Jack

by Alphonse Daudet

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By Alphonse Daudet

Translated by Mary Neal Sherwood

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Estes And Lauriat, 1877

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JACK

CHAPTER I. VAURIGARD.

“With a k, sir; with a k. The name is written and pronounced as in English. The child’s godfather was English. A major-general in the Indian army. Lord Pembroke. You know him, perhaps? A man of distinction and of the highest connections. But—you understand—M. l’Abbé! How deliciously he danced! He died a frightful death at Singapore some years since, in a tiger-chase organized in his honor by a rajah, one of his friends. These rajahs, it seems, are absolute monarchs in their own country,—and one especially is very celebrated. What is his name? Wait a moment. Ah! I have it. Rana-Ramah.”

“Pardon me, madame,” interrupted the abbé, smiling, in spite of himself, at the rapid flow of words, and at the swift change of ideas. “After Jack, what name?”

With his elbow on his desk, and his head slightly bent, the priest examined from out the corners of eyes bright with ecclesiastical shrewdness, the young woman who sat before him, with her Jack standing at her side.

The lady was faultlessly dressed in the fashion of the day and the hour. It was December, 1858. The richness of her furs, the lustrous folds of her black costume, and the discreet originality of her hat, all told the story of a woman who owns her carriage, and who steps from her carpets to her coupé without the vulgar contact of the streets. Her head was small, which always lends height to a woman. Her pretty face had all the bloom of fresh fruit. Smiling and gay, additional vivacity was

imparted by large, clear eyes and brilliant teeth, which were to be seen even when her face was in repose. The mobility of her countenance was extraordinary. Either this, or the lips half parted as if about to speak, or the narrow brow,—something there was, at all events, that indicated an absence of reflective powers, a lack of culture, and possibly explained the blanks in the conversation of this pretty woman; blanks that reminded one of those little Japanese baskets fitting one into another, the last of which is always empty.

As to the child, picture to yourself an emaciated boy of seven or eight, who had evidently outgrown his strength. He was dressed as English boys are dressed, and as befitted his name spelled with a k. His legs were bare, and he wore a Scotch cap and a plaid. The costume was in accordance with his years, but not with his long neck and slim figure.

He seemed embarrassed by it himself, for, awkward and timid, he would occasionally glance at his half-frozen legs with a despairing expression, as if he cursed within his soul Lord Pembroke and the whole Indian army.

Physically, he resembled his mother, with a look of higher breeding, and with the transformation of a pretty woman’s face to that of an intelligent man. There were the same eyes, but deeper in color and in meaning; the same brow, but wider; the same mouth, but the lips were firmly closed.

Over the woman’s face, ideas and impressions glided without leaving a furrow or a trace; in fact, so hastily, that her eyes always seemed to retain a certain astonishment at their flight. With the child, on the contrary, one felt that impressions remained, and his thoughtful air would have been almost painful, had it not been combined with a certain caressing indolence of attitude that indicated a petted child.

Now leaning against his mother, with one hand in her muff, he listened to her words with adoring attention, and occasionally looked at the priest and at all the surroundings with timid curiosity. He had promised not to cry, but a stifled sob

shook him at times from head to foot. Then his mother looked at him, and seemed to say, “You know what you promised.” Then the child choked back his tears and sobs; but it was easy to see that he was a prey to that first agony of exile and abandonment which the first boarding-school inflicts on those children who have lived only in their homes.

This examination of mother and child, made by the priest in two or three minutes, would have satisfied a superficial observer; but Father O———, who had been the director for twenty-five years of the aristocratic institution of the Jesuits at Vaurigard, was a man of the world, and knew too well the best Parisian society, all its shades of manner and dialect, not to understand that in the mother of his new pupil he beheld a representative of an especial class.

The self-possession with which she entered his office,—self-possession too apparent not to be forced,—her way of seating herself, her uneasy laugh, and above all, the overwhelming flood of words with which she sought to conceal a certain embarrassment, all created in the mind of the priest a vague distrust. Unhappily, in Paris the circles are so mixed, the community of pleasures and similarity of toilets have so narrowed the line of demarcation between fashionable women of good and bad society, that the most experienced may at times be deceived, and this is the reason that the priest regarded this woman with so much attention. The principal difficulty in arriving at a decision arose from the unconnected style of her conversation; but the embarrassed air of the mother when he asked for the other name of the child, settled the question in his mind.

She colored, hesitated. “True,” she said; “excuse me; I have not yet presented myself. What could I have been thinking of?” and drawing a small, highly-perfumed case from her pocket, she took from it a card, on which, in long letters, was to be read the insignificant name—

Ida de Barancy

Over the face of the priest flashed a singular smile.

“Is this the child’s name?” he asked.

The question was almost an impertinence. The lady understood him, and concealed her embarrassment under an assumption of great dignity.

“Certainly, sir, certainly.”

“Ah!” said the priest, gravely.

It was he now who found it difficult to express what he wished to say. He rolled the card between his fingers with a little movement of the lips natural to a man who measures the weight and effect of the words he is about to speak.

Suddenly he arose from his chair, and approaching one of the large windows that looked on a garden planted with fine trees, and reddened by the wintry sun, tapped lightly on the glass. A black silhouette was drawn on the window, and a young priest appeared immediately within the room.

“Duffieux,” said the Superior, “take this child out to walk with you. Show him our church and our hot-houses; he is tired of us, poor little man!”

Jack supposed that he was sent out to walk so that he might be spared the pain of saying good-bye to his mother, and his terrified, despairing expression so touched the kind priest that he hastily added,—

“Don’t be frightened, Jack. Your mother is not going away; you will find her here.”

The child still hesitated.

“Go, my dear,” said Madame de Barancy, with a queenly gesture.

Then he went without another word, as if he were already conquered by life, and prepared for all its evils.

When the door closed behind him, there was a moment of silence. The steps of the child and his companion were heard on the frozen gravel, and dying away, left no sound save the crackling of the fire, the chirps of the sparrows on the eaves, the

distant pianos, and an indistinct murmur of voices—the hum of a great boarding-school.

“This child seems to love you, madame,” said the Superior, touched by Jack’s submission.

“Why should he not love me?” answered Madame de Barancy, somewhat melodramatically; “the poor dear has but his mother in the world.”

“Ah! you are a widow?”

“Alas! yes, sir. My husband died ten years ago, the very year of our marriage, and under the most painful circumstances. Ah! Monsieur l’Abbé, romance-writers, who are at a loss to invent adventures for their heroines, do not know that many an apparently quiet life contains enough for ten novels. My own story is the best proof of that. The Comte de Barancy belonged, as his name will tell you, to one of the oldest families in Touraine.”

She made a fatal mistake here, for Father O——— was born at Amboise, and knew the nobility of the entire province. So he at once consigned the Comte de Barancy to the society of Major-General Pembroke and the Rajah of Singapore. He did not let this appear, however, and contented himself with replying gently to the soi-disant comtesse,—

“Do you not think with me, madame, that there would be some cruelty in sending away a child that seems so warmly attached to you? He is still very young; and do you think his physical health good enough to support the grief of such a separation?”

“But you are mistaken, sir,” she answered, promptly. “Jack is a very robust child; he has never been ill. He is a little pale, perhaps, but that is owing to the air of Paris, to which he has never been accustomed.”

Annoyed to find that she was not disposed to comprehend him, the priest continued,—

“Besides, just now our dormitories are full; the scholastic year is very far advanced; we have even been obliged to decline receiving new pupils until the next term. You would be compelled to wait until then, madame; and even then—”

She understood him at last.

“So,” she said, turning pale, “you refuse to receive my son. Do you refuse also to tell me why?”

“Madame,” answered the priest, “I would have given much if this explanation could have been avoided. But since you force it upon me, I must inform you that this institution, whose head I am, exacts from the families who confide their children to us the most unexceptionable conduct and the strictest morality. In Paris there are many laical institutions where your little Jack will receive every care, but with us it would be impossible. I beg of you,” he added, with a gesture of indignant protestation, “do not make me explain further. I have no right to question you, no right to reproach you. I regret the pain I am now giving, and believe me when I say that my words are as painful to myself as to you.”

While the priest spoke, over the countenance of Madame de Barancy flitted shadows of anger, grief, and confusion. At first she tried to brave it out, throwing her head back disdainfully; but the kind words of the priest falling on her childish soul made her burst suddenly into a passion of sobs and tears.

“She was so unhappy,” she cried, “no one could ever know all she had done for that child! Yes, the poor little fellow had no name, no father, but was that any reason why a crime should be made of his misfortune, and that he should be made responsible for the faults of his parents? Ah! M. l’Abbé, I beg of you—”

As she spoke she took the priest’s hand. The good father sought to disengage it with some little embarrassment.

“Be calm, dear madame,” he cried, terrified by these tears and outcries, for she wept, like the child that she was, with vehement sobs, and with the abandonment in fact of

a somewhat coarse nature. The poor man thought, “What could I do with her if this lady should be taken ill?”

But the words he used to calm her only excited her more.

She wished to justify herself, to explain things, to narrate the story of her life, and, willing or not, the Superior found himself compelled to follow her through an obscure recital, whose connecting thread she broke at every step, without looking to see how she should ever get back again to the light.

The name of Barancy was not hers, but if she should tell him her name, he would be astonished. The honor of one of the oldest families in France was concerned, and she would rather die than speak.

The Superior hastened to assure her that he had no intention of questioning her, but she would not listen to him. She was started, and a wind-mill under full sail would have been more easily arrested than her torrent of words, of which probably not one was true, for she contradicted herself perpetually throughout her incoherent discourse, yet withal there was something sincere, something touching even in this love between mother and child. They had always been together. He had been taught at home by masters, and she wished now to separate from him only because of his intelligence and his eyes that saw things that were not intended for his vision.

“The best thing to do, it seems to me,” said the priest, gravely, “would be to live such a life that you need fear neither the scrutiny of your child nor of any one else.”

“That was my wish, sir,” she answered. “As Jack grew older, I wished to make his home all that which it ought to be. Besides, before long, my position will be assured. For some time I have been thinking of marrying, but to do this it was necessary to send my boy away for a time that he might obtain the education worthy of the name he ought to bear. I thought that nowhere could he do as well as here, but at one blow you repulse him and discourage his mother’s good resolutions.”

Here the Superior arrested her with an exclamation of astonishment. He hesitated a

moment; then looking her straight in her eyes, said,—

“So be it, madame. I yield to your wishes. Little Jack pleases me very much; I consent to receive him among our pupils.”

“My dear sir!”

“But on two conditions.”

“I am ready to accept all.”

“The first is, that until the day that your position is assured, the child shall spend his vacations under this roof, and shall not return to yours.”

“But he will die, my poor Jack, if he does not see his mother!”

“Oh, you can come here whenever you please; only—and this is my second condition—you will not see him in the parlor, but always here in my private room, where I shall take care that you are not interfered with and that no one sees you.”

She rose in indignation.

The idea that she could never enter the parlor, or be present on the reception-days, when she could astonish the other guests with the beauty of her child, with the richness of her toilette, that she could never say to her friends, “I met at the school, yesterday, Madame de C———, or Madame de V———,” that she must meet Jack in secret, all this revolted her.

