddenly cleared for action, and they came together, as if by scent or instinct, at the same gathering places. Squatting down, looking like a crop of mushrooms sprouting on a misty and dark night,

they held veritable sabbaths, discussed some plunder, made up marauding parties, made brutal wagers, concocted crimes, frightened by their loose talk and their evasions the wenches that tacked about in their seas.

A swarm of bad flies, of invisible insects seemed to simultaneously sting the whole licentious tribe, and then, the whole length of the river and the canals, under the warehouses, amidst the piles of merchandise, there were furious races, pillages like those of the *guerilleros*, formidable filibusters that excited the police and threw them into consternation.

If he did not pass the night in the open air, Laurent lay with criminals of all species, in the dives at Schelleke of Coude Tortu, of the Impasse de Glaive or of the Montagne d'Or. Here he had to pay for his night's lodging in advance.

He stumbled, at the mercy of a worm-eaten and blistering staircase, into an attic hung with filthy bedding suspended like hammocks. The frequenters of the place threw themselves down with little ceremony, haphazard, often completely dressed, without bothering about their neighbors, ages and sexes confused, back to back, stomach to stomach, top to bottom, swarming with vermin, incontinent. This promiscuity determined almost unconscious and somnabulistic copulations, amorous mistakes, often, also, possessions spiced with carnage, scenes of jealousy and rivalry prolonging themselves until cock-crow. And, on these nights charged with ozone, desires crackled like will-o'-the-wisps above a peat-bog. Laurent could hear the rustle and the murmur of panting lips. Bargains were being struck around him, fatal initiations were consummated by the favor of the darkness. Where



did reality commence, and nightmare end? The noctambulists turned each other upside down, fighting with arms and legs, picked themselves up in positions like those of the Last Judgment or Fall of the Angels, until, when the tempest of unforgettable shrieking was at its height, a more frightful and more strident clamor than any of the others tore the roomfull of accomplices with a single jump from their anticipated hell.

Every night the police patrolled these cloacas, the atmosphere of which would have choked a sewer cleaner. From time to time they made a haul, but every night managed a partial pruning.

Preceded by the *baes*, the policeman shoved the light of the dark lantern beneath the noses of the sleepers. His choice having been made, he shook the second offender, invited him almost cordially to rise, dress and leave. The man obeyed, dully, grumbling like a gagged bear. This formality was renewed so frequently that the others hardly opened their eyes, or, after having bidden their comrade and his officer a joking "Pleasant trip!" fell back asleep without accordng the scoop any further attention. Tomorrow it would be their turn. And then, there were dead seasons for their business, just like any other. And, when they were out of work, they might just as well pass their days in the workhouse or in the free hotel of the Rue des Béguines. . . .

At daybreak, the lodging-house keeper came to the door of the dormitory, and having gargarized with a cough and a spit, he called out in the professional and somewhat nasal voice of an auctioneer carrying on a sale:

"Up with you, boys! One . . . two . . . three!"  
Then, without further warning, he took down the



straps that held up their pallets, and, at the risk of breaking up the mouldy boards of the floor, tumbled the mass of sleepers brutally out on the floor.

Accustomed to listening to cases in the police-court, whiling away hours with second-offenders and apprentice-criminals who allured him with tales of the exploits of their comrades, delighting in contact with rubbish impregnated with the odor of adventure, Paridael owed it to a miracle that he was not implicated in some affair or other carried off by these footpads who terrorized the district.

He knew more than one member of the celebrated bands established in the blind alleys of populous suburbs; at Stuivenberg, at Doelhof, at Roggeveld and Kerkeveld. The police watched him and took him for an eccentric, a cracked, inoffensive idiot. They watched him more carefully than had been their wont because of his shameless friendship with the cream of old offenders; the Herring, Tailless, Flower o' the Sewer.

He also had had a nickname bestowed upon him. It was not the first; formerly, in his own set, Bédard, Saint-Fardier, Félicité and even Regina had affected to see nothing but the too rosy color of his cheeks, and had called him the Peasant. The people among whom he now lived, on the other hand, noticed the whiteness and the smallness of his hands, the arch of his feminine foot, the fineness of his build; and for the full-breasted receivers of stolen goods, for the big-fisted and solidly built rogues, he was the *Jonker*, the Squireen.

How had he been able to make himself loved by all these apaches, instead of being found one morning stabbed and gutted in some back yard, or dragged out

of the silt of the Basins, his stomach already swarming with eels?

He excited, on the contrary, among this rabble a sort of superstitious respect and deferential sympathy. They had, moreover, tried him out, and he had come through because of his discretion. The spirit of contumacy brought together the declassed youth and those without the pale of the law.

To flatter and tickle their instinct of combativeness, to justify their life on the fringe of society in their own eyes, to stretch their riotous feelings, to excite their red-blooded bodies to rape, pillage and murderous frenzy, he told them about his reading, during calm hours, transposed Shakespeare for their understanding; Othello, Macbeth, King Lear, but especially the perpetual homicides of the Wars of the Roses, kings and queens of sinful days, stags with horns always gory, spotted with heroism.

More than once, leaving one of these readings, awakened by the vehement acclamation, the quivering of their gladitorial bodies, the fluid of these souls as irresponsible as nature herself, it seemed to him that his dream had just poured itself into reality.

It was among the young runners that the pigeon breeders recruited their youths on the Sundays when races were held. It befell Laurent to enter these relays and, clutching between his teeth the corner of the bag that held the winning dove, to run barefoot, his limbs as elastic as those of a hero of the palæstra.

He discovered the photographer charged by the courts with perpetuating the images of criminals at the issue of their trials, and procured for himself proofs of the entire collection. He became absorbed, with a bitter joy, in the contemplation of that gallery

of well known "trouble-bourgeoises" and compared them, without prejudice, with bronze, marble and even with august folk in the flesh. In default of the golden letters illustrating the monuments of civic gratitude, the name of the prisoner gleamed in white letters on the breast of each portrait. This inscription seemed to pillory and tattoo with a red-hot iron even the poor effigy of the subject. On the back of the card figured the description, the sobriquet, the place of birth, the number of the record, and the term of commitment.

Laurent was amused at the decoys and the deceptions in these faces. Certain of the satyr-like masks would have been equally becoming to the most venerated of magistrates and to the chastest of chaste youths.

Following an attack upon a young farm-girl by six peasants from Poudlerlée, he frequently went to the commonplace cabaret from which the scamps had rushed to gratify their lust. He was fond of the dilapidated road with its radish-beds, its mangy woods, its hillocks, its border of slender trees barked and notched, without doubt by the same Jacks-of-all-trades who occasionally set upon a less passive victim.

Thanks to his album of patibulary celebrities he recognized one of the heroes of this escapade in a young farmhand of eighteen, condemned by the Court of Assizes, but later freed by the royal pardon. If the excellent likeness of the photograph of this jail-bird, one of those to which Paridael determinedly returned, had disconcerted him by the almost seraphic candor of its features, how much more inoffensive did he appear in flesh and bone! There was nothing sinister or even suspicious in the symbol of his soul. A



little peasant, rosy and neat, brawny, with a free and easy figure, great, pale, limpid, blue eyes, his cheeks sprinkled with a light down, a fairly large nose with refined nostrils, a wilful mouth, fine blond hair parted at one side,—a rebellious tuft bristling above the ear;—dressed in a coat and breeches of reddish corduroy, shod in cowherd's boots, a red silk kerchief knotted like a cord around his neck; the awkward manner of a choir-boy surprised while stealing apples.

Laurent bought him a drink and made him tell the details of the crime, relishing the contrast between the horrible adventure and the candid air of the ravisher. That sorrowful, sweet voice of a penitent at confession gave him gooseflesh. The curious fellow entered upon the most bestial details without a pang, without a single contraction in his throat, as if he were reciting the plaint of some one else, and not himself, and concluded thus:

“The strangest thing was that, the affair being over, we did not dare leave each other, my comrades and I. And, nevertheless, their voices made me ill. Willeki having proposed to return there and finish the wretched girl off, so as to close her mouth for good, I scampered away at full tilt. . . . A dog was howling to wake the dead. ‘It’s Lamme Taplaar’s Spitz,’ I said to myself. In the distance, between the trees and above the moor, the city lights outlined the immense dome of a church, luminous against the black sky. And this thought of the too close city did not bring to my mind any fear of the police. A fine drizzle was falling. My head was on fire, my temples throbbing; I kept in my nose, in my clothes, beneath my nails an odor of flesh and of butchery that drove me sick as does the smell of food after a gorge. I slept excel-



lently that night, and dreamed of the great white church against the sky. . . .”

The chances of birth, education, and of manners, as well as the inconsistency of nature offered Paridael many comparisons for his discouraging philosophy.

Before a building under construction he became indignant at seeing plastic and decorative youths breaking their backs and wearing themselves out as plasterers and mason's assistants in order to erect a palace for some gouty old reprobate. The owner conferred phlegmatically with the architect and the obsequious builder, without according the slightest attention to the workmen who were barely able to carry their loads. But as much as the rich man reeked with self-sufficiency, showed himself to be grotesque and vulgar, so much did these artisans, trampled down and oppressed though they were, display a simplicity and courage, carrying their coarse clothes with fine grace.

And Laurent imagined the mason's assistant brought up after the fashion of rich people, dressed like an English "swell" or "masher," hurried into the wholesome and eurythmic fatigue of sports, and his superiority, thus transformed, over the young Saint-Fardiens and the weak, undersized striplings of their group. Often the whim seized him to empty his purse into the hands of an apprentice and say: "Here, you fool, save your strength, preserve your youth, and fresh face, laze, dream, love, abandon yourself!"

From his youth, at the house of the Dobouziez', he had condemned unhealthy arts, too heavy and too exclusive labor, work that brought only one side of the body into play, operations depending upon an unchangeable motion of the back or shoulder, the im-

placably repeated effort of the same muscular agents. He cursed the workshops that were creating monsters, the manufactories, the blast furnaces, the coal mines in which hordes of young men were defaced, injured, spoiled. And he cherished the idea of an Utopia, dreamed of a new and frankly pagan rebirth in which the cult of the nude, free and absolute, would flower again, the adoration of expressive bodies and unveiled flesh. Why could he not surround himself with those who had been freed from labor, with a court of plastic human figures? Instead of statues and pictures, he would have collected, or rather selected, human masterpieces. And in his enthusiasm for physical beauty, he blasphemed these words of Genesis: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Moral leprosy and physical deformity had no other origin. The law of Darwin was confirming that of Jehovah.

Then, by a strange contradiction, he began to acknowledge the imperious and tragic charm of these days. His contemporaries offered a beauty that was characteristic and psychic, and, if not as regular, at least more infinitely picturesque and less sculptural than that of bygone generations. He reconciled the two kinds of beauty, associated the nude of the past and the costume of the present, modernized the antique, created Antinous in the knitted vest of a bargeman, Venuses togged out like cigar-girls, Bacchantes as coffee-sorters and crossing-sweepers, Hercules' as butcher's boys and market-porters. Mercury incarnated himself in a runner with a finely formed back and tapering calves like those of the bronze statue of Giovanni da Bologna; Apollo put on the uniform of a fugleman; Bacchus the giver of wine had as his double an incorrigible drinker. A gang of navvies at work, a

crew of pavers, plump and bending over their toil, on the curb of a street, reminded him of companies of discus throwers exercising in the palæstra, and since his return from the banks of the Scheldt, he could imagine no bas-relief with a more perfect rhythm than that of the movement of a brigade of the Nations.