The astute priest had struck well.

“You are cruel with me, sir. You oblige me to refuse the favor for which I have so earnestly entreated, but I must protect my dignity as woman and mother. Your conditions are impossible. And what would my child think—”

She stopped, for outside the glass she saw the fair, curly head of the child, with eyes brightened by the fresh air and by his anxiety. Upon a sign from his mother, he entered quickly.

“Ah, mamma, how good you are! I was afraid you were gone!”

She took his hand hastily.

“You will go with me,” she answered; “we are not wanted here.”

And she sailed out erect and haughty, leading the boy, who was stupefied by this departure which so strongly resembled a flight. She hardly acknowledged the respectful salute of the good father, who had also risen hastily from his chair; but quickly as she moved, it was not too quick for Jack to hear a gentle voice murmur, “Poor child! poor child!” in a tone of compassion that went to his heart. He was pitied—and why? For a long time he pondered over this.

The Superior was not mistaken. Madame la Comtesse Ida de Barancy was not a comtesse at all. Her name was not Barancy, and possibly not even Ida. Whence came she? Who was she? No one could say. These complicated existences have fortunes so diverse, a past so long and so varied, that one never knows the last shape they assume. One might liken them to those revolving lighthouses that have long intervals of shadow between their gleams of fire. Of one thing only was there any certainty: she was not a Parisian, but came from some provincial town whose accent she still retained. It was said that at the Gymnase, one evening, two Lyons merchants thought they recognized in her a certain Mélanie Favrot, who formerly kept an establishment of “gloves and perfumery;” but these merchants were mistaken.

Again, an officer in the Hussars insisted that he had seen her eight years before at Orleans. He also was mistaken. And we all know that resemblances are often impertinences.

Madame de Barancy had however travelled much, and made no concealment of the fact, but an absolute sorcerer would have been needed to evolve any facts from the contradictory accounts she gave of her origin and her life. One day Ida was born in the colonies, spoke of her mother, a charming créole, of her plantation and her negroes. Another time she had passed her childhood in a great chateau on the Loire.

She seemed utterly indifferent as to the manner in which her hearers would piece together these dislocated bits of her existence.

As may be imagined, in these fantastic recitals, vanity reigned triumphant, the vanity of a chattering paroquet. Bank and money, titles and riches, were the texts of her discourse. Rich she certainly was. She had a small hotel on the Boulevard Haussmann; she had horses and carriages, gorgeous furniture in most questionable taste, three or four servants, and led a most indolent existence, trifling away her life among women like herself, less confident in her bearing, perhaps, than they, from her provincial birth and breeding. This, and a certain freshness, the result of a childhood passed in the open air, all kept her somewhat out of the current of Parisian life, where, too, being so newly arrived, she had not yet found her place.

Once each week, a man of middle age, and of distinguished appearance, came to see her. In speaking of him, Ida always said “Monsieur” with an air of such respect that one would have supposed him to be at the court of France in the days when the brother of the king was so denominated. The child spoke of him simply as “our friend.” The servants announced him as “M. le Comte,” but among themselves they called him “the old gentleman.”

The old gentleman was very rich, for madame spared nothing, and there was an enormous expenditure going on constantly in the house. This was managed by Mademoiselle Constant, Ida’s waiting-maid. It was this woman who gave her mistress the addresses of the tradespeople, who guided her inexperience through the mazes of life in Paris; for Ida’s pet dream and hope was to be taken for a woman of irreproachable character, and of the highest fashion.

Thus it will be seen into what state of mind the reception of Father O——— had thrown her, and in what a rage she left his presence. An elegant coupé awaited her at the door of the Institution. She threw herself into it with her child, retaining only sufficient self-command to say “home,” in so loud a voice that she was heard by a

group of priests who were talking together, and who quickly dispersed before this whirlwind of furs and curled hair. In fact, as soon as the carriage-door was closed, the unhappy woman sank into a corner, not in her usual coquettish position, but overwhelmed and in tears, stifling her sobs in the quilted cushions.

What a blow! The priest had refused to take her child, and at the first glance had discovered the humiliating truth that she believed to have thoroughly disguised under the luxurious surroundings of a woman of the world and of an irreproachable mother.

Her wounded pride recalled with renewed flushes of shame the keen eyes of the good father. She recalled all her falsehood, all her folly, and remembered his incredulous smile at almost her first words.

Silent and motionless in the other corner of the carriage sat Jack, looking sadly at his mother, unable to comprehend her despair. He vaguely conceived himself to be in fault, the dear little fellow, and yet was secretly glad that he had not been left at the school.

For a fortnight he had heard of it night and day; his mother had extorted a promise from him not to weep; his trunk was packed, and all was ready, and the child’s heart was full of trouble; and now at the last moment he was reprieved.

If his mother had not been in so much trouble now, he would have thanked her; how happy would he have been curled up at her side, under her furs, in the little coupé in which they had had so many happy hours together—hours which were now to be repeated. And Jack thought of the afternoons in the Bois, of the long drives through the gay city of Paris—a city so new to both of them, and full of excitement and interest. A monument, perhaps, or even a mere street incident, delighted them.

“Look, Jack—”

“Look, mamma—”

They were two children together, and together they peered from the window,—the

child's head with its golden curls close to the mother's face tightly veiled in black lace.

A despairing cry from Madame de Barancy aroused the boy from all these sweet recollections. "Mon dieu!" she cried, wringing her hands, "what have I done to be so wretched?"

This exclamation naturally elicited no response, and little Jack, not knowing what to say, or how to console her, timidly caressed her hand, even at last kissing it with the fervor of a lover.

She started and looked wildly at him.

"Ah! cruel, cruel child, what harm you have done me in this world!"

Jack turned pale. "I? What have I done?"

He loved but one person on the face of the earth, his mother. He thought her absolutely perfect; and without knowing it, he had injured her in some mysterious way. The poor child was now overwhelmed with despair also, but remained utterly silent, as if the noisy demonstrations of his mother had shocked him, and made him ashamed of any manifestations on his own part. He was seized with a sort of nervous spasm. His mother took him in her arms. "No, no, dear child, I was only in jest; be sensible, dear. What! must I rock my long-legged boy as if he were a baby? No, little Jack, you never did me any harm. It is I who did wrong. Come, do not weep any more. See, I am not crying."

And the strange creature, forgetful of her recent grief, laughed gayly, that Jack too might laugh. It was one of the privileges of this inconsequent nature never to retain impressions for any length of time. Singularly enough, too, the tears she had just shed only seemed to add new freshness and brilliancy to her youthful beauty, as a sudden shower upon a dove's plumage seems to bring out new lustre without penetrating below the surface.

"Where are we now?" said she, suddenly dropping the window that was covered

with mist. “At the Madeleine. How quickly we have come! We must stop somewhere; at the pastry-cook’s, I think. Dry your eyes, little one, we will buy some meringues.”

They alighted at the fashionable confectioner’s, where there was a great crowd. Rich furs and rustling silks crushed each other; and women’s faces with veils half lifted were reflected in the surrounding mirrors which were set in gilt frames and cream-colored panels; glittering glass, and a variety of cakes and dainties delighted the spectators. Madame de Barancy and her child were much looked at. This charmed her, and this small success following upon the mortification of the previous hour, gave her an appetite. She called for a quantity of meringues and nougat, and finished by a glass of wine. Jack followed her example, but with more moderation, his great grief having filled his eyes with unshed tears and his heart with suppressed sighs.

When they left the shop the weather was so fine, although cold, and the flower-market of the Madeleine so fragrant with the sweet perfume of violets, that Ida determined to dismiss the carriage and return on foot. Briskly, and yet with a certain slowness of step, that indicated a woman accustomed to admiration, she started on her walk, leading Jack by the hand. The fresh air, the gay streets and attractive shops, quite restored Ida’s good-humor. Then suddenly, by what connection of ideas I know not, she remembered a masqued ball to which she was going that night, preceded by a restaurant dinner.

“Mercy! I had forgotten. Hurry! little Jack—quick!” She wanted flowers, a bouquet, a dozen forgotten trifles: and the child, whose life had always been made up of just such trifles, and who felt as much as his mother the subtile charm of these elegances, followed her in high glee, delighted by the idea of the fête that he was not to see. The toilette of his mother always interested him, and he fully appreciated the admiration her beauty excited as they went through the streets and into the various

shops.

“Exquisite! exquisite! Yes, you may send it to me—Boulevard Haussmann.”

Madame de Barancy tossed down her card, and went out, talking gayly to Jack of the beauty of her purchases. Suddenly she assumed a graver air. “Remember, Jack, what I say. Do not tell our good friend that I went to this ball; it is a great secret, It is five o’clock. How Constant will scold!”

She was not mistaken.

Her maid, a tall, stout person of forty years, ugly and masculine, rushed toward Ida as she entered the house.

“The costume is here. There is no sense in being so late. Madame will not be ready in season. No one could make her toilette in such a little while.”

“Don’t scold, Constant. If you only knew what had happened. Look!” and she pointed to Jack.

The factotum seemed utterly out of patience. “What! Master Jack back again! That is very naughty, sir, after all you promised. The police will have to come and take you to school; your mother is too good.”

“No, no, it was not he. The priest would not have him. Do you understand? They insulted me!” Whereupon she began to cry again, and to ask of heaven why she was so unhappy. What with the meringues and the nougat, the wine and the heat of the room, she soon felt very ill. She was carried to her bed; salts and ether were hastily sought. Mademoiselle Constant acquitted herself with the propriety of a woman who is no stranger to such scenes, went in and out of the room, opened and shut wardrobes, with a certain self-possession that seemed to say, “This will soon pass off.” But she did not perform her duties in silence.

“What folly it was to take this child to the Fathers! As if it was a place for him in his position! It would not have been done certainly, had I been consulted. I would

engage to find a place for this boy at very short notice."

Jack, terrified at seeing his mother so ill, had seated himself on the edge of the bed; where, looking at her anxiously, he in silence asked her pardon for the sorrow he had caused her.

"There! get away, Master Jack. Your mother is all right. I must help her dress now."

"What! You do not mean, Constant, that I must go to this ball. I have no heart to amuse myself."

"Pshaw! I know you, madame. You have but five minutes. Just look at this pretty costume, these rose-colored stockings, and your little cap."

She shook out the skirts, displayed the trimming, and jingled the little bells which adorned it, and Ida ceased to resist.

While his mother was dressing, Jack went into the boudoir, and remained alone in the dark. The little room, perfumed and coquettish, was, it is true, partially illuminated by the gas lamps on the boulevard. Sadly enough the child leaned against the windows and thought of the day that was just over. By degrees, without knowing how, he felt himself to be "the poor child" of whom the priest had spoken in such compassionate tones.

It is so singular to hear one's self pitied when one believes one's self to be happy. There are sorrows, in fact, so well concealed, that those who have caused them, and even sometimes their victims, do not divine them.

The door opened—his mother was ready.

"Come in, Master Jack, and see if this is not lovely."