On Sundays and Mondays Paridael danced, until break of day, in the dives of the quarters made dramatic by riots between soldiers and people, or in the *musicos* of the Quartier des Bateliers, where runners and sea-faring folk gathered.

And what dances they were! What loures, what bourees, what dizzy shindys accompanied by a triangle, a clarinet and an accordeon! The vulgar debauchery of these sprightly fellows; their figured contortions, their swift, sudden leaps into the air, the dull twistings of their bodies, the firing and galvanic knitting of their muscles!

A hole in the bellows of the accordion brought about a lamentable flight of melody, and at each pressure upon the punctured note, the sound escaped in a moribund wail.

During the pause between two dances, while the couples walked about and paid into the hands of the "*tenancier*" their money for these dances, the watering pot of one of the waiters laid the dust by drawing wet festoons upon the floor.

Then the clarinets started up again, the dancers returned to the floor, and boots and slippers again began to stamp.

Middle-aged street-walkers, their cheeks fiery with paint, condescended to skip about with calker's apprentices shining with white resin and pitch, their breeches stuffed into their stockings, who jostled eag-



erly against these matrons clad in percaline or plaid satin evening dresses.

In the promenade around the dancing floor good-humored old sea-dogs, sprightly cabin-boys, fishermen smelling of sea-weed and fish-gall, sat at tables, tipping and making the women who straggled about drink out of their glasses, calling them and despotically drawing them down on their laps.

Sea-folk were meeting lightermen, the bosses of *beurts* and their cabin-boys, less sunburnt, less chapped, rosier, immature, their ears projecting and pierced with silver rings.

In the swirl of dust, of sweat and tobacco as acrid and as black as peat, the forms of the dancers darkened or emerged in fragments. Hats, caps, *suroits* or tarred *zuidwesters*, curly heads came to the surface of the heavy cloud.

By the aid of a gleam of light, when the entrance or the exit of a couple wafted a momentary draft through the hall, one could see blue jerseys as close-fitting as tights, oil-skins with large collars, bare, full-breasted bosoms, tight-fitting breeches, a herding of haunches and hips, a blowing about of short skirts, fishing boots, tight stockings showing through their light meshes the rose of a more or less firm thigh. It was a skirmish of heads close together; lips meeting avidly; eyes darting baiting gleams; sighs of languor, ticking laughs, embraces, insinuating movements of the knee, bursts of passion badly restrained. . . .

On the morning after these wild nights, Paridael, greedy for air that could be breathed, hurried to meet at Doel his gang of comrades, the river-pirates.

Quarantine was held at Doel. The service-launch met all the boats coming up the Scheldt, the doctor



looked over clearance papers and health-billets, and boats coming from the Orient or from Spain, where cholera reigned like a King of Dahomey, were forced to anchor there for a week, the old Fort Fred-eric.

Already five boats were stationed there, motionless, sullen Leviathans, their fires out, their steam cut off, their smokestacks despoiled of their long banners of smoke. They flew the sinister yellow flag which cut them off, temporarily, from society, the only one which kept at a distance even the runners, who, however, were difficult to discourage.

But the pleasure was only deferred; it would be sufficient for the infected boats or those only under observation to finish their term of quarantine and draw in the sulphurous flag, for the swarm of ruffians who had been lying in wait for them, as a cat watches a bird upon which he cannot get his claws, and who had been made more avid for the prey by their long wait, to fall upon them with the inevitable despotism of a new scourge.

Until then, in order to keep themselves upon the alert, the runners had cast their choice upon *The Dolphin*, a great Australian three-master just in from the Dutch East Indies and Indo-China. A pilot-boat, profiting by the high tide, had been towing her up from Flushing to Antwerp and she was due to pass Doel at three in the afternoon.

While waiting for the promised ship to rise, from the direction of Bats, above the Polders, our scoundrels flung themselves down upon the grassy dike, behind and below which sank the placid village which they terrorized, like a descent of the Normans in the year one thousand.

Their presence at Doel added a further unwholesome charm to the lazaretto-like atmosphere that for the last month had been hovering above these stolid boatmen, proof against all epidemics. Oh, the cemetery of fishermen and castaways in which they had recently interred four victims of cholera!

The deans of the worthy brotherhood, old stagers and dreadful, hairy fellows, mingled with their worthy apprentices. Under the large peaks of their caps the latter showed crop-eared or curly heads, mischievous, strangely prepossessing, but vicious, deflowered by blows of the lash and by debauchery. Runaway sailors, pseudo-pilots, several of them not yet over the effects of a night of debauchery, were dozing, their haunches in the air, their hands clasped under their necks. Others were lying on their backs, their weight upon their elbows, their chins in their hands, in the pose of ambushed sphynxes or malevolent, lurking rocks.

Winking and blinking their eyes, they gazed at the horizon and seemed to charm the yellow-flagged boats into immobility.

From time to time, to ease their impatience, the runners would jump to their feet, yawn, stretch, shake their legs, regretfully and slowly practice a few wrestler's grips, run a few steps, then fall back little by little into their expectant immobility.

There were a few restless ones among them who, like wasps, teased and set upon the sleepers, or paddled about barefoot in the mud and came out shod with a black cothurnus.

But one of the lookouts had spied the schooner! A truce to all laziness and gaping! At the sight of their prey they thought of nothing but their game, they

kicked the sleepers, ran to the little creek where they had stored their canoes, threw in their decoys and provisions, bent to the oars and set about making for the river. A critical operation, for the creek was narrow, the boats touched each other, and in their stormy selfishness each one wanted to push out before the others. All of them bustled and struggled at the same time, each determined not to cede the path to his neighbor and rival.

Then, a brawl, invectives, a scuffle. To arrive there first, a runner would throw aside not only a comrade's boat, but the comrade himself. Moreover, it was no longer a question of friendship; the instinct of greed came to the fore, and friends who had just been eating from the same plate and drinking from the same bottle glared at each other as though they wished to tear each other to pieces.

But profiting by this squabble, which was threatening to turn into a naval engagement, one boat, then another, then a third, manned by more watchful lads, gently squirmed between the antagonists and were craftily making for the open river.

At this sight, the quarrellers suspended hostilities, and the bulk of the fleet detached itself from the shore.

The laggards spurted every oar, silent, worried, swallowing their envious spite, bent upon surpassing their competitors at all costs, meditating windfalls and treacherous blows.

They manœuvred so well that they overtook their forerunners.

And now they played a waiting game; an equal force and energy seemed to animate all of them; no single crew was gaining noticeably on the others. Their panting breathing kept time with the rhythm of their



rowing; they bent backward and forward spasmodically, the tholes moaned at each stroke of the oars, and the water dropping from the blades dragged over the surface of the water a trail of carbuncles.

From the vessel, the point aimed at by this passionate regatta, they had seen the coming of this flotilla which, from a distance, looked like a bank of migratory fish, so compact and close-formed was it. A crowd hurried to the deck. The captain and the crew suspected and smelled in these devilish rowers emissaries from the shopkeepers and purveyors of the port.

The captain, for whom this was not a first encounter with these landsharks, changed color and commenced to swear like a devil. The sailors, although they had plenty of ground for bitterness against the race, pretended anger, but only grumbled with their lips; they were intrigued by the idea of the pleasures, paid for at usurious rates, but so copious and so intense withal, procured for them by these middlemen.

At a cable's length from the boat the first canoes hailed the captain, who greeted their overtures with a recrudescence of oaths and even threatened, if they did not decamp quickly, to shoot them like a flock of wild ducks. But the runners, incomparable dodgers, possessed their maritime code. They avoided its penalties as adroitly as they shunned the rapids and shoals of the Scheldt. The commands of the Englishman were pure rhodomontade! He would take care not to get into a nasty scrape. No Belgian law protected him from having his boat invested by victualer's clerks.

Thus, strong in the connivance of the law, the rascals pretended a wheedling conciliation in proportion as the raging man hurled them, in default of other shot, the largest projectiles from his arsenal of oaths.



While this was going on, other crews, dropping their oars to use grappling-hooks, grappled the stern of the ship, climbed hand over hand to the deck, and crowded there before the captain had come to the end of his chaplet of imprecations.

The crew no longer struggled, or only paid slight attention to their orders. In truth, the sailors covenanted with the invaders. The approach to port had softened these hardy fellows, discipline had been relaxed; they were as puerile and distracted as school-boys on the eve of vacation. From the mouth of the Scheldt, in the less biting wind that blew from the land, these prisoners had sniffed the bouquet of future liberties and noisily sniffed the odor of the hospitable brothel.

Far from bearing a grudge against these wily pilots who flung themselves at their necks only to fleece them anew by exploiting the sudden pangs of their passions, the good-natured fellows welcomed them as heralds of approaching blow-outs and relaxations.

No less than thirty boats, each one manned by two or three runners, clung to the carcass of *The Dolphin* with the ineluctable stubbornness of an octopus. While the sailors organized a show of resistance, pushing the invaders lightly off to the larboard, the latter were boarding them from the starboard. Pushed back from the stern, the rascals threw themselves aft, where, massing together for a single stroke, they began mounting upon each other's shoulders.

One climbed upon the shoulders or sat upon the head of another, who balanced all his weight upon the shoulder-blades of a third. The bottom man supported the weight of another comrade, upon whom a fifth had just perched, and so it kept up. The men at the

bottom whined, panted, snorted, begged them to hurry, exhausted themselves; the men on top romped and joked; heels threatened to beat in jaw-bones, hands knotted themselves into the hair, sweaters tore with a sharp rip, eyes were blinded by thighs and hips, and thus agglutinated, tumbling over each other, they called to mind the free, fine fellows of the kermesses, who climbed one atop the other until the highest man could fetch down, for the glory of all, the prizes on an inaccessible greasy mast. At each oscillation of the boat, which was continuing to plunge along, the human pyramid threatened to crumble into the river; the frail canoe upon which the whole structure rested risked capsizing with its whole cargo.

The temerity of the runners stupefied the captain himself, and his contempt for this riff-raff changed into the inexpressible admiration that every Anglo-Saxon has for dare-devil exploits.

Courage! One more effort and they are masters of the place!

After boarding her the first thing to do was to share the spoils. A delicate partition, for a hundred birds of prey could be counted for every twenty or thirty souls manning the schooner. Harassed, pulled from every quarter, called in all languages and from all sides at the same time, the sailors did not know who to listen to. The deck took on the appearance of a stock-exchange. From group to group the value represented by each head of the crew was being debated. The veterans intimidated the weak and the novices; crafty ones forced the boobys to give place. Some of the runners began to retreat. But the majority quarrelled vigorously and bitterly; the talk grew livelier and became diatribe. Teeth were shown, fists clenched,

foxes became wolves. The altercations of the shore began all over again; more envenomed by reason of having been deferred, they were now being decided for good. A single hand-to-hand scuffle was enough to commence a general brawl. They cuffed each other, took each other by the throat, knocked each other down, snatched at each other like mastiffs, fought tooth and nail, and, if they thought themselves worsted, resorted to underhand blows.

The sailors were careful not to interfere in these passages at arms of which they represented the object. Moreover, they were too crafty to thwart this settlement of accounts. They made a circle about the fighters, passive, scared, judging the outcome. Their booty would belong to the victors. These ferocious struggles unloosed by the petty tradesmen flattered, perhaps, the great prodigals who were bound to melt their last yellow-boys in some furnace or other. A black eye, a cut lip, a tooth knocked out, a few cuts and contusions decided the victory. Sprawled out, the victor's knee resting heavily upon their chests, a few gave up the struggle before being utterly worsted. They pitifully rushed back into their boats and beat toward Doel, but followed *The Dolphin* from a distance and pursued their lucky competitors with jeers.

Now these latter were cooling off, stanching the blood from their wounds, repairing the ruins and the breeches in their accoutrement and beneath the buccaneer, heroic in his hour, there appeared the sordid trafficker, the cash-box trickster.

They fell back upon the sailors just as, after a decisive battle between two troops of ants, the victors



hurry to carry off the largest green-flies of the conquered.

Baskets of food, packages of tobacco, boxes of cigars, plugs of cavendish, and above all casks of liquor, beer, wine, whisky, gaseous imitation champagne, Bordeaux more or less adulterated and doctored with alcohol, spiced and peppered so as to take the jaw-bone off a bull, emerged and bubbled up as if by magic from the mysterious hiding places where the fighters had concealed them. The battle-field became a market-place, and the carnage a bivouac. Corks leaped up and bung-holes perforated the casks. Case after case was tapped, mugs and glasses refilled, and the sailors began to respond to the advances of their insinuating captors. The foul-mouthed ruffians became demure and almost mincing.

The officers contented themselves with supervising the execution of the necessary manœuvres, and to be certain, put their own hands to the job. And gradually the ambient languor won them.

"Oh! let's hurry and finish the dull and changeless work as quickly as we can, and strip off our duties with our uniforms; humanize ourselves, yes, even make ourselves animals! And while we are waiting, why not taste the refreshments that these ruffians have brought us? For the last three weeks, under the pretext that it was brandy, the steward has been serving us only slops, and our stomachs reject sea-biscuit, and salted and preserved meat!"

Thus monologued the officers, as they paced the deck. The austere captain himself felt weaker and more indulgent than was his wont.

A runner divined this feeling, for he approached the captain, and with a coaxing gesture, poured him out a



bumper of the sparkling mixture: "A glass of champagne, Captain!" The sea-wolf looked the brazen fellow through and through, ready to box his ears, but the irritated oath expired between the wisps of his grey mustache, ventured a supercilious grin, and, tantalized, accepted the glass, drained it at a single gulp, smacked his lips, and tendered it to the cup-bearer that he might fill it up again.

The shrewd, strange fellow who had just led him into temptation so successfully, did not cease intriguing the captain, a straight-laced Presbyterian who was also somewhat of a Puritan. Like the majority of his fellows, this runner had disguised himself as a midshipman. He had the build of a cabin-boy, the face of a girl, and fuller hips and a more finely molded body than the other ruffians of his crew.

"Where the devil did that band of downright bandits ever find such nice recruits?" muttered the respectable captain, and, more bothered by the wheedling expression of the cup-bearer than he was willing to admit, he was about to walk away when the pretended midshipman threw his arms about the captain's neck, and thus revealed his double disguise.

"Damnation!" yelled the captain, seeing stars. "They'll finish by bringing the whole of their cursed brothel on board!"

"At your service, Captain!"

And laughingly she pointed out the lieutenants pestered by runners, in whom, being good connoisseurs, they had not delayed sharing the agreeable surprise of their captain!

But *The Dolphin* was now entering the roadstead.

After a last turn in the river, the panorama of Antwerp stretched out in all its majestic and grandiose

splendor. For more than a league's length the city offered to the eyes of the newcomers an imposing view of warehouses, markets, gables, towers and belfries, dominated by the pile of Notre Dame. This lighthouse of good advice warned the travellers against the wiles and the ambushes of perdition stretched at the foot of the cathedral as the serpent curled in the shade of the tree of life. Twilight was coloring the admirable monument with rose, glistening in the lacy stone-work, and at the same time the belfry was giving full flight to the notes of its carillon. . . .

But the sailors on *The Dolphin* no longer raised their eyes to that height, nor heard the voices of the vesperal chimes. Why had the high pile not been visible from the mouth of the Scheldt, and the great-bell had not been audible from Doel? The emissaries of the devil had beaten the messengers of heaven. Even when they found themselves in the presence of these good spirits they had ears only for the promises of the brokers of pleasure, and eyes only for the narrow alleys whose windows were red like signals of warning.

As soon as the sailor set foot on shore the runners led him off without protest to the clandestine dispensaries where the lodging-house keeper was in partnership with the prostitute to detain him and fleece him. The one attacked his vigor, the other busied himself with his goods. The girl having worn him out, the pimp would pluck him without difficulty.

In order to deliver him bound hand and foot to their masters, the runners advanced him a part of his wages, and then made him turn over to his hosts the handfull of gold amassed at the price of a labor as painful as

torture. From thenceforth the poor devil no longer belonged to himself.

He tore himself from the arms of the street-walker only to get drunk with the ruffian.

He was saddled with all sorts of junk at exorbitant prices. He paid ten and twenty times their value in order to present them to friends, to those who had just loaded him with a bottle of outrageous perfume, with loud knick-knacks, with shell mirrors, with English cutlery, with imitation jewelry, claptrap and glass beads with which civiliziers could no longer fascinate Kaffirs or Sioux. He was never allowed out alone, nor permitted to leave the confines of the district.

All day long he leaned against the bar of the public room. The walls were hung with placards: advertisements of Old Tom gin, the red triangles of pale ale, the brown squares of stout. Chromolithographs from Christmas Numbers alternated with epileptic pictures from the *Police News*, just as on the sideboard the sirups and elixirs tasting like pommade stood next to the corrosive liquors.

In order to obtain the right to perpetually gaze at the creature chosen for his affection, he swallowed all the poisons displayed. Little by little, under the influence of these libations, she seemed to take on the appearance of a madonna throned in a sanctuary: the smoke of his pipe became incense, the sideboard was reredos, the liquors composed the subjects of stained-glass windows, and spouting oraisons did not free him from the fervor of his stupidity. Then a mocking laugh would bring him back to the feeling of the place in which he found himself, and the goddess whom he invoked.

If his drunkenness turned into frenzy, if he made a



racket and struggled a bit, these accesses lasted only a few moments.

She was even ordered to provoke them by her coquetry, for not only was his jealousy unprofitable, but in order to be forgiven his whims, he would be more pliable and easy-going than ever. To again conquer his sullen mistress there was no folly that he would not commit, no expensive whim he would not gratify.

Each morning the lodging-house keeper gave him a louis from his little hoard, and every night he had conscientiously spent his tiny sum. He paid on the spot as if he possessed the purse of Fortunatus.

And his astonishment on the day when the boss gave him a bill showing that he owed almost the double of what he thought he had. This time the pigeon kicked over the traces and wanted to leave for good, but in anticipation of a scuffle, the lodging-house keeper had paid his usual satellites, and they overpowered the recalcitrant boarder. He was also threatened with the naval police, a mysterious power unknown to this simple soul, and which he imagined as severe as the Inquisition. A great dejection followed his will to revolt. Rather than go to prison, he would sell his carcass.

And here began the most sorrowful phase of the transaction.

The Merchant of Venice took only a pound of flesh from his insolvent debtor; the Shylocks of Antwerp morally hacked to pieces their poor debtor in raising up a series of tribulations for him; they forced him to desert, procured him a new berth, took the advance pay he received, forced him to sign another contract, took his pay again, and kept up this game until the



consular authorities got wind of it and prepared to act.

They had squeezed him dry like an orange. But to believe them he had not yet paid his debts. But he had become compromising, and it became necessary to get rid of him. For fear that he would speak and have them caught they hid him in a hovel outside the fortifications.

Finally they bartered the poor human merchandise, so greatly wronged, for a last time, to an unscrupulous captain, and, under cover of a dark night, a runner, always ready for risky jobs, the same runner who had cajoled and intoxicated him on board the *Dolphin*, loaded the poor rebel on a skiff and quietly conducted him on board the smuggler.

Hardly returned to his element, to his rude labor, the sailor no longer thought of the vicissitudes of his last harbor. The memory of recent humiliations was drowned by the wind of the open sea.

So thoroughly that after a prolonged trip the poor devil, all ready to begin his disastrous experience all over again, would give himself body and soul to the evil Tritons of the banks of the Scheldt.

In short, there was no one but these pressers to offer him absolute refreshment!

At the ports of call in the Antipodes, in those vehement climates, in those fiery lands peopled by beings with lemonish flesh, reptilian women and effeminate men, among populations as yellow and as feline as their fevers, Europeans hold their lust in leash, or lend themselves to vice only with the repugnance of an apoplectic who has a pallet of blood drawn from him.

Or they go to the brothel as a danger, drunkenly, with an air of bravado, and urged to stay there, de-

bauch themselves furiously in the opium-smoking dens. An intoxicating flower, spices, poisons and the odorous atmosphere whip them and pack them off headlong to an exquisite voluptuousness followed by stupor and remorse. . . .

Child-like and mystic souls, tasting the pleasure only when accompanied by an undercurrent of intimacy and fervor, they associate with their loves the fresh, steady, set breezes of northern seas, the lenifying temperatures of occidental shores, the virile gusts, even the crabbed cordiality of the squalls, the sharp shifting of the wind after the enervating caress of the trade-winds; the tender smile of the north, the friendly curtains of clouds drawn over the implacable glare, and the almost lustral kiss of the first fog. . . .

In return, they reproached themselves for their commerce with pagan women as if it had been a sacreligious rite.

And they never looked back upon these crimes without there also rising up before them the nightmare of the anguish of typhoons and cyclones during which the occult priestesses of Siva, with the winding and the blowing of trumpets, seemed to pump boiling oil from the sea, only to substitute for it the tellurian lava and the fusing metals of the firmament. . . .

## VI

### THE CARNIVAL

OBVIOUSLY, Laurent's relations with the dangerous and poorer strata of the population did not proceed without an unbridled prodigality. One would have said that, in order to more closely resemble the people around him, he longed not to have a cent to bless himself with. The vague disgust, mingled with terror, that he had conceived for the money even on the day of his majority, when he had barely come into possession of his little hoard, had only augmented since his discussion with the Tilbaks.

As in *Das Rheingold*, in the Wagnerian tetralogy, he attributed a malignant virtue to capital, the cause of all human calamities, and to it he also ascribed his personal afflictions. Had not the money separated him from both Regina and Henriette? That money which had not even been powerful enough to do him the great service of keeping in Antwerp his dear friends of the Cocoonut!

However, at the rate at which he had been abusing his property, it would hardly last for a year.

After the departure of the emigrants and his break with Bergmans there had been no check and no more exhortation to stop him. He tasted the delight of

ridding himself of his abhorred gold, rolling it in the gutter or scattering it in starved surroundings where it rarely consented to glisten. He paraded as much contempt for this lever of the modern world as the traders dedicated respect and idolatry to it.