Ah! what a charming Folly! Silver and pink, lustrous satin and delicate lace. What a lovely rustling of spangles when she moved!

The child looked on in admiration, while the mother, light and airy, waving her Momus staff, smiled at Jack, and smiled at herself in the Psyche, without at that time

asking heaven why she was so unhappy. Then Constant threw over her shoulders a warm cloak, and accompanied her to the carriage, while Jack, leaning over the railing, watched from stair to stair, moving almost as if she were dancing the little pink slippers embroidered with silver, that bore his mother to balls where children could not go. As the last sound of the silver bells died away, he turned towards the salon, disturbed and anxious for the first time by the solitude in which he ordinarily passed his evenings.

When Madame de Barancy dined out, Master Jack was confided to the tender mercies of Constant. “She will dine with you,” said Ida.

Two places were laid in the dining-room that seemed so huge on such days. But very often Constant, finding her dinner anything but cheerful, took the child and joined her companions below, where they feasted gayly. The table-cloth was soiled, and the conversation was not of the purest; and very often the conduct of the mistress of the house was commented upon, in words to be sure that were slightly veiled, so as not to frighten the child. This evening there was a grand discussion as to the refusal of the Fathers to receive the boy. The coachman declared that it was all for the best,—that the priests would have made of the child “a hypocrite and a Jesuit.”

Constant protested against these words. She was not a professor of religion, she said, but she would not hear it spoken ill of. Then the discussion changed to the great disappointment of Jack, who listened with all his little ears, hoping to hear why this priest, who appeared so good, was not willing to receive him.

But for the moment Jack was of little consequence; each was absorbed in narrating his or her religious convictions.

The coachman, who had been drinking, said that his God was the sun; in fact, he, like the elephants, adored the sun! Suddenly some one asked how he knew that elephants adored the sun.

“I saw it once in a photograph,” said he, sternly. Upon which Mademoiselle

Constant vehemently accused him of impiety and atheism; while the cook, a stout Picardian with true peasant shrewdness, told them to be quiet.

“Hush!” she said; “you should never quarrel over your religions.”

And Jack—what was he doing all this time?

At the end of the table, stupefied by the heat and the interminable discussions of these brutes, he slept, with his head on his arms, and his fair curls spread over his velvet sleeves. In his unrestful slumber he heard the hum of the servants’ voices, and at last he fancied that they were talking of him; but the voices seemed to reach from afar off—through a fog, as it were.

“Who is he, then?” asked the cook.

“I don’t know,” answered Constant; “but one thing is certain, he can’t remain here, and she wishes me to find a school for him.”

Between a yawn and a hiccough, the coachman spoke,—

“I know a capital school, and one that will, just answer your purpose. It is called the Moronval College—no, not college—but the Moronval Academy. But what of that? it is a college all the same. I put my child there once, when I was ordered off with the Egyptian army. The grocer gave me the prospectus, and I think I have it still.”

He looked in his portfolio, and from among the tumbled and soiled papers he extracted one, dirtier even than the others.

“Here it is!” he cried, with an air of triumph.

He unfolded the prospectus and began to read, or rather to spell with difficulty:

“Gymnase Moronval—in the—in the—”

“Give it to me,” said Mademoiselle Constant; and taking it from him, she read it at one glance.

“Moronval Academy—situated in the finest quarter of Paris—a family school—large garden—the number of pupils limited—course of

instruction—particular attention paid to the correction of the accent of foreigners—”

Mademoiselle Constant interrupted herself here to breathe, and to exclaim, “This seems all right enough!”

“I think so,” said the cook.

The reading of the prospectus was resumed, but Jack was soundly asleep, and heard no more.

He was dreaming. Yes, while his future was thus under discussion around this kitchen-table, while his mother was dancing as Folly in her rose-colored skirts and silver bells, he was dreaming of the kind priest, and of the tender voice that had murmured—“Poor child!”

CHAPTER II. THE SCHOOL IN THE AVENUE MONTAIGNE.

“23 Avenue Montaigne, in the best quarter of Paris,” said the prospectus. And no one can deny that the Avenue Montaigne is well situated in the Champs Elysées, but it has an incongruous unfinished aspect, as of a road merely sketched and not completed.

By the side of the fine hotels with their plate-glass windows hung with silken draperies, stand the houses of workmen, whence issue the noise of hammers and grating of saws. One part of the Faubourg seems also to be relinquished to gardens after the style of Mabille.

At the time of which I speak, and possibly now? from the avenue ran two or three narrow lanes whose sordid aspect offered a strange contrast to the superb buildings near them. One of these lanes opened at the number 23, and announced on a gilded sign swinging in the passage, that the Moronval Academy was there situated. This sign, however, once passed, it seemed to you that you were taken back forty years,

and to the other end of Paris. The black mud, the stream in the centre of the lane, the reverberations from the high walls, the drinking-shops built from old planks, all seemed to belong to the past. From every nook and cranny, from stairs and balconies, whence fluttered linen hung to dry, streamed forth a crowd of children escorted by an army of lean and hungry cats. It was amazing to see that so small a spot could accommodate such a number of persons. English grooms in shabby liveries, worn-out jockeys, and dilapidated body-servants, seemed there to congregate. To these must be added the horde of workpeople who returned at sunset; those who let chairs, or tiny carriages drawn by goats; dog-fanciers, beggars of all sorts, dwarfs from the hippodrome and their microscopic ponies. Picture all these to yourself, and you will have some idea of this singular spot—so near to the Champs Elysées that the tops of the green trees were to be seen, and the roar of carriages was but faintly subdued.

It was in this place that the Moronval Academy was situated. Two or three times during the day a tall, thin mulatto made his appearance in the street. He wore on his head a broad-brimmed Quaker hat placed so far back that it resembled a halo; long hair swept over his shoulders, and he crossed the street with a timid, terrified air, followed by a troop of boys of every shade of complexion varying from a coffee tint to bright copper, and thence to profound black. These lads wore the coarse uniform of the school, and had an unfed and uncared-for aspect.

The principal of the Moronval Academy himself took his pupils—his children of the sun, as he called them—out for their daily walks; and the comings and goings of this singular party gave the finishing touch of oddity to the appearance of the Passage des Douze Maisons.

Most assuredly, had Madame de Barancy herself brought her child to the Academy, the sight of the place would have terrified her, and she would never have consented to leave her darling there. But her visit to the Jesuits had been so unfortunate, her

reception so different from that which she had anticipated, that the poor creature, timid at heart and easily disconcerted, feared some new humiliation, and delegated to Madame Constant, her maid, the task of placing Jack at the school chosen for him by her servants.

It was one cold, gray morning that Ida's carriage drew up in front of the gilt sign of the Moronval Academy. The lane was deserted, but the walls and the signs all had a damp and greenish look, as if a recent inundation had there left its traces. Constant stepped forward bravely, leading the child by one hand, and carrying an umbrella in the other. At the twelfth house she halted. It was at the end of the lane just where it closes, save for a narrow passage into La Rue Marbouf, between two high walls on which grated the dry branches of old shrubbery and ancient trees. A certain cleanliness indicated the vicinity of the aristocratic institution; and the oyster-shells, old sardine-boxes, and empty bottles were carefully swept away from the green door, that was as solid and distrustful in aspect as if it led to a prison or a convent.

The profound silence that reigned was suddenly broken by a vigorous assault of the bell by Madame Constant. Jack felt chilled to the heart by the sound of this bell, and the sparrows on the one tree in the garden fluttered away in sudden fright.

No one opened the door, but a panel was pushed away, and behind the heavy grating appeared a black face, with protuberant lips and astonished eyes.

"Is this the Moronval Academy?" said Madame de Barancy's imposing maid.

The woolly head now gave place to one of a different type,—a Tartar, possibly,—with eyes like slits, high cheekbones, and narrow, pointed head. Then a Creole, with a pale yellow skin, was also inspired by curiosity and peered out. But the door still remained closed, and Madame Constant was losing her temper, when a sharp voice cried from a distance,—

"Well do you never mean to open that door, idiots?"

Then they all began to whisper; keys were turned, bolts were pushed back, oaths

were muttered, kicks were administered, and after many ineffectual struggles the door was finally opened; but Jack saw only the retreating forms of the schoolboys, who ran off in as much fright as did the sparrows just before.

In the doorway stood a tall, colored man, whose large white cravat made his face look still more black. M. Moronval begged Madame Constant to walk in, offered her his arm, and conducted her through a garden, large enough, but dismal with the dried leaves and débris of winter storms.

Several scattered buildings occupied the place of former flower-beds. The academy, it seemed, consisted of several old buildings altered by Moronval to suit his own needs.

In one of the alleys they met a small negro with a broom and a pail. He respectfully stood aside as they passed, and when M. Moronval said, in a low voice, “A fire in the drawing-room,” the boy looked as much startled as if he had been told that the drawing-room itself was burning.

The order was by no means an unnecessary one. Nothing could have been colder than this great room, whose waxed floor looked like a frozen, slippery lake. The furniture itself had the same polar aspect, enveloped in coverings not made for it. But Madame Constant cared little for the naked walls and the discomforts of the apartment; she was occupied with the impression she was making, and the part she was playing, that of a lady of importance. She was quite condescending, and felt sure that children must be well off in this place, the rooms were so spacious,—just as well, in fact, as if in the country.

“Precisely,” said Moronval, hesitatingly.

The black boy kindled the fire, and M. Moronval looked for a chair for his distinguished visitor. Then Madame Moronval, who had been summoned, made her appearance. She was a small woman, very small, with a long, pale face all forehead and chin. She carried herself with great erectness, as if reluctant to lose an inch of

her height, and perhaps to disguise a trifling deformity of the shoulders; but she had a kind and womanly expression, and drawing the child towards her, admired his long curls and his eyes.

“Yes, his eyes are like his mother’s,” said Moronval, coolly, examining Madame Constant as he spoke.

She made no attempt to disclaim the honor; but Jack cried out in indignation, “She is not my mamma! She is my nurse!”

Upon which Madame Moronval repented of her urbanity, and became more reserved. Fortunately her husband saw matters in a different light, and concluded that a servant trusted to the extent of placing her master’s children at school, must be a person of some importance in the house.

Madame Constant soon convinced him of the correctness of this conclusion. She spoke loudly and decidedly—stated that the choice of a school had been left entirely to her own discretion, and each time that she pronounced the name of her mistress, it was with a patronizing air that drove poor Jack to the verge of despair.

The terms of the school were spoken of: three thousand francs per annum was named as the amount asked; and then Moronval launched forth on the superior advantages of his institution; it combined everything needed for the development of both soul and body. The pupils accompanied their masters to the theatre and into the world. Instead of making of the boys intrusted to his charge mere machines of Greek and Latin, he sought to develop in them every good quality, to prepare them for their duties in every position in life, and to surround them with those family influences of which they had too many of them been totally deprived. But their mental instruction was by no means neglected; quite the contrary. The most eminent men, savans and artists, did not shrink from the philanthropic duty of instructing the young in this remarkable institution, and were employed as professors of sciences, history, music, and literature. The French language was made a matter of especial importance, and

the pronunciation was taught by a new and infallible method of which Madame Moronval was the author. Besides all this, every week there was a public lecture, to which friends and relatives of the pupils were invited, and where they could thoroughly convince themselves of the excellence of the system pursued at the Moronval Academy.