He invented any number of extravagances in order to scandalize an essentially timorous and bashful bourgeoisie, until his visible dissipation outraged, as a sacrilege and a blasphemy, hoarders and systematic people. He would have been pardoned his other eccentricities, his degradation of body and soul, his open struggle against society, but his savage squandering procured him only the anathema of even the most tolerant spirits.

Had he not taken it into his head, after having dined too well, to walk in broad daylight with his hardly respectable friends, the assistant riding-master and the stud-groom of a bankrupt riding school, who were no less intoxicated than himself, through the most crowded streets in order to meet the business men on their way to the Exchange? As an excess of provocation the restaurant porter walked a few feet in front of the edifying trio, carrying on each arm, as a banner, a bottle of the best champagne. And with this pomp the three gay dogs undertook the ascension of the Haute tour and, when they came to the highest balcony, above the carillon and the bell chamber, they gloriously sipped the sparkling liquor, and then threw the bottles down into the square at the risk of stoning the cabbies stationed at the foot of the monument.

He often paid for rounds of liquor for all the dockers working on the quays. On the watch at the bar, Paridael prevented the bartender from accepting payment from the drinkers as fast as they stood on line, in



whole gangs, each telling the other of the good fortune that awaited them.

And many a time there were interminable sprees with whole crews or companies of troopers, tipping from dive to dive, pilgrimages to the sanctuaries of love, the whole stressed by brawls and scuffles with the police.

But one could have discovered a noble motive at the bottom of his greatest excesses; a need for expansion, protection of the weak, disguised charity, a limitless compassion, the happiness of procuring some little pleasure and some moments of peace for the down-trodden. It seemed as if, in indulging himself in so fantastic a slaughter of coins and banknotes, the spend-thrift wanted to put at their ease the beggars whom he was helping, and justify their eventual forgetfulness. By holding at such a small value that which he was scattering about him, he absolved the recipients of all gratitude. To the poor devils who melted into thanks he would say: "Take it; take all you can get. Pocket it all, and a truce to your thanks. . . . As well as someone else. . . . I would have none of the money by tonight, anyway!"

His charities appeared to be as untimely and as immoderate as his pranks. Not only had he aided the flight and the desertion of a prisoner, but he bought back many sailors from their vampires, repatriated emigrants, and harbored liberated convicts.

All during a winter, a terrible winter when the Scheldt was ice-bound, he visited the homes of day-laborers and mechanics. He gave himself out for an anonymous delegate from the charities, emptied his pockets onto the table or mantelpiece, and before the starving people had time to discover the importance of

his offering, ran down the stairs as if he had robbed and pillaged these paupers.

He never forgot, among all the calls in his errands of mercy, the garret in which a brood of children ranging from one to five years old were crying in a packing case stuffed with shavings, a litter too fetid even for a hutch. It seemed, as he listened to their crying and saw their convulsions, that hunger herself was bending over them and that her nails, scraping their wasted bodies, were skinning them as the rake of a greedy gleaner scrapes fallow-land that has already been reaped.

Leaning backward in a corner, at the other end of the garret, as far away as possible from their agony, the father, a widower, a powerful and muscular calker from the Basins, whose flesh and blood misery had not yet succeeded in exhausting, was without doubt meditating the prompt and violent destruction of his useless strength.

With a roar and a vivid gesture that would bear no reply, the wretched man commanded the intruder to relieve him of his presence, but the increasing pitiableness of the children's wailing was as imperious as the father's comminatory attitude, and, spurred on, though almost sure of being killed, but not wishing to survive these innocents, Laurent walked toward the despairing man and offered him a twenty franc piece.

It was more blinding than the sunshine, for the giant could not bear the gleam of it, and turned toward the wall, like a sulky, shame-stricken child, raising his hands to eyes, tormented to the point of tears! And it was so heavy that, when Laurent had slipped it into his other hand, his huge fingers let it drop!

The gold rang like an angelus, a message from Providence, for the abominable reaper abandoned this meager rake-full of human grain, and the wailing subsided.

And suddenly, like a madman, the man threw his arms around Paridael's neck, and hid his good plebian head on the shoulder of the declassed man. And Paridael, bruised against that great and sobbing breast, bedewed with the warm tears of gratitude, no less mad than the workingman himself, swooned in the bosom of infinite beatitudes and thought the hour of the assumption promised to the elect of the Saviour had already arrived! And never had he lived with a more intense life, nor found himself nearer death!

That did not prevent him, upon leaving this pathetic meeting, from consecrating a part of his money, that very evening, to his debauchery, and from throwing himself body and soul into bestiality.

He particularly distinguished himself during the carnival of that same calamitous winter. Never in the memory of Antwerp had Shrovetide unloosed so much license nor been celebrated with such gusto. The general misery and distress were taken as a pretext to multiply the celebrations for the benefit of the poor. The people themselves were swept by giddiness, took a double holiday, sought in a fleeting drunkenness and brutishness a refuge from the sinister reality, celebrated like a ragged Decameron this exceptional carnival which, instead of preceding Lent, fell in a season of absolute abstinence unforeseen by the Church, which the Curia would have never dared impose even in its severest mandates.

Not being any longer able to procure food, the poor devils found means to get enough to drink. Besides



being cheaper than bread, alcohol deceived their sudden pangs of hunger and deadened the twinges of their stomachs. A wretched man spends more time in sleeping off the effects of bitter gin than in digesting a ridiculous mouthful of bread. And the fumes of the liquor, heavy and dense as the splenetic fogs of the country, passed away the more slowly lest the new blood again become cold in their veins. They procured a bizarre and brutal drunkenness during which the stupefied organs demanded no food and the instincts slept like reptiles in torpor.

For three nights the Théâtre des Variétés, uniting in a single immense hall its suite of four huge rooms, swarmed with a rutilant mob, blazed with lights, resounded with savage music and furious stamping. Within, there reigned a hubbub and a confusion of all castes almost as great as in the street. Ladies and lorettes, foreladies and shop-girls, grisettes and prostitutes fluttered about in the same quadrilles. Silk and satin dominos rubbed against horrible hired cloaks. During intermissions, while young swells in full dress were leading a mistress for whose sake they had deserted their fiancées into the little withdrawing room, and treating her to the classic dozen of "Zeeland" sprinkled with Roederer, the vaults beneath the dancing floor, converted into a Gargantuan cook-shop, claimed the less fashionable couples and groups who were cramming themselves, in the midst of the strong exhalations of pipes, with boiled sausage, and were flooding themselves with a sparkling, white Louvain beer, the popular champagne, which was not at all heady, but which cleansed out their bladders without having any other effect upon their organisms.



Towards morning, the hour of the last cancons, these crypts of the temple of Momus presented the lugubrious appearance of a community of troglodytes exhausted by too strenuous incantations.

During the length of the carnival Laurent made it a point of honor never to see his bed, nor quit his tattered Pierrot domino.

The street carnival intrigued him no less than the nocturnal dissipations. Loafing in the streets that had been turned over to the maskers, he was wherever the sport was at its giddiest, the crowd most effervescent. The din of horns and rattles reverberated from street to street, and pig-bladders blown up and brandished like clubs beat down with an ill thud upon the backs of wayfarers. Maskers, false sinners, aggravated the crush, and were thrusting forth like fishhooks at the end of lines small loaves of bread smeared with molasses which gamins as frisky and as voracious as ab-lests were struggling to snatch, though they were only succeeding in smudging their faces.

But Paridael was especially fond of the war of *pepernotes*, the true originality of Antwerp carnivals. He converted a great part of his last coins into bags of these "pepper nuts," northern confetti, large, cubic hailstones as hard as rocks, which were sold by the butchers, and with which, from afternoon to twilight, hot battles were fought between the ladies crowded in windows or balconies, and the gallants stationed in the streets, or between the riders upon the floats and the pedestrians who passed them in review.

On the afternoon of Shrove-Tuesday Laurent recognized in the recess of a window in the Hotel Saint-Antoine, rented at an enormous tariff for the occasion,

Mesdames Béjard, Falk, Lesly and both the little Saint-Fardiens.

He had not seen his cousin since the sacking of the Béjard mansion, and he was astonished at feeling, at the sight of his so idolized Gina, only spite and a sort of bitterness. He grudged her, so to speak, his love for her. His stormy life and the desolation of the pariahs with whom he had come into contact were not foreign to this sudden change.

But the catastrophe of *The Gina* had complicated this antipathy with a superstitious terror and aversion. The nymph of the drain, the evil genius of the Dobouziez manufactory, was now exercising her evil influence over the whole city. She was poisoning the Scheldt and contaminating the ocean.

The vague sadness which her face reflected, the indolent part which she took in the battle of *pepernotes*, the nonchalance with which she defended herself would without doubt at any other time have disarmed and softened the heart of the worshipping Paridael.

It cannot be said that at any other time he would not have again found something of his early religion for the lofty idol, but he was in one of his days, now ever more frequent, of ill-humor and of biting irascibility, in one of those states of mind in which, gorged and saturated with rancor, he had a desire to smash some precious bibelot, to damage some work whose symmetry and immutable serenity seemed an insult to the general distress; a critical juncture in which one is capable of tormenting and hurting in every way the most beloved person.

He found it piquant to join the batallion of young fops who, stationed on the sidewalk in front of the hotel, that they might be easily seen, were paying hom-

age to the young ladies by languidly letting fly, from the tips of their gloved fingers, one *pepernote* at a time. Among these handsome gentlemen were the two Saint-Fardiens, von Frans, the dapper captain of the civic horse-guards, Ditmayr, the rich woollen-merchant, and a swarthy, exotic-looking man, wearing a red tie and dogskin gloves, whom Laurent saw for the first time.

Irritated by the phlegm and the blase air of Madame Béjard as much as by the ostentation and delicate airs of the fops, he resolved not to spare her, even promised himself to lose his patience, to pelt her, to force her to withdraw from the scene. Rummaging in his deep pockets, he set himself to hurl handfulls of *pepernotes* at the impassive beauty. It was a continual volley of shrapnel. The projectiles, thrown with increasing force, were always aimed at Madame Béjard and especially at her face.

After a furtive examination of the dishevelled Pierrot, she affected to pay no more attention to him for a long while. Then, in the face of the impetuosity and the tenacity of his aggression, she let fall, at two or three repetitions, a disdainful look upon the fellow, and proceeded to chatter away to her companions in the most detached manner.

This air only enraged Laurent. He no longer observed the slightest restraint. She would notice him, or leave her place. At present he was throwing like a madman.

He was looked at askance from the beginning by the fashionable clique to whom he was lending such furious reinforcement, and the gentlemen, having become more and more annoyed by the reveller, left the game, repudiating and disavowing so ragged a partner.



Those around them, on the contrary, were hugely enjoying the cruel ballistics. The people were ready to take the part of the intruder, whose looks and apparel proclaimed him to be one of them, against the gallants. It was a little to their servility and to their collective objection that the patrician lady was opposing her ever more irritating disdain.

A few drops of blood fell from a slight wound on Gina's cheek made by the hail of Paridael's ammunition. She barely turned her head away, made a little face of disgust, and far from honoring her discourteous adversary with a retort, she mechanically threw a handfull of *pepernotes* toward the other side of the square.

"Enough!" cried the fops, looking as though they were about to interfere. "Enough, you cad!"

But some rough-looking comrades wedged in between Paridael and those who were threatening him, crying: "Well aimed, old boy! Go it! Let him alone. . . . It's carnival time! . . . Free play! Free play!"

Paridael heard neither the one nor the other. Made feverish by the exercise, like a sportsman breaking some record, he had neither eyes nor attention for anyone but Regina. He lashed her and riddled her with real animosity. His wiry arm performed the function of a sling with as much violence as precision.

In the heat of the firing, each volley brought him nearer to her, the force of his throw carried him along with his shot, and it seemed to him as if his fingers had lengthened until they touched her cheeks, and that he was tearing her skin with his nails!

Gina, no less stubborn, persisted in serving as a



target for him, unflinchingly continued to laugh, did not even deign to protect her face with her hands.

She had not recognized Laurent, but she took pleasure in exasperating this truculent ragamuffin and in driving him to extremities, firmly resolved not to allow her force of character to flag beneath the hostile gaze of the populace.

Laurent had come to that point of blind rage in which a scuffle began as a joke, degenerates into a massacre. In default of other ammunition, he would have thrown pebbles and stoned her. The bonbons seemed to grow hard in the pressure of his sinewy hands, and such was the anxious silence of the crowd that they could be heard beating against the panes of glass, the walls and even Gina's face.

Finally, her face was covered with blood. Angèle and Cora made Regina return into the room and closed the shutters after her.

With a final handfull of *pepernotes*, Laurent cracked the window behind which the courageous woman had appeared.

Then panting, weary as though from drudgery, as careless of the growling and the murmur of reprobation which his brutality drew from the well-dressed folk as he was of the amused laugh of the populace, he lost himself in the crowd, hastily gained a cross street away from the tumult and the swarm; and there, seized with shame and remorse, his former idolatry suddenly reacting against his sacreligious outburst, he burst into tears that smeared his makeup and made him look like the "little savage" daubed by Gina, twenty years before, in the garden of the factory.

A crowd which imperceptibly formed about this crying Pierrot brought him back so sharply to his rôle of

brazen and bragging reveller that the onlookers could have imagined that he was crying from laughter.

Toward evening he joined several poor devils of dancers from an insolvent theater, whom he was taking to dine at Casti's, the fashionable restaurant. It was to be his last feast! No matter what he did to forget his thoughts, he found himself lacking in spirit. Instead of enlivening him, the wine only made him more sorrowful. Moreover, he was exhausted with fatigue. He grew drowsy in the middle of the repast while around him the others gorged and drank in silence.

Partly in dream, partly in reverie, certain landscapes came back to him like a sweet vexation. His past, his lost life whispered in gusts loaded with moldiness, with rancid perfume, with a sickening roar, and, in this retrospective and intermittent breeze, there tumbled the rough flourishes heard every evening in low cabarets. The uselessness of his days defiled before Laurent like a macabre procession, a trail of clowns and slick Pierrots, trifling, lispng cold and plaintive, whom salacious paroxysms electrified, and who twisted and mingled in dances as lascivious as the spasm itself. . . .

As he was finally falling asleep, indifferent to the grateful and almost canine caresses of a girl, he jumped up suddenly at a lively explanation at the bottom of the stairs, followed by footsteps upon the stairway, then in the hall, that drew near the room in which Laurent was dining, but which stopped before the next door.

"Open! In the name of the law!" commanded a grave voice, with the brutally professional intonation of a superintendent of police.

Laurent, having come to his senses in a minute, commanded his companions to be silent, and at the same time put his ear to the partition separating the two rooms.

Cries, confusion, the sound of breakage, a window being opened, but no reply. Then the crash of the door being broken in.

Insurgent by instinct against all authority, ready to take the part of the feasters against the police, Laurent flew outside, and above the shoulders of the superintendent of police who had stopped at the sill of the door, above those of Bédard, of Athanasius and Gaston, he saw, to his consternation, Angèle and Cora crouching each one in a corner of the room and forcing themselves to disguise in the folds of the window-curtain the pagan simplicity of their toilette. Not far from them, seeking to put on a face, a dignified and resolute air, incompatible, however, with a state of attire as makeshift as that of their fair ladies, stood the elegant von Frans and the tall Ditmayr and—easily recognizable, although he was no longer wearing his red tie and dogskin gloves—the swarthy pimp whom Laurent had that afternoon taught how to throw *peper-notes*.

The husbands were perhaps even more astounded and more overwhelmed than the gallants; this was the case, at least, with the young Saint-Fardiens. The superintendent of police himself lost assurance, and became confused in his procedure.

But the humorous side of this modernist scene did not in the least strike Laurent; he could only consider and figure out the consequence of the crash.

The presence of Bédard, moreover, would have been sufficient to remove any desire to laugh. Alone among



them the ugly hypocrite seemed at his ease. One would have even thought that the scandal rejoiced him. In any case he was the man to have first fomented it and brought it to its consummation. Who could say with what black infamy he would complicate the deplorable scandal?

He alone had gone into the room. He went from the table to the window, handled the dishes and the tablecloth, ferreted into the corners, showed an appalling presence of mind, directed the investigation, pointed out to the superintendent the pieces of evidence, pushed his impudence to the point of crumpling and rummaging the garments strewn about the furniture, and, without worrying about the presence of the wretched adulteresses, even found the spirit to joke.

"There were six places set! One of the male birds, no, one of the female birds has taken flight by the window, helping herself with a curtain, torn down, as you see. . . . It was even worse than a party of two couples; a cubic party. . . . What a pity! I should like to have seen the fugitive! I'll bet she was the prettiest of all!"

He put so treacherous a meaning into these last words, he allowed such a devilish double meaning to pierce this reticence that a sinister light penetrated Laurent's spirit and he threw himself forward toward Bédard to treat him like a coward.

Bédard contented himself with surveying this impertinent reveller from head to foot and immediately going on with his investigations, but the violent entrance of Paridael recalled the superintendent to his rôle.

"Hey, you, Pierrot? . . . Get out, quickly! This



is none of your business!" he said, taking Laurent by the arm and pushing him out; then turning to Bédard and the two husbands: "I think the facts have been sufficiently established, Monsieur Bédard, and that it is superfluous to prolong this delicate situation. We can therefore retire."

After coughing, he added in a constrained tone, as if modesty prevented him from speaking directly to the lightly clad culprits: "These gentlemen and ladies will have the kindness to join us at the commissariat for the little formalities that we still have to go through!"

Laurent, contrary to his usual habit, thought it useless to resist. He would find the superintendent of police again. Bédard would lose nothing by waiting!

For the moment another duty was incumbent upon Laurent.

Guilty or not, Gina had to be warned of what had just taken place and of the manner in which Bédard had spoken of her. . . . Laurent rushed to the street like a madman, hailed a cabby, jumped into the fiacre:

"To Bédard's!"

He tore at the bell, jostled the footman, entered an illuminated room like a housebreaker.

Gina screamed loudly, first at recognizing her Pierrot of that afternoon, and then, beneath his disordered costume and the remainder of his makeup, her cousin Laurent Paridael.

He snatched her brutally by the hand: "A yes or no, Gina; were you at Casti's restaurant this evening?"

"I! From what asylum have you escaped?"

He told her, in one breath, the scandal which he had just attended.

"The wretch!" she cried, as she heard the rôle played

by Bédard in the vile performance. "I have not been out of the house this evening. Is not my word enough for you? Here, the postmarks on this registered letter prove that it was delivered to me about an hour ago. I was just finishing my reply to it when you burst in, and you will admit that it would take easily an hour to fill these four pages with a handwriting as close as mine."

In order to be satisfied Laurent had no need of an irrefutable proof; everything about Gina proclaimed her innocence; her air of repose, her house-gown, her coiffure, arranged for the night, the sound of her voice, the honest look in her eyes, even the cool and calm perfume that she herself exhaled.

"Forgive me, cousin, for having doubted you for a moment. . . . Forgive me, above all, my conduct of this afternoon. . . ."

"I have already forgotten that nonsense. . . . Ah! Laurent, it is rather I who should ask your pardon! Have I not been cruel toward everyone, but especially toward you, my poor Laurent! . . . Be merciful to me. Just now I need to be spared! I am expiating my coquetry!

"For a long time you have hated Bédard, haven't you? You will never hate him enough! He is the enemy of us all, the malignant beast par excellence. . . . You know about the shipwreck of *The Gina*! Well; it is a horrible thing to say, but I am convinced that the wretch anticipated the disaster, that it even entered into his calculations. Yes, he knew that the boat wouldn't hold water very much longer!"

"No! Oh, no! Don't say that! Bédard was an angel two minutes ago! Bédard was as good as Jesus! . . . He knew *that*; he wanted that shipwreck!

God! God! God! Oh, no! . . .” cried Laurent, burying his head in his hand, and stopping up his ears.

“Yes, I would take an oath upon my soul that he knew about it. He distrusted me. He knew that I divined it; he feared me. He is afraid that I may talk. I know that he planned, with old Saint-Fardier, to have you shut up as a lunatic. And had it not been for my father, they would have done it. Crazy! Anyone would go crazy in such surroundings. It is a miracle that I have preserved my sanity. I would swear that this evening’s plot was brewed by him, with Vera-Pinto, the Chilian whom you noticed in the street this afternoon, and saw again at Casti’s this evening.”

And Gina told Laurent that, since his arrival in Antwerp, the foreigner had pursued her with his attentions. She had dismissed him many times, but he always came back to the onset, encouraged, unbelievable as it seemed, by Bédard, with whom he had taken Dupoissy’s place. He had, for sure, a lower and a blacker mind than the Sedanese, and Gina did not augur any good from the fact that the two partners went about together under the pretext of business.

Bédard hoped to regain his liberty to marry another heiress. After having ruined her, Gina was but an obstacle to his fortunes. Not daring to rid himself of his second wife as he had been able to rid himself of his first, across the sea, he was trying to persuade Gina to consent to a divorce. The interest of her child, and respect for her own reputation had prevented Gina from listening to his advances, otherwise she would have been the first to break their abominable union. In the face of her refusal, Bédard had had recourse to threats, and then, since his wife continued unsubmitive to his will, he had beaten her without pity.

However, one day when he again raised his hand to her, Gina had armed herself with a knife and threatened to plunge it into his breast. As cowardly as he was vicious, he took her at her word. But, in order to break down his wife's resistance, he took other abominable means. He tried to throw her into the arms of the Chilian. She avoided these pitfalls, and the charlatan was out of pocket for his gallantry. Finally, in despair of getting a case, not having succeeded in inducing his wife to adultery, Bédard had resolved upon having her condemned and stigmatized as though she had been guilty. With the connivance of Vera-Pinto he had not hesitated, in order to attack her, to ruin the two little Saint-Fardiens.

And thus, mused Gina, she was the warp and woof of the plot:

"After having warned Bédard of the party arranged for the evening, the Chilian went to it with one or the other of his conquests.