This long tirade of the principal, who needed, possibly, more than any one else the advantages of lessons in pronunciation from his wife, was achieved more quickly for the reason that, in Creole fashion, he swallowed half his words, and left out many of his consonants.

It mattered not, however, for Madame Constant was positively dazzled.

The question of terms, of course, was nothing to her, she said; but it was necessary that the child should receive an aristocratic and finished education.

“Unquestionably,” said Madame Moronval, growing still more erect.

Here her husband added that he only received into his establishment strangers of great distinction, scions of great families, nobles, princes, and the like. At that very time he had under his roof a child of royal birth,—a son of the king of Dahomey. At this the enthusiasm of Madame Constant burst all boundaries.

“A king’s son! You hear, Master Jack—you will be educated with the son of a king!”

“Yes,” resumed the instructor, gravely; “I have been intrusted by his Dahomian Majesty with the education of his royal Highness, and I believe that I shall be able to make of him a most remarkable man.”

What was the matter with the black boy, who was still at work at the fire, that he shook so convulsively, and made such a hideous noise with the shovel and tongs?

M. Moronval continued. “I hope, and Madame Moronval hopes, that the young king, when on the throne of his ancestors, will remember the good advice and the noble

examples afforded him by his teachers in Paris, the happy years spent with them, their indefatigable cares and assiduous efforts on his behalf."

Here Jack was surprised to see the black boy kneeling before the chimney, turn toward him, and shake his woolly head violently, while his mouth opened wide in silent but furious denial.

Did he wish to say that his royal Highness would never remember the good lessons received at the academy, or did he mean that he would never forget them? But what could this poor black boy know about it?

Madame Constant announced, in pompous terms, that she was willing to pay a quarter in advance. Moronval waved his hand condescendingly, as if to say, "There is no need of that."

But the old house told a far different tale,—the shabby furniture, the dismantled walls, the worn carpets, as well as the threadbare coat of Moronval himself, and the shiny scant robe of the little woman with the long chin.

But that which proved the fact more than anything else was the eagerness with which the pair went to find in another room the superb register in which they inscribed the ages of the pupils, their names, and the date of their entrance into the academy.

While these important facts were being written, the black boy remained crouched in front of the fire, which seemed quite useless while he absorbed all its heat. The chimney, which at first had refused to consume the least bit of wood, as stomachs after too long fasting reject food, had now revived, and a beautiful red flame was to be seen. The negro, with his head on his hands, his eyes fixed as in a trance, looked like a little black silhouette against a scarlet background. His mouth opened in intense delight, and his eyes were perfectly round. He seemed to be drinking in the heat and the light with the greatest avidity, while outside the snow had begun to fall silently and slowly.

Jack was very sad, for he fancied that Moronval had a wicked look, notwithstanding his honeyed words. And, then, in this strange house the poor child felt himself utterly lost and desolate, discarded by his mother, and rendered still more miserable by the vague idea that these colored pupils, from every corner of the globe, had brought with them an atmosphere of unhappiness and of restlessness. He remembered, too, the Jesuits' college, so fresh and sweet; the fine trees, the green-houses, the whole appearance of refinement, and the kind hand of the Superior laid for a moment upon his head.

Ah! why had he not remained there? And as this occurred to him, he said to himself, that perhaps they would not have him here either. He looked toward the table. There by the big register the husband and wife were busy whispering with Madame Constant. They looked at him, and he caught a word now and then. The little woman sighed, and twice Jack heard her say, as did the priest,—"Poor child!"

She also pitied him. And why? What was he, then, that they pitied him? Jack asked himself.

This compassion that others felt for him weighed sorely on his little heart. He could have wept with shame, for in his childish mind he attributed this disdainful compassion to some peculiarity of costume, his bare legs, or his long curls.

But he thought of his mother's despair. Should he meet with another refusal? Suddenly he saw Constant draw her purse and hand to the principal some notes and gold pieces. Yes, they were going to keep him. He was delighted, poor child, for he little knew that the great misfortune of his life was now inaugurated there in that room.

At this moment a tremendous bass voice came up from the garden below, singing the chorus of an old song. The windows of the room had not recovered from the shock, when a stout, short man, in a velvet coat, close-cut hair, and heavy beard, burst into the room.

“Hallo!” he cried, in a tone of comic astonishment, “a fire in the parlor? What a luxury!” and he drew a long breath. In fact, the new-comer was in the habit of drawing long breaths at the end of each sentence, a habit he had acquired in singing; and these breaths were almost like the roaring of a wild beast. Catching sight of the strangers and the pile of money, he stopped short with the words on his lips. Delight and surprise succeeded each other on his countenance, whose muscles seemed habituated to all facial contortions.

Moronval turned gravely toward the waiting woman. “M. Labassandre, of the Imperial Academy of Music, our Professor of Music.” Labassandre bowed once, twice, three times, and then, by way of restoring his self-possession, and putting matters at once on a pleasant footing for all parties, administered a kick to the black boy, who did not seem at all astonished, but picked himself up and disappeared from the room.

The door again opened, and two persons entered. One was very ugly—a mean face without a beard, huge spectacles with convex glasses, and wearing an overcoat buttoned to the chin, which bore all up and down the front too visible indications of-the awkwardness of a near-sighted man. This was Dr. Hirsch, Professor of Mathematics and of Natural Sciences. He exhaled a strong odor of alkalies, and, thanks to his chemical manipulations, his fingers were every color of the rainbow. The last comer was very different. Imagine a handsome man, dressed with the greatest care, scrupulously gloved and shod, his hair thrown back from a forehead already unnaturally high. He had a haughty, aggressive air; his heavy blonde moustache, much twisted at the ends, and a large, pale face, gave him the look of a sick soldier.

Moronval presented him as “our great poet, Amaury d’Argenton, Professor of Literature.”

He, too, looked as astonished, when he caught sight of the gold pieces, as did Dr.

Hirsch and the singer Labassandre. His cold eyes had a gleam of light, but it disappeared as he glanced from the child to his nurse.

Then he approached the other professors standing in front of the fire, and, saluting them, listened in silence. Madame Constant thought this Argenton looked proud; but upon Jack the man made a very strong impression, and the child shrank from him with terror and repugnance.

Jack felt that all these men might make him wretched, but this one more than all others. Instinctively, on seeing him enter, the child felt him to be his future enemy, and that cold, hard glance meeting his own, froze him to the core of his heart. How many times, in days to come, was he to encounter those pale, blue eyes, with half-shut, heavy lids, whose glances were cold as steel! The eyes have been called the windows of the soul, but D'Argenton's eyes were windows so closely barred and locked, that one had no reason to suppose that there was a soul behind them.

The conversation finished between Moronval and Constant, the principal approached his new pupil, and giving him a little friendly tap on the cheek, he said, "Come, come, my young friend, you must look brighter than this."

And in fact, Jack, as the moment drew near that he must say farewell to his mother's maid, felt his eyes swimming in tears. Not that he had any great affection for this woman, but she was a part of his home, she saw his mother daily, and the separation was final when she was gone.

"Constant," he whispered, catching her dress, "you will tell mamma to come and see me."

"Certainly. She will come, of course. But don't cry."

The child was sorely tempted to burst into tears; but it seemed to him that all these strange eyes were fixed upon him, and that the Professor of Literature examined him with especial severity: and he controlled himself.

The snow fell heavily. Moronval proposed to send for a carriage, but the maid said

that Augustin and the coupé were waiting at the end of the lane.

“A coupé!” said the principal to himself, in astonished admiration.

“Speaking of Augustin,” said she: “he charged me with a commission. Have you a pupil named Said?”

“To be sure—certainly—a delightful person,” said Moronval.

“And a superb voice. You must hear him,” interrupted Labassandre, opening the door and calling Said in a voice of thunder.

A frightful howl was heard in reply, followed by the appearance of the delightful person.

An awkward schoolboy appeared, whose tunic, like all tunics, and, indeed, like all the clothing of boys of a certain age, was too short and too tight for him; drawn in, in the fashion of a caftan, it told the story at once of an Egyptian in European clothing. His features were regular and delicate enough, but the yellow skin was stretched so tightly over the bones and muscles that the eyes seemed to close of themselves whenever the mouth opened, and vice versa.

This miserable young man, whose skin was so scanty, inspired you with a strong desire to relieve his sufferings by cutting a slit somewhere. He at once remembered Augustin, who had been his parents’ coachman, and who had given him all his cigar-stumps.

“What shall I say to him from you?” asked Constant, in her most amiable tone.

“Nothing,” answered Said, promptly.

“And your parents, how are they? Have you had any news from them lately?”

“No.”

“Have they returned to Egypt, as they thought of doing?”

“Don’t know: they never write.”

It was evident that this pupil of the Moronval Academy had not been educated in the

art of conversation, and Jack listened with many misgivings.

The indifferent fashion with which this youth spoke of his parents, added to what M. Moronval had previously said of the family influences of which most of his pupils had been deprived since infancy, impressed him unfavorably.

It seemed to the child that he was to live among orphans or cast-off children, and would be himself as much cast off as if he had come from Timbuctoo or Otaheite.

Again he caught the dress of his mother's servant. "Tell her to come and see me," he whispered; "O, tell her to come."

And when the door closed behind her, he understood that one chapter in his life was finished; that his existence as a spoiled child, as a petted baby, had vanished into the past, and those dear and happy days would never again return.

While he stood silently weeping, with his face pressed against a window that led into the garden, a hand was extended over his shoulder containing something black.

It was Said, who, as a consolation, offered him the stump of a cigar.

"Take this: I have a trunk full," said the interesting young man, shutting his eyes so as to be able to speak.

Jack, smiling through his tears, made a sign that he did not dare to accept this singular gift; and Said, whose eloquence was very limited, stood silently planted by his side until M. Moronval returned.

He had escorted Madame Constant to her carriage, and came back inspired with respectful indulgence for the grief of his new pupil.

The coachman, Augustin, had such fine furs, the coupé was so well appointed, that the little fellow, Jack, profited by the magnificence of the equipage.

"That is well," he said, benevolently, to the Egyptian. "Play together; but go to the other room, where it is warmer than here, I shall permit the boys to have a holiday in honor of the new pupil."

Poor little fellow! He was soon surrounded by a noisy crowd, who questioned him without mercy. With his blonde curls, his plaid suit, and bare legs, he sat motionless and timid, wondering at the frantic gestipulations of these little boys of foreign birth, and among them all, looked much like an elegant little Parisian shut up in the great monkey cage in the Jardin des Plantes.

This was the idea that occurred to Moronval, but he was aroused from his silent hilarity by the noise of a discussion too animated to be altogether amiable. He heard the puffs and sighs of Labassandre and the solemn little voice of madame. Easily divining the bone of contention, he hastened to the assistance of his wife, whom he found heroically defending the money paid by Madame Constant against the demands of the professors, whose salaries were greatly in arrear.