"They are not lacking, I give you my word," she continued, "even in what is called good society, for my equals do not all share my aversion for that suspicious half-breed. It makes no difference who they are. Luckier than Angéle and Cora, the third lady mixed up in the escapade found a way, at least, of fleeing in time. She does not suspect that she owes her good fortune to the hatred which Bédard, in his damned soul, bears me. It was necessary for them to have her out of the way before the arrival of the police in order to implicate me in the affair. Was I not seen, this very afternoon, with my unfortunate friends? And were not von Frans, Ditmayr and Vera-Pinto planted beneath our balcony the whole time? The scene at Casti's represents the epilogue of an intrigue



begun at the Hotel Saint-Antoine, and tomorrow there will not be one person in the whole of Antwerp, with the exception of my father and yourself, who is not persuaded of my relations with that Chilian! Ah! Laurent! To think that Bergmans himself will believe my traducers! And it is from my memory of him that I have drawn the strength to remain virtuous!

“It was he whom I loved; it was he whom I should have married! I discouraged him by my vanity, and when he had gone away, my conceit still got the better of my love, and I consented to the most disastrous of marriages. To irritate the one whom I loved, I made myself eternally unhappy!”

In vain had Paridael tried to wear out his passion, to make it more and more absurd by multiplying, with deliberate intention, the obstacles and barriers that separated him from his cousin; in vain had he descended so low that he could never raise himself up to her again.

He thought himself cured, but he had only brought his trouble to the boiling point once more. We know how, a few hours before, his animosity had been aroused against her.

The accidents, the intimacies, the promiscuities of his vagabond life, his commerce with the rebellious and the refractory fellows who were not ashamed of their nature, who were initiated in every form of turpitude, had stripped him, also, of all prejudice, had made him more daring and more expeditious.

While she was denouncing Bédard's brutalities to him, Paridael was strangely torn; one part of his being sympathized, from the depths of his soul, with so great a misfortune, and was revolted by so monstrous

a villainy, and the other part burned to leap upon the weeping woman, to beat her in his turn, to treat her with more barbarity than he had, just a little while before, at the carnival. Never had the extremes of his nature so contradicted each other. His feelings clashed with each other like contrary winds in a tempest.

The nudity of the two blonde adulteresses, surprised at Casti's restaurant, still trembled before his eyes and inflamed his blood.

"Why do you not quickly strip this quivering woman? Would you be less brave than the little violator of Poudr  e?" suggested the material side of his nature. "I shall find enough nobility of soul to love her better than Bergmans himself!" the other phase of his nature promised him. And he cherished no less generous and extravagant an idea than that of sacrificing himself in order to assure her of happiness by ridding both her and Antwerp of the damnable despoiler.

It was under the influence of this quixotic thought that he said to Gina, after a long silence during which he held her hands in his:

"You still love Bergmans, then?"

The accent of his voice betrayed so much sadness and affection that Gina looked at him. But she was amazed to find in his eyes the strange, wrecked expression she had already seen, one eventful day, in the orangery, and as he gripped her hands more tightly:

"Laurent!" she cried, trying to push him away, and not answering his question.

He, however, continued in his weak and breaking voice:

"Fear nothing from me, Gina. Think anything you

want about me, overwhelm me with contempt, but know that there is nothing I would not do for your happiness!"

It was the sincere expression of his feelings, but wherefore, while offering Gina this respectful devotion, did the rough pressure of his fingers, and the wild light of his eyes give the lie to his speech?

"If B ejard were to disappear, it would be Bergmans that you would marry?"

His voice seemed to come from the other world, like that of one who dreams out loud.

"Do you want me to kill him, that husband of yours? You have only to speak the word! Come, answer me! Answer me, I say!"

His murderous look did not threaten only the person who had defined it with such intensity and concentrated fire. Gina had just read in it something other than murderous fury, a more direct plea, an imminent danger. . . .

"Before I assure your happiness and that of Bergmans forever, be good to me just for one instant, Gina . . . the instant that it takes to give a sister's kiss. Then I shall leave to accomplish my mission. And you shall never see me again. . . . Quick! the farewell kiss, my Regina. . . ."

His voice changed, became hoarse and threatening; his plea sounded false; he dragged her by force to him, twisting her wrists as he did it.

"Laurent! Stop! You're hurting me! . . ."

Instead of obeying her, he stroked the flesh of her arm; he even put his hands to her corsage, and, at the thrill of her bosom, beneath the thin material of her tea-gown, he pressed his lips greedily to hers. Almost thrown back, and on the point of belonging to

him, she succeeded in releasing herself, and bounded to the other side of the table:

"All my compliments, master cheat! And to think that I was accusing Vera-Pinto! It is you who are the tool of Bédard! I follow it, now. After having paid you for maltreating me this afternoon, he counted upon surprising me with you, you hideous clown! Your ugliness and your beastliness would have made the enormity of my fault even greater!"

Whipped by this violent attack, as blinded as though she had dashed a bottle of vitriol in his face, Laurent did not even try to justify himself. Appearances overwhelmed him; the best thing he could do would be to take himself off at once. The arrival of Bédard might convert her slanderous hypothesis into a reality at any moment.

Laurent took to flight, not without stumbling many times, ready to fall.

Gina! His dearly beloved Gina! To think him capable of such deceit! Never could Laurent rise beyond it again. He would be right forever more to wallow in all mire to add ignominies to ignominies: his worst actions would seem good beside the one of which she had impeached him, and the severest penalties, the most infernal expiation that a list of unimaginable iniquities would yield him would seem gentle and clement to him when compared with the rigor and the cruelty of her accusation.

Gina herself could never retrieve her error nor repair her injustice. It was indelible. Any rehabilitation or forgiveness would come too late.



## VII

### THE CARTRIDGE PLANT

THAT day in May the fogs of an exceptionally stubborn winter had scattered, to leave floating in the air only a diaphanous evaporation through which the azure tendered the interesting pallor of convalescence, and which became iridescent, in the radiant sunlight, like a mist of fine pearls.

After a long illness contracted on the morrow of his stormy Mardi Gras, Laurent, as convalescent as the season, left, for the first time, the hospital where the practitioners had saved him in spite of himself and less, without doubt, for interest in him than in order to triumph over one of the most stubborn and most complex cases of typhoid that had ever been met with in the establishment.

Put back upon his feet, returned to the life of the outside world, he seemed to have come back from a long and perilous voyage, as if pardoned from an exile that had lasted for years. And so never before, even on the day of his return to Antwerp, had the metropolis appeared to him with this aspect of power, splendor and serenity.

At the harbor, the activity was feeling the effects of the spring-like temperature. The recent famine caused by the blocking of the Scheldt had not persisted after

the break-up of the ice. The roadstead and the docks were swallowing up more ships than ever and a mighty recrudescence was succeeding the long lull in traffic.

The workmen were laboring without suffering, happy to spend their strength, considering the drudgery, often so painful, as an exercise giving elasticity to their long relaxed muscles.

Even the emigrants, stationed at the doors of the consulates, seemed to Paridael less pitiful and more resigned than usual.

Passing the Coin des Paresseux, he noticed that all its habitués were absent.

Their king, a perpetual loafer, who never worked even when the most downright lazy among them allowed themselves to be hired out, had exceptionally recanted his laziness. This humiliated Laurent not a little. He remained the only drone in the busy hive. He was impatient to regenerate himself in work.

To this end he stopped several brigades of dockers and asked for any employment from their *baes*, but the latter, after carefully looking him over, seemed not at all anxious to saddle himself with as ridiculous a laborer as the fellow before him, wasted with two months of fever, asked him to come back the next day, alleging that the day was already too far gone.

Drawing trucks, there passed with a slow and majestic gait the great horses of the Nations. On their large collars gilded nails set forth the name or the monogram of the corporation to which they belonged. The drivers of these drays employed for reins only a hempen rope drawn through one of the rings of the collar. Whether they stood up on their empty wagons, like antique coachmen, or whether they walked placidly and apparently unconcerned, by the side of their loaded

drays, their dexterity, their watchfulness and the intelligence of their horses were such that the trucks passed each other and rubbed against each other without ever becoming tangled.

Laurent could not help admiring the strong horses and their magnificent drivers; he even stopped still in the middle of the road and would have been run over had not an imperative crack of the whip or a guttural onomatopoeia not warned him to watch out.

Drunken with the springtide, he splashed about with delight in the thick mud, the black and permanent sweat of a pavement constantly trampled down by the heavy rolling of traffic; he trespassed upon the railroad tracks; mooring-ropes caused him to stumble, bales thrown in flight from hand to hand like simple juggler's balls by Herculean jugglers, threatened to upset him, and the gang whose rhythmic, cadenced work he interfered with rated him in a patois as enormous and crusty as their bodies.

Nothing could alter, today, Laurent's good humor; he took pleasure in being hardly used by the world he preferred, enjoyed the extreme familiarity with which he was treated by these dockers, as robust as they were placid.

He lounged about the great Kattendyck basin. His heart beat more rapidly at the sight of comrades from the America, the Nation of which he himself had been a part, unloading grain. The sacks snatched by the hooks of the crane at the bottom of the hold were hoisted to the height of the masts and funnel, then the mighty lever, describing an horizontal quarter-circle, carried its load to a truck waiting on the quay.

Standing on the truck, bare-headed and bare-armed, a tall fellow, his loins girded like a wrestler, with a



sort of pruning-hook in his hand, grappled the bags as they hung above his head, loosened them from their slings, and, by the same stroke, gave its liberty of movement back to the machine, which turned to continue its looting.

Other comrades, wearing hoods, came up in a single file to load upon another truck the load which the bare-headed man caught up and fastened upon their backs. All around sweepers were gathering in scoops the grain which was spilled, at every trip of the machine, from the fissures in the grappled and torn bags.

As he came nearer, Laurent recognized in the principal actor of the scene, in which he alone, perhaps, among his contemporaries, experienced the sovereign beauty that would have intrigued Michael Angelo and sent Benvenuto Cellini into transports of lyricism, the docker whom he had aided in the garret, and thought himself recompensed for any terrestrial or divine perspective by the emotion which he felt at the sight of this noble creature restored to life and beauty. For an instant, Laurent thought of hailing him, but did not; the good chap might think, seeing his benefactor so shabby and worn looking, that a brutal appeal was being made to his gratitude. Paridael even hastened to keep on his way, fearful of being recognized, congratulating himself for having had this scruple, but sending a warm wave of emotion toward his debtor.

He passed through the drydocks, crossed many bridges and gang-planks, and came to the warehouses for inflammable matter, the storehouses of naphtha immersed in marshy hollows, the petroleum tanks, great vats like gasometers, all objects whose characteristic appearance contributed to the demarcation of this commercial landscape.



Here stopped, after its last wanderings, the monopolizing and voracious industry of the metropolis.

Therefore he was not a little surprised to find, beyond the petroleum reservoirs, towards the village of Austruweel—a pitiful bit of a village separated by strategic necessity from its parish and added to the urban region—an agglomeration of flimsy and provisional buildings, whose appearance was so troubled, so forbidding, so infernal, that Laurent was not far wrong in attributing a diabolic origin to claim his property, or as if he exercised an unavowable profession. The hovels must have shot up there like mushrooms growing in a single night in a damp spot, propitious also to the hatching of toads.

As a whole, it looked like a lazaretto, a dispensary, a horse-pound, a warehouse for contraband goods, or a clandestine still relegated to a district outside the zone of normal industries.

Disagreeably surprised, Laurent Paridael stopped in spite of himself before these interloping buildings, consisting of five bodies of buildings without floors, built of wreckage, loam, coarse plaster, of agglutinated materials, like a temporary thing of which only an ephemeral consistency was demanded.