Evariste Moronval, lawyer, politician, and littérateur, had been sent from Pointe-à-Petre in 1848 as secretary to a deputy from Guadaloupe. At that time he was just twenty-five, energetic and ambitious, with considerable ability and cultivation. Being poor, however, he accepted a dependent position which insured his expenses paid to Paris, that marvellous city, the heat of whose lurid flames extends so far over the world that it attracts even the moths from the colonies.

On landing, he left his deputy in the lurch, easily made a few acquaintances, and attempted a political career, in which path he had obtained a certain success in Guadaloupe; but he had not taken into account his horrible colonial accent, of which, notwithstanding every effort, he was never able to rid himself. The first time he spoke in public, the shouts of laughter that greeted him proved conclusively that he could never make a name, for himself in Paris as a public speaker. He then resolved to write, but he was clever enough to understand that it was far easier to win a reputation at Pointe-à-Petre than in Paris. Haughty and tenacious, and spoiled by small successes, he passed from journal to journal, without being retained for any length of time on the staff of any one. Then began those hard experiences of life

which either crush a man to the earth or harden him to iron. He joined the army of the ten thousand men who live by their wits in Paris, who rise each morning dizzy with hunger and ambitious dreams, make their breakfast from off a penny-roll, black the seams of their coats with ink, whiten their shirt-collars with billiard-chalk, and warm themselves in the churches and libraries.

He became familiar with all these degradations and miseries,—to credit refused at the low eating-house, to the non-admittance to his garret at eleven o'clock at night, and to the scanty bit of candle, and to shoes in holes.

He was one of those professors of—it matters not what, who write articles for the encyclopaedias at a half centime a line, a history of the Middle Ages in two volumes, at twenty-five francs per volume, compile catalogues, and copy plays for the theatres.

He was dismissed from one institution, where he taught English, for having struck one of the pupils in his passionate, Creole fashion.

After three years of this miserable existence, when he had eaten an incalculable number of raw artichokes and radishes, when he had lost his illusions and ruined his stomach, chance sent him to give lessons in a young ladies' school kept by three sisters. The two eldest were over forty; the third was thirty,—small, sentimental, and pretentious. She saw little prospect of marriage, when Moronval offered himself and was accepted.

Once married, they lived some time in the house with the elder sisters; both made themselves useful in giving lessons. But Moronval had retained many of his bachelor habits, which were far from agreeable in that peaceful and well-ordered boarding-school. Besides, the Creole treated his pupils too much as he might have done his slaves at work on the sugar-cane plantation.

The elder sisters, who adored Madame Moronval, were nevertheless obliged to separate from her, and paid her as an indemnification a satisfactory sum. What

should be done with this money? Moronval wished to start a journal, or a review; but to make money was his first wish. Finally, a brilliant idea came to him one day.

He knew that children were sent from all parts of the world to finish their education in Paris. They came from Persia, from Japan, Hindostan, and Guinea, confided to the care of ship-captains, or to merchants. Such people being generally well provided with money, and having but little experience in getting rid of it, Moronval decided that there was an easy mine to work. Besides, the wonderful system of Madame Moronval could be applied in perfection to the correction of foreign accents, to defective pronunciation. The Professor immediately caused advertisements to be inserted in the colonial journals, where were soon to be seen the most amazing advertisements in several languages.

During the first year, the nephew of the Iman of Zanzibar, and two superb blacks from the coast of Guinea, appeared upon the scene. It was not until they arrived that Moronval bestirred himself to find a local habitation and a name. Finally, in order to combine economy with the exigencies of his new position, he hired the buildings we have just visited in this hideous Passage des Douze Maisons, and displayed in the avenue the gorgeous sign we have mentioned.

The owner of the property induced Moronval to believe that certain improvements would soon be made, in fact, that an appropriation was ordered for a new boulevard on one side of the building. This conviction induced Moronval to forget all the inconveniences, the dampness of the dormitory, the cold of certain rooms, the heat of others. This was nothing: the appropriation bill was ready for the signature, and things would be all right soon.

But Moronval was forced to endure that long period of waiting, only too well known to Parisians in the last twenty years; and this wore heavily upon him, costing him more thought and more anxiety than did the improvement or welfare of his pupils. He soon discovered that he had been hugely duped, and this discovery had the worst

effect on the passionate, weak nature of the Creole. His discouragement degenerated into absolute incapacity and indolence. The pupils had no supervision whatever. Provided they went to bed early, so that they used the least possible fire and light, he was satisfied. Their day was cut up into class hours, to be sure, but these were interfered with by every caprice of the principal, who sent the pupils hither and thither on his personal service.

And Moronval called about him all his former acquaintances,—a physician without a diploma, a poet who never published, an opera singer without an engagement,—all of whom were in a state of constant indignation against the world which refused to recognize their rare merits.

Have you noticed how such people by a system of mutual attraction seem to herd together, supporting each other as it were by their mutual complaints? Inspired, in fact, by a thorough contempt for each other, they pretend to an admiring sympathy.

Imagine the lessons given, the instruction imparted by such teachers, the greater part of whose time was passed in discussions over their pipes, the smoke from which soon became so thick that they could neither see nor hear. They talked loudly, contradicted each other with vehemence in a vocabulary of their own, where art, science, and literature were picked into fragments as precious stuffs might be under the application of violent acids.

And the “children of the sun,” what became of them amid all this? Madame Moronval alone, who preserved the good traditions of her former home and school, made any attempts to perform the duties they had undertaken, but the kitchen, her needle, and the care of the great establishment absorbed a great part of her time.

As it was necessary that they should go out, their uniforms were kept in order, for the pupils were proud of their braided tunics, and of the chevrons reaching to the elbow. In the Moronval Academy, as in certain armies of South America, all were sergeants. It was a trifling compensation for the miseries of exile and for the harsh

treatment of surly masters. Moronval was quite pleasant the first days of each new quarter, when his exchequer was full; he had even then been known to smile; but the rest of the time he avenged himself on these black skins for the negro blood in his own veins.

His violence accomplished that which his indolence had begun. Very soon he began to lose his pupils; of the fifteen that were there at one time there remained but eight.

“Number of pupils limited,” said the prospectus, and there was a certain amount of melancholy truth in the announcement. A dismal silence seemed to settle down on the great establishment, which was even threatened with a seizure of the furniture, when Jack appeared upon the scene. It of course was no very great sum, this quarter in advance, but Moronval understood certain prospective advantages, and even had a very clear perception of Ida’s true nature, having cross-examined Constant with very good results. This day, therefore, witnessed a certain armed neutrality between masters and pupils. A good dinner in honor of the new arrival was served, all the professors were present, and “the children of the sun” even had a drop of wine, which startling event had not happened to them for a long time.

CHAPTER III. MÂDOU.

If the Moronval Academy still exists, I desire to stigmatize it now and forever as the most unhealthy spot I ever knew. Its dampness makes it most objectionable for children.

Imagine a long building all rez-de-chaussée, without windows, and lighted only from above. About the room hung an indescribable odor of collodion and ether, as if it had once been used by a photographer. The garden was shut in by high walls covered with ivy which dripped with moisture. The dormitory stood against a superb hotel; and on one side was a stable, always noisy with the oaths of grooms, the trampling of horses’ feet, and the rattling of pumps. From one end of the year to the

other the place was always damp, the only difference being that, according to the different seasons of the year, the dampness was either very cold or very warm. In summer it was filled with moisture like a bathroom. In addition, a crowd of winged creatures, who lived among the old ivy on the walls, attracted by the brightness of the glass in the low roof, introduced themselves into the dormitory through the smallest crevice, and struck their wings against the glass, humming loudly, and finally falling on the beds in clouds.

The winter's humidity was worse still; the cold crept into the dormitory through the uneven floors and the thin walls, but after two hours of shivering the pupils might succeed in getting warm if they drew their knees up to their chins and kept the bedclothes well over their heads. The paternal eye of Moronval saw at once the propriety of utilizing this otherwise unemployed building.

"This shall be the dormitory," he said.

"May it not be somewhat damp?" Madame Moronval ventured to ask.

"What of that?" he answered, sternly.

In reality there was but room for ten beds; but twenty were placed there, with a lavatory at the end, a wretched bit of carpet near the door, and all was in readiness.

Why not? After all, a dormitory is only a place to sleep in, and children should be able to sleep anywhere, in spite of heat or cold, of bad air and of creeping things, in spite of the noise of pumps and of horses. They catch rheumatism, ophthalmia, and bronchitis, to be sure, but they sleep all the same the calm sweet sleep of children worn out by out-door exercise and play, and undisturbed by anxieties for the morrow. This is the popular belief in regard to children, but too many of us know that the truth is quite different. For example, the first night little Jack could not close his eyes. He had never slept in a strange house, and the change was great from his own little room at home, dimly lighted by a night-lamp, and littered with his favorite playthings, to the strange and comfortless place where he now found himself.

As soon as the pupils were in bed, a black servant took away the light, and Jack remained wide awake.

A pale moon, reflected from the snow that covered a portion of the skylight, filled the room with a bluish light. He looked at the beds, standing close together foot to foot the length of the room, most of them unoccupied, their coverings rolled up in a bundle at one end. Seven or eight were animated by an occasional snore, by a hollow cough, or a stifled exclamation.

The new-comer had the best place, a little sheltered from the wind of the door. Nevertheless, he was far from warm, and the cold kept him from sleep as much as the novelty of his surroundings. He went over and over again in his memory every trifling detail of the day's events. He saw Moronval's bulky white cravat, the enormous spectacles of Dr. Hirsch—his soiled and spotted overcoat; but above all he recalled the cold and haughty eyes of "his enemy," as he already in his innermost heart called D'Argenton.

This thought struck such terror to his soul that involuntarily he looked to his mother for protection and defence.

Where was she at that moment? A dozen different clocks at that instant struck eleven. She was probably at some ball or theatre. She would soon come in, all wrapped in furs and laces. When she came, it mattered not how late, she always opened Jack's door and bent over his bed to kiss him. Even in his sleep he was generally conscious of her presence, and smilingly opened his eyes to admire her toilette. And now he shuddered as he thought of the change; and yet it was not altogether painful, for the chevrons of his uniform delighted him, and he was happy in concealing his long legs in the skirt of his tunic. He had made two or three new acquaintances,—a thing very agreeable to most children; he had found his fellow-pupils odd enough, but their oddities interested him. They had snowballed each other in the garden, which, to a child who had been living in the warm boudoir

of a pretty woman, was a very novel amusement.

One thing puzzled Jack: he had not yet seen his royal Highness. Where was the little king of Dahomey, of whom M. Moronval had spoken so warmly? Was he in the Infirmary? Ah! if he could only see him, talk with him, and make him his friend. He repeated to himself the names of the “eight children of the sun,” but there was no prince among them. Then he thought he would ask the boy Said.

“Is not his royal Highness in the school at present?” he asked.