Surrounded by a dilapidated wall of rotted hand-rails, it threw a discordant note into the grandiose and loyal harmony, into the impression of honest foundations produced upon him today by the panorama of Antwerp. These hovels, lacking any apparent purpose, intrigued Paridael more than he would have wished.

He was distracted from his examination by a dozen apprentices, boys and girls, who, hurrying along and chatting joyously, were going into precisely those suspicious sheds,

He stopped them with the nervousness of a rescuer who jumps into the water or throws himself at the bridle of a runaway horse, and asked them what the installations were.

"Those? But that's the Bédard Cartridge Plant," they answered him, looking at him as if he had fallen from the moon.

At this answer he must have had an even more bewildered look. How was it that he had not foreseen this correlation? An establishment with such a repulsive expression and such a malignant exterior could serve only Bédard.

Laurent Paridael remembered that someone had told him of this last operation of the former slaver. Without becoming reconciled to Bergmans, he had applauded the vehement campaign which the tribune had conducted against the threatening works of the dealer in human flesh, and if he had not been more actively concerned in this opposition, it was only because he thought the Council incapable of tolerating such manipulations in the interior of the city. And now Paridael was finding that his anticipations had been given the lie, and that the public safety had been imperilled despite Bergmans' phillipics, adjurations, and cries of alarm.

Bédard, the evil alchemist, had succeeded in establishing his laboratory where it best suited him.

It was in these dangerous workshops, almost open to all the winds, built rather to attract bats than to shelter human beings, that his dreadful operations were taking place!

It was in close proximity to the most combustible materials that the presence of the most withering producers of fire was tolerated!

It was to children, fatally rattle-brained and flighty babies, belonging essentially to the most turbulent and the most reckless class of the Antwerp proletariat, that they turned over work for which sufficiently careful and steady manipulators could not be found!

And so that nothing would be lacking to the stakes, so that the challenge would cry the louder to God or rather, to Hell, these little hands, unskilled and clumsy, were provided with cumbersome and rudimentary tools.

Finally, as a supreme provocation, a steam engine and its fire-box were accommodated next to the gun-powder-maker; quite literally, the powder was being treated in the fire!

Considering only the little difficulty required by the work itself, "regular child's play," as the greedy capitalist said with a chuckle, he had carried off two hundred of the very young blackguards swarming in the Quartier des Bateliers and the Quartier de la Minque, offspring of drunkards, women peddlers, pilots, smugglers and runners, hopeless vagrants to whom he paid a few cents a day, Bédard worried as little about the safety of the poor children as he had about that of the emigrants. Laurent even imagined that he recognized, among the moss-grown and tarry boards, the wreckage of *The Gina*, and, going even further back, he thought of the boats whose construction was helped, in the time of Bédard, senior, by the children tortured to amuse Bédard, junior.

The eldest of the boys, to whom Laurent had just spoken, was but sixteen years old, and Laurent learned from him that the majority of his companions had not yet reached that age.

In questioning them, Paridael took a hitherto un-



felt interest in their welfare, felt there and then an imperious and almost piercing solicitude, the most intense, the most jealous that any human being had ever aroused in his veins, taxed his ingenuity to prolong the conversation in order to hold them back, there, near him, and delay their entrance into the factory from minute to minute.

He racked his brain in order to divert them from their work, to disband this deleterious workshop. He had never before nourished such a desire to dispute a factory its workingmen; to debauch, to liberate, to emancipate the apprentices yoked to a homicidal trade. All his former loves revived and condensed into that supreme attachment.

“In that building there, in front of your nose, is the workroom where the boys empty the cartridges. Back of the shed, the customhouse. In the middle, that species of fort surrounded by bare earth is the powder-house, where we case the powder coming from the broken cartridges. On the other side of the powder-house, the girls’ workroom. It’s there that my girl works, the red-haired one who is hiding behind the other one. Like they used to do at school, they separate the breeches from the skirts. I don’t say that they are altogether wrong . . . the more because we make amends for it when we come out, don’t we, Carrot? Finally, that shed there contains the oven in which we melt in separate ingots the copper and the lead.

“The same shed contains the steam engine which crushes the empty and burned shells. I work at the oven. It is I, Frans Verwinkel, who explode the fulminate of the percussion-caps after having emptied the shells. It is very amusing, and no more difficult



than thumping him, here! Vlan! I do it like that! And the thing is finished! Don't get angry, Pitiet, it's only to explain the trick to Monsieur!"

In proportion as the eldest gave him, without any recrimination, even in a bragging tone strongly impregnated with racy local slang, these details and others of the place, the materials and the workers, Laurent's affinities for this crew of sturdy fellows and buxom girls increased to its paroxysm of commiseration.

They had well-modelled flesh, their faces were healthy, although they had lost something of their velvety quality, their expressions were sprightly, their movements quick, their eyes flashing, their lips mobile, they had the tan complexion, the red cheeks, the dark coloring of the harbor folk, the type whom Laurent prized so highly that it made him sympathetic to even the runners and other land-sharks.

As he looked at them, how did it come to pass that he suddenly reflected that the first victims of Béjard and his shipyards, the little crucified children of the Fulton shipyards, must have been of their age, must have had their grace, their beauty, their bluster? Truly, they must have been congeners of those proud youths whom, as the newspapers of the time said, had been tortured and made martyrs of without drawing information from them.

"And don't you do yourselves any harm? Does no one do you any harm in there? Are you sure? That man, Béjard; doesn't he take pleasure in drawing blood from you? Are you not lending yourselves to his amusements; doesn't he burn you and mangle you, the tyrant? Don't deny it! I know him! Be careful! . . ."

They looked at each other and burst out laughing, not understanding anything of this reveller's divagations.

The presentiment of a hidden danger that menaced them worried Paridael cruelly, sorrowed, to employ the word of the sublime Saviour, his soul unto death. A train of torments and torture was lying in wait for this adolescent flesh. He would have liked to ransom these poor children at the price of his own blood, from he did not know what vivisectors.

One moment he thought that he had found a means to ward off their destiny.

After having mentally calculated how much he still possessed, he proposed point blank to the whole troop to take them to the country, beyond Austruweel, where he would have regaled them with rice, with "Corinth bread," and with sugared coffee, just as Jesus treats his elect in Paradise.

But, while he was searching his pockets for his last money, he examined himself for bandages, lint and salve. His clothes had been fumigated at the hospital, but an abominable odor of phenol, laudanum and cauterized flesh outraged his nostrils.

Dressed in one of those picaresque rigs to the composition of which he brought a true dandyism, his cheeks sunken, his face ravaged by his illness and made more haggard and more distorted by his present worry, his ridiculous and incoherent vapping coinciding with the unfavorable impression of his looks, Laurent Paridael was so little the person from whom one could expect liberality that, when they heard him propose such a wonderful treat in the country, the gamins believed themselves to be absolutely in the presence of an insane man, an opium smoker, or a drunkard incapable

of doing what he offered, and endeavored to stun him with their ridiculous answers.

“Say, Jan Slim, have you finished humbugging your set? Tell us your tailor’s address? Hey, rare bird, since you are in the mood to preach, why not recite the ten commandments for us? Surely, we’ll go with you, little father, and right off, but can you take us to the Hotel Saint-Antoine or to Casti’s for dinner? We don’t want to hurt your feelings, but we think you’ve broken out from the Rue des Beguines or that you are a pilgrim to Merxplas! Is it with stolen money that you are going to cram our bellies?”

Far from taking offence at these jokes, Laurent profoundly regretted that he could no longer find a single hundred franc note to distribute among them and pay their ransom to fate. He was himself at the end of his resources, and should he not be able to hire out his enfeebled arms on the morrow, he would in point of fact have to begin a pilgrimage to Merxplas, to the hospitable prison for tramps and vagrants, where he would meet Karl the Blacksmith and so many other worthy pariahs.

Warned of an ever more imminent trouble, Laurent persisted in trying to take the young folks far from this neighborhood; he begged them almost with his tears to hire themselves out elsewhere as hodmen, navvies, coffee-sorters, herring-peddlers, or at least to take a holiday today, only one afternoon, to play the truant from the factory for the rest of the day.

But thinking that this mystification was becoming a bore, their chief scamp with large eyes the color of a ripe chestnut, with a teasing expression, with a willful, dimpled chin, a difficult rogue to handle, the



same Frans Verwinkel who said his job was to explode the fulminate, lifted his cap respectfully to Paridael, and, bowing his black, curly head, harangued him in these terms:

"It isn't, old brother, that your company is particularly disagreeable to us, or that your conversation lacks relish, but if you will believe me, you will be first in the field and wait for us at Wilmarsdonck. . . . It's over an hour ago that the clock struck, and, without altogether being the bugbear that you say he is, Bédard would not hesitate to fine us, or put us all out, sure as he is of always being able to catch enough artists of our genius to keep his shop going.

"And so, in this case, it is not you, our uncle, who butters our bread, or lodges us in the henhouse, or offers himself up to take a whipping as paternal as it is burning, we bid you good day, friend. Good luck, and a good wind behind you!"

Laurent tried to bar his passage, to hold him by the arm, to grip him by the hands:

"Come, hop, friend! Down with your paws! Get out, do you understand!"

The frisky apprentice released himself, and Laurent vainly clung desperately to blouses and skirts; they all passed him, following their leader, not without molesting him a little. And with hisses and catcalls, with any amount of derisive gestures, they were all swallowed up by the cartridge plant, more brazen and more blustering than a flock of crows scorning a scarecrow.

Paridael stood there for a long time after the door had shut upon the last of the laggards. The sonorous laugh, their vibrant voice still rang in his ears; he saw the great chestnut eyes of the eldest sparkle and glisten once more, recalled the relish of his gesture when he



had raised his cap to heaven like a quarrelsome titmouse bristling its tuft.

Paridael's heart bled more and more sorrowfully in his bosom. And that because of some young scoundrels who were absolute strangers to him.

"There are hundreds, even thousands of these louts, all cast in the same mold, between Merxem and Kiel!" the judicious and moderate Marbol had told him.

Did not they themselves realize that Bédard would not have found it difficult to raise more than one reserve of conscripts of the same kidney!

The prolific city threw them upon the streets, neglectfully, exposing them to accidents, abandoning them to their own industry, to their good or evil instincts, destining nearly all of them to helotism, squandering them upon the racy atmosphere of the streets and the waterfront.

If they did not serve for food for the fishes, they would, one day, be stretched out upon the slabs in the morgue, or contribute to the instruction of medical students. Did they possess the supreme and unique character with which Laurent endowed them? Incontestably. Were he the only one to see them in this warm light and in so bold a relief, it would be because they were created and existed so.

On the point of joining the apprentices in their workshop in order to suspend the malignant labor with which they were charged, and disputing them with Bédard himself, the same odor as before, but stronger, the stifling heat of a slaughter-house, blended with the mustiness of an infirmary and puffs of the odor of burning pounced upon him. As though he had been made to breathe a powerful anesthetic, he became dizzy, and things reeled before his eyes.