The young man looked at him with wide-opened eyes, in astonished silence. Jack’s question remained unanswered, and the child’s thoughts ran on as he lay in his bed, listening to occasional gusts of music that rang through the house from the lungs of Labassandre, and to the perpetual sound of the pumps in the stable.

Moronval’s guests were gone, with a final bang of the large gate, and all was silent. Suddenly the dormitory door was thrown open, and the small black servant entered, with a lantern in his hand.

He shook off the snow that lay thick on his black head, and crept between the two rows of beds, with his head drawn down between his shoulders, and his teeth chattering.

Jack looked at the grotesque shadows on the wall, which exaggerated all the peculiarities of the black boy—the protruding mouth, the enormous ears, and retreating forehead.

The boy hung his lantern at the end of the dormitory and stood there warming his hands, which were covered with chilblains. His face, though dirty, was so honest and kindly, that Jack’s heart warmed toward him. As he stood there the negro looked out into the garden. “Ah! the snow! the snow!” he murmured sadly.

His way of speaking, and the sweet voice, touched little Jack, who looked at the boy with lively pity and curiosity. The negro saw it, and said, half to himself, “Ah! the new pupil! Why don’t you go to sleep, little boy?”

“I cannot,” said Jack, sighing.

“It is good to sigh if you are sorry,” said the negro, sententiously. “If the poor world could not sigh, the poor world would stifle!”

As he spoke, he threw a blanket on the bed next to Jack.

“Do you sleep there?” asked the child, astonished that a servant should occupy a bed in the dormitory of the pupils. “But there are no sheets!”

“Sheets are not good for me, my skin is too black.” The negro laughed gently as he said these words, and prepared to glide into bed, half clothed as he was, when suddenly he stopped, drew from his breast an ivory smelling-bottle, and kissed it devoutly.

“What a funny medal!” cried Jack.

“It is not a medal,” answered the negro; “it is my Gri-qri.”

But Jack had no idea what a Gri-gri was, and the other explained that it was an amulet—something to bring him good luck. His Aunt Kérika had given it to him when he left his native land,—the aunt who had brought him up, and to whom he hoped to return at some future day.

“As I shall to my mamma,” said little Barancy; and both children were silent, each thinking of the one he loved most on earth.

Jack returned to the charge in a few minutes. “And your country—is it a pretty place? Is it far off? and what is its name?”

“Dahomey,” answered the negro.

Jack started up in bed.

“What! Do you know him? Did you come to this country with him?”

“Who?”

“Why, his royal Highness,—you know him,—the little king of Dahomey.”

“I am he,” said the negro, quietly.

The other looked at him in amazement. A king! this servant, whom he had seen at work all day making fires, sweeping the corridors, waiting on the table, and rinsing glasses!

The negro spoke the truth, nevertheless. The expression of his face grew very sad, and his eyes were fixed as if he were looking into the past, or toward some dear, lost land. Was it the magical word of king that led Jack to examine this black boy, seated on the edge of his bed, his white shirt open, while on his dark breast shone the ivory amulet, with new interest?

“How did all this happen?” asked the child, timidly.

The black boy turned quickly to extinguish the lantern. “M. Moronval not like it if Mâdou lets it burn.” Then he pulled his couch close to that of Jack.

“You are not sleepy,” he said; “and I never wish to sleep if I can talk of Dahomey. Listen!”

And in the darkness, where the whites only of his eyes could be seen, the little negro began his dismal tale.

He was called Mâdou,—the name of his father, an illustrious warrior, one of the most powerful sovereigns in the land of gold and ivory: to whom France, Holland, and England sent presents and envoys. His father had cannon, and soldiers, troops of elephants with trappings for war, musicians and priests, four regiments of Amazons, and two hundred wives. His palace was immense, and ornamented by spears on which hung human heads after a battle or a sacrifice. Mâdou was born in this palace. His Aunt Kérika, general-in-chief of the Amazons, took him with her in all her expeditions. How beautiful she was, this Kérika! tall and large as a man,—in a blue tunic; her naked arms and legs loaded with bracelets and anklets; her bow slung over her shoulder, and the tail of a horse streaming below her waist. Upon her head, in her woolly locks, she wore two small antelope horns joining in a half-moon; as if

these black warriors had preserved among themselves the tradition of Diana the white huntress! And what an eye she had, what deftness of hand! Why, she could cut off the head of an Ashantee at a single blow. But, however terrible Kérika might have been on the battlefield, to her nephew Mâdou she was always very gentle, bestowing on him gifts of all kinds: necklaces of coral and of amber, and all the shells he desired,—shells being the money in that part of the world. She even gave him a small but gorgeous musket, presented to herself by the Queen of England, and which Kérika found too light for her own use. Mâdou always carried it when he went to the forests to hunt with his aunt.

There the trees were so close together, and the foliage so thick, that the sun never penetrated to these green temples. Then Mâdou described with enthusiasm the flowers and the fruits, the butterflies, and birds with wonderful plumage, and Jack listened in delight and astonishment. There were serpents, too, but they were harmless; and black monkeys leaped from tree to tree; and large mysterious lakes, that had never reflected the skies in their brown depths, lay here and there in the forests.

At this, Jack uttered an exclamation, “O, how beautiful it must be!”

“Yes, very beautiful,” said the black boy, who undoubtedly exaggerated a little, and saw his dear native land through the prism of absence, of childish recollections, and with the enthusiasm of his southern nature; but encouraged by his comrade’s sympathy, Mâdou continued his story.

At night the forests were very different; hunting-parties bivouacked in the jungles, building huge fires to drive away wild beasts, who were heard in the distance roaring horribly. The birds were aroused; and the bats, silent and black as shadows, attracted by the fire-light, hovered over and about it until daybreak, when they assembled on some gigantic tree, motionless, and pressed against each other, looking like some singular leaves, dry and dead.

In this open-air life the little prince grew strong and manly,—could wield a sabre and carry a gun at an age when children are usually tied to their mother's apron-string. The king was proud of his son, the heir to his throne. But, alas! it seemed that it was not enough, even for a negro prince, to know how to shoot an elephant through the eye; he must also learn to read books and writing, for, said the wise king to his son, "White man always has paper in his pocket to cheat black man with." Of course some European might have been found in Dahomey who could instruct the prince,—for French and English flags floated over the ships in the harbors. But the king had himself been sent by his father to a town called Marseilles, very far at the end of the world; and he wished his son to receive a similar education.

How unhappy the little prince was in leaving Kérika; he looked at his sabre, hung his gun against the wall, and set sail with M. Bonfils, a clerk in a mercantile house, who sent him home every year with the gold dust stolen from the poor negroes.

Mâdou, however, was resigned; he wished to be a great king some day, to command the troop of Amazons, to be the proprietor of these fields of corn and wheat, and of the palace filled with jars of palm-oil and with treasures of gold and ivory. To own these riches he must deserve them, and be capable of defending them when necessary,—and Mâdou early learned that it is hard to be a king; for when one has more pleasures than the rest of the world, one has also greater responsibilities.

His departure was the occasion of great public fetes, of sacrifices to the fetish and to the divinities of the sea. All the temples were thrown open for these solemnities, the prayers of the nation were offered there, and at the last moment, when the ship set sail, fifteen prisoners of war were executed on the shore, and the executioner threw their heads into a great copper basin.

"Good gracious!" gasped Jack, pulling the bedclothes over his head.

It is certainly not very agreeable to hear such stories told by the actors in them; and Jack was very glad that he was in the Moronval Academy rather than in that terrible

land of Dahomey.

Mâdou seeing the effect he had produced, dwelt no longer on the ceremonies preceding his departure, but proceeded to describe his arrival and life at Marseilles.

He told of the college there, of the high walls and the benches in the court-yard, where the pupils cut their names; of the solemn professor, who sternly said, if a whisper was heard, “Not so much noise, if you please!” The close air of the recitation-rooms, the monotonous scratching of pens, the lessons repeated over and over again, were all new and very trying to Mâdou. His one idea was to get into the sun; but the walls were so high, the court-yard so narrow, that he could never find enough to bask in. Nothing amused or interested him. He was never allowed to go out as were the other pupils, and for a very good reason. At first he had induced M. Bonfils to take him to the wharves, where he often saw merchandise from his own country, and sometimes went into ecstasies at some well-known mark.

The steamers puffing and blowing, and the great ships setting their sails, all spoke to him of departure and deliverance.

Mâdou dreamed of these ships all through school-hours,—one had brought him to that cold gray land, another would take him away. And possessed by this fixed idea, he paid no attention to his A B C’s, for his eyes saw nothing save the blue of the sea and the blue of the sky above. The result of this was, that one fine day he escaped from the college and hid himself on one of the vessels of M. Bonfils; he was found in time, but escaped again, and the second time was not discovered until the ship was in the middle of the Gulf of Lyons. Any other child would have been kept on board; but when Mâdou’s name was known, the captain took his royal Highness back to Marseilles, relying on a reward.

After that, the boy became more and more unhappy, for he was kept a very close prisoner. Notwithstanding all this, he escaped once more; and this time, on being discovered, made no resistance, but obeyed so gently, and with such a sad smile, that

no one had the heart to punish him. At last the principal of the institution declined the responsibility of so determined a pupil. Should he send the little prince back to Dahomey? M. Bonfils dared not permit this, fearing thereby to lose the good graces of the king. In the midst of these perplexities Moronvol's advertisement appeared, and the prince was at once dispatched to 23 Avenue Montaigne,—"the most beautiful situation in Paris,"—where he was received, as you may well believe, with open arms. This heir of a far-off kingdom was a godsend to the academy. He was constantly on exhibition; M. Moronval showed him at theatres and concerts, and along the boulevards, reminding one of those perambulating advertisements that are to be seen in all large cities.

He appeared in society, such society at least as admitted M. Moronval, who entered a room with all the gravity of Fénélon conducting the Duke of Burgundy. The two were announced as "His Royal Highness the Prince of Dahomey, and M. Moronval, his tutor."

For a month the newspapers were full of anecdotes of Mâdou; an attaché of a London paper was sent to interview him, and they had a long and serious talk as to the course the young prince should pursue when called to the throne of his ancestors. The English journal published an account of the curious dialogue, and the vague replies certainly left much to be desired.

At first all the expenses of the academy were discharged by this solitary pupil, Monsieur Bonfils paying the bill that was presented to him without a word of dispute. Mâdou's education, however, made but little progress. He still continued among the A B C's, and Madame Moronval's charming method made no impression upon him. His defective pronunciation was still retained, and his half-childish way of speaking was not changed. But he was gay and happy. All the other children were compelled to yield to him a certain deference. At first this was a difficult matter, as his intense blackness seemed to indicate to these other children of the sun that he

was a slave.

And how amiable the professors were to this bullet-headed boy, who, in spite of his natural amiability, so sturdily refused to profit by their instructions! Every one of the teachers had his own private idea of what could be done in the future under the patronage of this embryo king. It was the refrain of all their conversations. As soon as Mâdou was crowned, they would all go to Dahomey. Labassandre intended to develop the musical taste of Dahomey, and saw himself the director of a conservatory, and at the head of the Royal Chapel.

Madame Moronval meant to apply her method to class upon class of crisp black heads. But Dr. Hirsch saw innumerable beds in a hospital, upon the inmates of which he could experiment without fear of any interference from the police. The first few weeks, therefore, of his sojourn at Paris seemed to Mâdou very sweet. If only the sun would shine out brightly, if the fine rain would cease to fall, or the thick fog clear away; if, in short, the boy could once have been thoroughly warm, he would have been content; and if Kérika, with her gun and her bow, her arms covered with clanking bracelets, could occasionally have appeared in the Passage des Douze Maison, he would have been very happy.

But Destiny altered all this. M. Bonfils arrived suddenly one day, bringing most disastrous news of Dahomey. The king was dethroned, taken prisoner by the Ashantees, who meant to found a new dynasty. The royal troops and the regiment of Amazons had all been conquered and dispersed. Kérika alone was saved, and she dispatched M. Bonfils to Mâdou to tell him to remain in France, and to take good care of his Gri-gri, for it was written in the great book that if Mâdou did not lose that amulet, he would come into his kingdom. The poor little king was in great trouble. Moronval, who placed no faith in the gri-gri, presented his bill—and such a bill!—to M. Bonfils, who paid it, but informed the principal that in future, if he consented to keep Mâdou, he must not rely upon any present compensation, but upon the

gratitude of the king as soon as the fortunes and chances of war should restore him to his throne. Would the principal oblige M. Bonfils by at once signifying his intentions? Moronval promptly and nobly said, “I will keep the child.” Observe that it was no longer “his Royal Highness.” And the boy at once became like all the other scholars, and was scolded and punished as they were,—more, in fact, for the professors were out of temper with him, feeling apparently, that they had been deluded by false pretences. The child could understand little of this, and tried in vain all the gentle ways that had seemed to win so much affection before. It was worse still the next quarter, when Moronval, receiving no money, realized that Mâdou was a burden to him. He dismissed the servant, and installed Mâdou in his place, not without a scene with the young prince. The first time a broom was placed in his hands and its use explained to him, Mâdou obstinately refused. But M. Moronval had an irresistible argument ready, and after a heavy caning the boy gave up. Besides, he preferred to sweep rather than to learn to read. The prince, therefore, scrubbed and swept with singular energy, and the salon of the Moronvals was scrupulously clean; but Moronval’s heart was not softened. In vain did the little fellow work; in vain did he seek to obtain a kindly word from his master; in vain did he hover about him with all the touching humility of a submissive hound: he rarely obtained any other recompense than a blow.

The boy was in despair. The skies grew grayer and grayer, the rain seemed to fall more persistently, and the snow was colder than ever.

O Kérika! Aunt Kérika! so haughty and so tender, where are you? Come and see what they are doing with your little king! How he is treated, how scantily he is fed, how ragged are his clothes, and how cold he is! He has but one suit now, and that a livery—a red coat and striped vest! Now, when he goes out with his master, he does not walk at his side—he follows him.

Mâdou’s honesty and ingenuity had, however, so won the confidence of Madame

Moronval, that she sent him to market. Behold, therefore, this last descendant of the powerful Tocodonon, the founder of the Dahomian dynasty, staggering daily from the market under the weight of a huge basket, half fed and half clothed, cold to the very heart; for nothing warms him now, neither violent exercise, nor blows, nor the shame of having become a servant; nor even his hatred of “the father with a stick,” as he called Moronval.

And yet that hatred was something prodigious; and Mâdou confided to Jack his projects of vengeance.

“When Mâdou goes home to Dahomey, he will write a little letter to the father with the stick; he will tell him to come to Dahomey, and he will cut off his head into the copper basin, and afterwards will cover a big drum with his skin, and I will then march against the Ashantees,—Boum! boum! boum!”

Jack could just see in the shadow the gleam of the negro’s white eyes, and heard the raps upon the footboard of the bed, that imitated the drum, and was frightened. He fancied that he heard the whizzing of the sabres, and the heavy thud of the falling heads; he pulled the blanket over his head, and held his breath.

Mâdou, who was excited by his own story, wished to talk on, but he thought his solitary auditor asleep. But when Jack drew a long breath, Mâdou said gently, “Shall we talk some more, sir?”

“Yes,” answered Jack; “only don’t let us say any more about that drum, nor the copper basin.” The negro laughed silently. “Very well, sir; Mâdou won’t talk—you must talk now. What is your name?”

“Jack, with a k. Mamma thinks a great deal about that—”

“Is your mamma very rich?”

“Rich! I guess she is,” said Jack, by no means unwilling to dazzle Mâdou in his turn. “We have a carriage, a beautiful house on the boulevard, horses, servants, and all. And then you will see, when mamma comes here, how beautiful she is. Everybody

in the street turns to look at her, she has such beautiful dresses and such jewels. We used to live at Tours; it was a pretty place. We walked in the Rue Royale, where we bought nice cakes, and where we met plenty of officers in uniform. The gentlemen were all good to me. I had Papa Leon, and Papa Charles,—not real papas, you know, because my own father died when I was a little fellow. When we first went to Paris I did not like it; I missed the trees and the country; but mamma petted me so much, and was so good to me, that I was soon happy again. I was dressed like the little English boys, and my hair was curled, and every day we went to the Bois. At last my mamma's old friend said that I ought to learn something; so mamma took me to the Jesuit College—"

Here Jack stopped suddenly. To say that the Fathers would not receive him, wounded his self-love sorely. Notwithstanding the ignorance and innocence of his age, he felt that there was something humiliating to his mother in this avowal, as well as to himself; and then this recital, on which he had so heedlessly entered, carried him back to the only serious trouble of his life. Why had they not been willing to receive him? why did his mother weep? and why did the Superior pity him?

"Say, then, little master," asked the negro suddenly, "what is a cocotte?"

"A cocotte?" asked Jack in astonishment. "I don't know. Is it a chicken?"

"I heard the father with a stick say to Madame Moronval that your mother was a cocotte."

"What an ideal. You misunderstood," and at the thought of his mother being a hen, with feathers, wings, and claws, the boy began to laugh; and Mâdou, without knowing why, followed his example.

This gayety soon obliterated the painful impressions of their previous conversation, and the two little, lonely fellows, after having confided to each other all their sorrows, fell asleep with smiles on their lips.

CHAPTER IV. THE REUNION.

Children are like grown people,—the experiences of others are never of any use to them.

Jack had been terrified by Mâdou's story, but he thought of it only as a frightful tale, or a bloody battle seen at the theatre. The first months were so happy at the academy, every one was so kind, that he forgot that Mâdou for a time had been equally happy.

At table he occupied the next seat to Moronval, drank his wine, shared his dessert; while the other children, as soon as the cakes and fruit appeared, rose abruptly from the table. Opposite Jack sat Dr. Hirsch, whose finances, to judge from his appearance, were in a most deplorable condition. He enlivened the repast by all sorts of scientific jokes, by descriptions of surgical operations, by accounts of infectious diseases, and, in fact, kept his hearers au courant with all the ailments of the day; and, if he heard of a case of leprosy, of elephantiasis, or of the plague, in any quarter of the globe, he would nod his head with delight, and say, "It will be here before long—before long!"

As a neighbor at the table he was not altogether satisfactory: first, his near-sightedness made him very awkward; and, next, he had a way of dropping into your plate, or glass, a pinch of powder, or a few drops from a vial in his pocket. The contents of this vial were never the same, for the doctor made new scientific discoveries each week, but in general bicarbonate, alkalies, and arsenic (in infinitesimal doses fortunately) made the base of these medicaments. Jack submitted to these preventives, and did not venture to say that he thought they tasted very badly. Occasionally the other professors were invited, and everybody drank the health of the little De Barancy, every one was enthusiastic over his sweetness and cleverness. The singing teacher, Labassandre, at the least joke made by the child, threw himself back in his chair with a loud laugh, pounded the table with his fist,

and wiped his eyes with a corner of his napkin.

Even D'Argenton, the handsome D'Argenton, relaxed, a pale smile crossed his big moustache, and his cold blue eyes were turned on the child with haughty approval. Jack was delighted. He did not understand, nor did he wish to understand, the signs made to him by Mâdou, as he waited upon the table, with a napkin in one hand and a plate in the other. Mâdou knew better than any one else the real value of these exaggerated praises and the vanity of human greatness.

He too had occupied the seat of honor, had drunk of his master's wine, flavored by the powder from the doctor's bottle; and the tunic, with its silver chevrons, was it not too large for Jack only because it had been made for Mâdou? The story of the little negro should have been a warning to the small De Barancy against the sin of pride, for the installation of both boys in the Moronval Academy had been precisely of the same character.

The holiday instituted in honor of Jack was insensibly prolonged into weeks. Lessons were few and far between, except from Madame Moronval, who snatched every opportunity of testing her method.

As to Moronval himself, he professed a great weakness for his new pupil. He had made inquiries in regard to the little hotel on the Boulevard Hauss-mann, and had fully acquainted himself with the resources of the lady there. When, therefore, Madame de Barancy came to see Jack, which was very often, she met with a warm reception, and had an attentive audience for all the vain and foolish stories she saw fit to tell. At first Madame Moronval wished to preserve a certain dignified coolness toward such a person, but her husband soon changed that idea, and she saw herself obliged to lay aside her womanly scruples in favor of her interests.

"Jack! Jack! here comes your mother," some one would cry as the door opened, and Ida would sail in beautifully dressed, with packages of cakes and bonbons in her hands and her muff. It was a festival for every one; they all shared the delicacies,

and Madame de Barancy ungloved her hand, the one on which were the most rings, and condescended to take a portion. The poor creature was so generous, and money slipped so easily through her fingers, that she generally brought with her cakes all sorts of presents, playthings, &c., which she distributed as the fancy struck her. It is easy to imagine the enthusiastic praises lavished upon this inconsiderate, reckless generosity. Moronval alone had a smile of pity and of envy at seeing money so wasted, which should have gone to the assistance of some brave, generous soul like himself, for example. This was his fixed idea. And as he sat looking at Ida and gnawing his finger-nails, he had an absent, anxious air like that of a man who comes to ask a loan, and has his petition on the end of his lips. Moronval's dream for some time had been to establish a Review consecrated to colonial interests, in this way hoping to satisfy his political aspirations by recalling himself regularly to his compatriots; and, finally, who knows he might be elected deputy. But, as a commencement, the journal seemed indispensable, and he had a vague notion that the mother of his new pupil might be induced to defray the expenses of this Review, but he did not wish to move too rapidly lest he should frighten the lady away; he intended to prepare the way gently. Unfortunately, Madame de Barancy, on account of her very fickleness of nature, was difficult to reach. She would continually change the conversation just at the important point, because she found it very uninteresting.

"If she could be inspired with an idea of writing!" said Moronval to himself, and immediately insinuated to her that between Madame de Sévigné and George Sand there was a vacant niche to fill; but he might as well have attempted to carry on a conversation with a bird that was fluttering about his head.

"I am not strong-minded nor literary," said Ida, with a half yawn, one day when he had been speaking with feverish impatience for a long time.

Moronval finally concluded that a creature so inconsequent must be dazzled, not led.