The wall surrounding the cartridge plant was swept away, the masonry crumbled to pieces, the walls of the buildings cracked and parted like scenery, or as if a sudden torrent of water had burst forth, and, in a green Bengal light with the color of a glaucous and phosphorescent sea, unwonted human forms whirled about before his eyes, more rapid and more fleeting than a luminous bank of fishes, or than the thousand candles quivering before the pupil of an apoplectic's eye. In the horrible bustling of these apparitions, Laurent distinguished trunks without members, hands and feet amputated from bodies, and what dismayed him the most was the imploring or terrified expression in the gleaming eyes of those bloodless heads, the same youthful roguish eyes that he had seen a few seconds before, and the grin, the convulsion, the grimace of horrible suffering upon these mouths, the same mouths that only just now had been so willful and so bantering, and the frank, courageous beauty of these children, now twisted in he knew not what convulsion.

Was he watching a shipwreck or a fire? He saw again, but together, the martyred children of the Fulton shipyards, and the emigrants who had gone down on *The Gina*. And one of these faces, that of young Frans Verwinkel, extraordinarily resembled that of his dear Pierket, Henriette's youngest brother and her living image, but a stubborn and determined version of that pensive image.

This phantasmagoria lasted but one brief second, after which the green light died down, the walls closed up, the fence rose once more, and the hideous factory took on its sullen, but normal aspect.

"What now!" said Paridael to himself. "Am I going mad?"

And blushing at this morbid seizure, which he attributed to an hyperesthesia caused by his illness, to the heady effect of the air after a long claustration, he finally resolved to turn his back upon these hallucinating objects, and make his way toward the river.

Two or three times, however, he looked back at the factory, turned in his path for a moment as if he had forgotten something, or as though some dearly beloved person had called him back to repeat their farewell.

Gradually the spell ceased to operate. The normal and reassuring appearance of the other buildings in the light and warmth of this first fine day soothed him. Not a single cloud darkened the azured opal of the sky. Imperceptible wavelets skimming the surface of the sun-drenched river reminded him of the little shiver of comfort rippling the flank of a horse that is being stroked by its master.

Laurent could no longer distinguish the rigging or the cordage of distant ships, so that their white sails, whiter than the sheets of his numbered bed in the hospital, or the covers of stretchers, seemed to float unshackled in space, and suggested the wings of angels sent to meet the souls who were shortly expected above!

When he reached the embankment, the same place from which he had watched the disappearance of the ship that bore away the Tilbaks, Paridael lovingly and jealously embraced the panorama of his native city. His look travelled over the outlines and the contour of monuments, it completed a delineation as exact and minute as that of a diagram, while his enthusiasm livened the tints, multiplied and chromatized the nuances of this familiar architecture. He inhaled with

the avidity of one asphyxiated and restored to life the briny air, the aroma of the open, the perfume of odoriferous spices, and even the smell of fetid organic matters loaded on the merchant fleet. The haunting odor of the hospital dissolved in this superior aroma.

Laurent was aware of diligent crews, discovered choral manœuvres in the great gestures of elevators and cranes, recorded the calls, the signals and the orders. He confused in an immense transport of affection the native horizon and all whose sight is circumscribed. A profound and total beatitude invaded him; a sort of Nirvana, of voluptuous stupor. While he was tasting and relishing the ambient and tangible reality, he no longer felt himself part of the city. For it took on the proportions and the character of a sublime work of art. Would he never again participate in creation, or had he been dissolved and melted into the essences and the principles of which it was composed?

It was the first day that he had appreciated it, that he had thus assimilated it through all his pores. In what strange life was he living? If such delights as these constituted the day without a tomorrow, he would never tire of the eternity!

A melody from the carillon preluded the stroke of three o'clock.

Before the first chime, Paridael felt the sensation of cold of a sleeper who awakes in the open air; at the same time, it seemed that he was being pulled fiercely by the sleeve, and that the last human voices he had heard, those of Béjard's young workers, were hailing him from the far distance. He turned toward the buildings of the cartridge plant. There was no living soul beneath the buildings and the river, and an-



noyed at this recall, Laurent turned toward the roadstead.

At the moment when the clock struck the first stroke of the hour, he heard a series of little detonations go off with ever increasing rapidity at the cartridge plant, and as he gave up trying to count them, a shock plowed through his legs, the soil bent and unbent beneath his feet like a spring-board and threw him, with an involuntary force, a few feet away.

A thunder comparable to that of all the cannons in all the forts united in a single battery broke his tympanum and made the blood gush from his ears. At the same moment a part of the cartridge plant—alas, the workrooms of the children:—shook and was rent asunder like a house of cards, and, huddled and thrown together in a white spout, leaped and liquified toward heaven.

It mounted in a single jet, quickly, the upright stem of a vegetation, and at the tip of this white, cottony unending stem, there formed the immense bulbous mass of a red and black tulip blowing, like the fabulous aloe, in the crash of lightning; a still born flower shedding its petals in ominous fireworks.

At the second stroke of three, during the thousandth of a second in which this pyrotechnic flower had its life, Laurent, who was gazing at the petals, distinguished arms, legs, trunks, and entire human silhouettes, gesticulating horribly like disjointed puppets. He recalled analogous gestures and contortions in the canvases of visionary painters, evocators or scorcers repairing to their sabbaths. And these parts of the red and black tulip, bloody and charred, rained, rained, rained in innumerable ruins to the accompaniment of untranslatable outcries and the continuous cannonade.

The howls of human beings being burnt alive! Nero-  
nian pyrotechnics!

While Laurent was thinking that he had already heard these voices, a few lumps and a hail of shot tumbled down about him, and he had a hurried vision of a trunk to which a bit of chest was still hanging, of a child's foot still lodged in its little boot, of a muscular leg breeched in velveteen, and he remembered the curve of that body, the rumple of the breeches, the sprightly noise of the boots running about their work, and the handsome impudence of a bright face beneath a saucy cap.

"It's I, Frans Verwinkel, who explode the fulminate! You should see me at work! I have only to hit it thus, and the thing is over!"

Perhaps the poor thing had only hit it thus. . . .

No, it was impossible! Laurent could not believe his senses. The mirage had come on again, stronger than before. To convince himself of his own state of hallucination, he laughed out loud, but he heard himself laugh, and the nightmare persisted.

Toward the extremity of the urban belt, where less than a second ago there had been a block of houses of the village of Austruweel, not one of the twenty hovels remained with the exception of the tap-room *In den Spanjaard*, contemporaneous with the Spanish domination, and flourishing in the year 1560. Through the raging gap one could see the country, the grass-covered slopes of the fortifications, the curtain of budding trees, and the placid church-steeple of Austruweel, above which the lark was singing its first song. The sentry box of a sentinel was lying at the bottom of a rampart.

Capricious as lightning, the explosion had preserved

some shaky, nearby hovels that a breath could have swept away, and even spared a part of the cartridge plant, while it had overturned and pulverized buildings several kilometers off, reduced to jelly torpedo-proof masonry, broken like a wisp of straw the piles and the joists of docks, converted iron into filings, and rumpled like a piece of silk the galvanized sheet-iron roofs of the warehouses.

Ruins leaned in an unstable state of equilibrium and slashed themselves into fabulous profiles and unheard of styles of architecture.

Before the third stroke of three rang out, from behind the cartridge plant, hissing and howling like a host of snakes, there surged a flaming geyser whose waves rolled a surface of ten hectares; all the stock of petroleum, fifty thousand barrels, burst into flame, like a simple match.

And such was the progress of the conflagration, such was the fury of this incendiary tide that it seemed about to submerge the metropolis and swallow its river at one gulp.

Through an illusion of perspective, the enormous red tongues, immoderately elongated, all darting in the same direction, were licking the buttresses of the cathedral. In spite of the broad daylight, the towering pile reflected a sunset. And the ships in the basins, alternately masked and uncovered as the flaming waves scattered away from them or drew near to them, seemed the playtoys of these devouring billows, to pitch upon an ocean in eruption.

The apocalyptic splendor of the spectacle ended by drowning Laurent's horror and pity in a monstrous trance. But the bitumen and sulphur were not raining from the skies. Never had so pure and so sweet

an ether filled space, never had so blue and caressing a sky enticed mortals. Contrary to prophecy, the stars were not dashing to pieces, the spring day continued to smile indifferently, and the thick, black smoke, unfurling its hurried scrolls from far off, the black foam of this tempest of flames, did not succeed in troubling the unruffled and serene majesty of the sun.

However, after the helplessness and consternation of the first moment, a wave of terror swept the population of the southern districts and sent flying from their homes, under a hail of plaster and breaking glass, the inhabitants of quarters furthest distant from the cartridge plants. Workmen who had escaped from death; calkers, dockers, sorters, women with their babies on their arms, young girls almost nude, sailors, customs-officials, lock-keepers, haggard, horribly out of breath, their eyes more distended than by belladonna, their mouths cloven and widened by a prolonged cry, their hair and clothing burned, sometimes even their flesh, living torches whose speed was stimulated by the race crowded to the banks of the river and even tried to throw themselves into the Scheldt.

One of these fugitives ran against Laurent and almost knocked him over. Laurent recognized Bédard, and, torn sharply out of his trance, his hate restoring him his lucidity, persuaded that this extermination was the work of his enemy, the crown of his iniquities, he grappled him as he passed.

In this hypercritical moment, he retrieved his lost forces. He was going to stick to his word: avenge Regina, avenge Antwerp, avenge the emigrants who had deliberately been thrown to the fishes, avenge, finally, the children in the cartridge plant.



Ah! these, then, were the ends for which destiny had saved him!

Béjard fought, yelled for help, but completely occupied with their own distress, the fugitives pursued their course without bothering about this struggle.

Laurent overpowered Béjard, clasped him in an implacable grip like that of a bulldog's jaws, of a vulture's claw, of a spider's tentacle, or of the sucker of an octopus.

Ah! he had flattered himself, the exactor, the extortioner, the dealer in souls, that he would survive this hecatomb of children! He had just reached safety, the scourge seemed to have spared him, when one more violent and more implacable than the flames was luckily on hand to supplement their blind clemency and restore to them the prey which they had allowed to escape.

As implacable as death itself, a final justiciary, Laurent dragged his culprit back to the Gehenna. In all Antwerp he was the only person who cold-bloodedly was going back to this hearth of horror. He intended to stay there with his condemned criminal. The idea of death had no terrors for him. Had he not felt himself go off deliciously a few minutes ago?

Béjard, guessing the horrible purpose of his executioner, screamed, bit, used all his strength, despair increasing his normal vigor tenfold.

From time to time he put up such resistance that Laurent could not succeed in advancing, and they fought in the one place. But the advantage always remained with Paridael and he kept victoriously pushing his captive before him, through all, over the slimy mass, flabby, charred matter in which one could hardly recognize human remains.

He even jostled the wounded, the idea of vengeance made him deaf to their death rattle. Cartridges were constantly exploding beneath his feet, shots whistled in his ears, he could have thought himself upon the battlefield during the decisive fusillade.

The heat was becoming intolerable. The flaming naphtha was asphyxiating him. In this extremity he addressed but one prayer to God, not to die until he had killed Bédard.

God granted his prayer.

At the moment when, at the end of his strength, Paridael was about to give up the struggle, what remained of the cartridges blew up in a mass, in one supreme explosion. The last vestiges of the Bédard factory leaped into the air. Another red and black tulip brightened in a flash of light.

Two shades tightly entwined fought in the midst of a lake of fire.



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