One day, when Ida was holding audience in the parlor, telling wonderful tales of her various acquaintances to whose often plebeian names she added the de as she pleased, Madame Moronval said, timidly,—

“M. Moronval would like to ask you something, but he dares not.”

“O, tell me, tell me!” said the silly little woman, with a sincere wish to oblige.

The principal was sorely tempted to ask her at once for funds for the Review, but being himself very distrustful, he thought it wiser to act with great prudence; so he contented himself with asking Madame de Barancy to be present at one of their literary reunions on the following Saturday. Formerly these little fêtes took place every week, but since Mâdou’s fall they had been very infrequent. It was in vain that Moronval had extinguished a candle with every guest that left, in vain had he dried the tea-leaves from the teapot in the sun on the window-sill, and served it again the following week, the expense still was too great. But now he determined to hazard another attempt in that direction. Madame de Barancy accepted the invitation with eagerness. The idea of making her appearance in the salon as a married woman of position was very attractive to her, for it was one round of the ladder conquered, on which she hoped to ascend from her irregular and unsatisfactory life.

This was a most splendid fête at which she assisted. In the memory of all beholders no such entertainment had taken place. Two colored lanterns hung on the acacias at the entrance, the vestibule was lighted, and at least thirty candles were burning in the salon, the floor of which Mâdou had so waxed and rubbed for the occasion that it was as brilliant and as dangerous as ice. The negro boy had surpassed himself; and here let me say that Moronval was in a great state of perplexity as to the part that the prince should take at the soirée.

Should he be withdrawn from his domestic duties and restored for one day only to his title and ancient splendor? This idea was very tempting; but, then, who would hand the plates and announce the guests? Who could replace him? No one of the

other scholars, for each had some one in Paris who might not be pleased with this system of education; and finally it was decided that the soirée must be deprived of the presence and prestige of his royal Highness. At eight o'clock, "the children of the sun" took their seats on the benches, and among them the blonde head of little De Barancy glittered like a star on the dark background.

Moronval had issued numerous invitations among the artistic and literary world—the one at least which he frequented—and the representatives of art, literature, and architecture appeared in large delegations. They arrived in squads, cold and shivering, coming from the depths of Montparnasse on the tops of omnibuses, ill dressed and poor, unknown, but full of genius, drawn from their obscurity by the longing to be seen, to sing or to recite something, to prove to themselves that they were still alive. Then, after this breath of pure air, this glimpse of the heavens above, comforted by a semblance of glory and success, they returned to their squalid apartments, having gained a little strength to vegetate. There were philosophers wiser than Leibnitz; there were painters longing for fame, but whose pictures looked as if an earthquake had shaken everything from its perpendicular; musicians—inventors of new instruments; savans in the style of Dr. Hirsch, whose brains contained a little of everything, but where nothing could be found by reason of the disorder and the dust. It was sad to see them; and if their insatiate pretensions, as obtrusive as their bushy heads, their offensive pride and pompous manners, had not given one an inclination to laugh, their half-starved air and the feverish glitter of eyes that had wept over so many lost illusions and disappointed hopes, would have awakened profound compassion in the hearts of lookers-on.

Besides these there were others, who, finding art too hard a taskmistress and too niggardly in her rewards, sought other employment.. For example, a lyric poet kept an intelligence office, a sculptor was an agent for a wine merchant, and a violinist was in a gas-office.

Others less worthy allowed themselves to be supported by their wives. These couples came together, and the poor women bore on their brave, worn faces the stamp of the penalty they paid for the companionship of men of genius. Proud of being allowed to accompany their husbands, they smiled upon them with an air of gratified maternal vanity. Then there were the habitués of the house, the three professors; Labassandre in gala costume, exercising his lungs at intervals by tremendous inspirations; and D'Argenton, the handsome D'Argenton, curled and pomaded, wearing light gloves, and his manners a charming mixture of authority, geniality, and condescension.

Standing near the door of the salon, Moronval received every one, shaking hands with all, but growing very anxious as the hour grew later and the countess did not appear; for Ida de Barancy was called the countess under that roof. Every one was uncomfortable. Little Madame de Moronval went from group to group, saying, with an amiable air, "We will wait a few moments, the countess has not yet arrived!"

The piano was open, the pupils were ranged against the wall; a small green table, on which stood a glass of eau-sucré and a reading-lamp, was in readiness. M. Moronval, imposing in his white vest; Madame, red and oppressed by all the worry of the evening; and Mâdotu, shivering in the wind from the door,—all are waiting for the countess. Meanwhile, as she came not, D'Argenton consented to recite a poem that all his assistants knew, for they had heard it a dozen times before. Standing in front of the chimney, with his hair thrown back from his wide forehead, the poet declaimed, in a coarse, vulgar voice, what he called his poem.

His friends were not sparing in their praises.

"Magnificent!" said one. "Sublime!" exclaimed another; and the most amazing criticism came from yet another,—"Goethe with a heart?"

Here Ida entered. The poet did not see her, for his eyes were lifted to the ceiling. But she saw him, poor woman; and from that moment her heart was gone. She had never

seen him, save in the street wearing his hat: now she beheld him in the mellow light which softened still more his pale face, wearing a dress-coat and evening gloves, reciting a love poem, and, believing in love as he did in God, he produced an extraordinary effect upon her.

He was the hero of her dreams, and corresponded with all the foolish sentimental ideas that lie hidden very often in the hearts of such women.

From that very moment she was his, and he took exclusive possession of her heart. She paid no attention to her little Jack, who made frantic signs to her as he threw her kiss after kiss; nor had she eyes for Moronval, who bowed to the ground; nor for the curious glances that examined her from head to foot, as she stood before them in her black velvet dress and her little white opera hat, trimmed with black roses and ornamented with tulle strings which wrapped about her like a scarf. Years after she recalled the profound impression of that evening, and saw as in a dream her poet as she saw him first in that salon, which seemed to her, seen through the vista of years, immense and superb. The future might heap misery upon her; her past could humiliate and wound her, crush her life, and something more precious than life itself; but the recollection of that brief moment of ecstasy could never be effaced.

“You see, madame,” said Moronval, with his most insinuating smile, “that we made a beginning before your arrival. M. le Vicomte Amaury d’Argenton was reciting his magnificent poem.”

“Vicomte!” He was noble, then!

She turned toward him, timid and blushing as a young girl.

“Continue, sir, I beg of you,” she said.

But D’Argenton did not care to do so. The arrival of the countess had injured the effect of his poem—destroyed its point; and such things are not easily pardoned. He bowed, and answered with cold haughtiness that he had finished. Then he turned away without troubling himself more about her. The poor woman felt a strange pang

at her heart. She had displeased him, and the very thought was unendurable. It needed all little Jack's tender caresses and outspoken joy—all his delight at the admiration expressed for her, the attentions of everybody, the idea that she was queen of the fete—to efface the sorrow she felt, and which she showed by a silence of at least five minutes, which silence for a nature like hers was something as extraordinary as restful. The disturbance of her entrance being at last over, every one seated himself to await the next recitation.

Mademoiselle Constant, who had accompanied her mistress, took her seat majestically on the front bench next the pupils. Jack swung himself on the arm of his mother's chair, between her and M. Moronval, who smoothed the lad's hair in the most paternal way.

The assemblage was really quite imposing, and Madame Moronval took dignified possession of the little table and the shaded lamp, and proceeded to read an ethnographic composition of her husband's on the Mongolian races. It was long and tedious—one of those lucubrations that are delivered before certain scientific societies, and succeed in lulling the members to sleep. Madame Moronval took this opportunity of demonstrating the peculiarities of her method, which had the merit—if merit it were—of holding the attention as in a vice, and the words and syllables seemed to reverberate through your own brain. To see Madame Moronval open her mouth to sound her o's, to hear the r's rattle in her throat, was more edifying than agreeable. The mouths of the eight children opposite mechanically followed each one of her gestures, producing a most extraordinary effect; one absolutely fascinating to Mademoiselle Constant.

But the countess saw nothing of all this; she had eyes but for her poet leaning against the door of the drawing-room, with arms folded and eyes moodily cast down. In vain did Ida seek to attract his attention; he glanced occasionally about the salon, but her arm-chair might as well have been vacant; he did not appear to see

her, and the poor woman was rendered so utterly miserable by this neglect and indifference, that she forgot to congratulate Moronval on the brilliant success of his essay, which concluded amid great applause and universal relief.

Then followed another brief poem by Argenton, to which Ida listened breathlessly.

“Ah, how beautiful!” she cried; “how beautiful!” and she turned to Moronval, who sat with a forced smile on his lips. “Present me to M. d’Argenton, if you please.”

She spoke to the poet in a low voice and with great courtesy. He, however, bowed very coldly, apparently careless of her implied admiration.

“How happy you are,” she said, “in the possession of such a talent!”

Then she asked where she could obtain his poems.

“They are not to be procured, madame,” answered D’Argenton, gravely.

Without knowing it, she had again wounded his sensitive pride, and he turned away without vouchsafing another syllable.

But Moronval profited by this opening. “Think of it!” he said; “think that such verses as those cannot find a publisher! That such genius as that is buried in obscurity! If we only could publish a magazine!”

“And why can you not?” asked Ida, quickly.

“Because we have not the funds.”

“But they can easily be procured. Such talent should not be allowed to languish!”

She spoke with great earnestness; and Moronval saw at once that he had played his cards well, and proceeded to take advantage of the lady’s weakness by talking to her of D’Argenton, whom he painted in glowing colors.

He spoke of him as Lara, or Manifred, a proud and independent nature, one which could not be conquered by the hardships of his lot.

Here Ida interrupted him to ask if the poet was not of noble birth.

“Most assuredly, madame. He is a viscount, and descended from one of the noblest families in Auvergne. His father was ruined by the dishonesty of an agent.”

This was his text, which he proceeded to enlarge upon, and illustrate by many romantic incidents. Ida drank in the whole story; and while these two were absorbed in earnest conversation, Jack grew jealous, and made various efforts to attract his mother’s attention. “Jack, do be quiet!” and “Jack, you are insufferable!” finally sent him off, with tearful eyes and swollen lips, to sulk in the corner of the salon. Meanwhile the literary entertainments of the evening went on, and finally Labassandre, after numerous entreaties, was induced to sing. His voice was so powerful, and so pervaded the house, that Mâdou, who was in the kitchen preparing tea, replied by a frightful war-cry. The poor fellow worshipped noise of all kinds and at all times.

Moronval and the comtesse continued their conversation; and D’Argenton, who by this time understood that he was the subject, stood in front of them, apparently absorbed in conversation with one of the professors. He appeared to be out of temper—and with whom? With the whole world; for he was one of that very large class who are at war against society, and against the manners and customs of their day.

At this very moment he was declaiming violently, “You have all the vices of the last century, and none of its amenities. Honor is a mere name. Love is a farce. You have accomplished nothing intellectually.”

“Pardon me, sir,” interrupted his hearer. But the other went on more vehemently and more aggressively. He wished, he said, that all France could hear what he thought. The nation was abased, crushed beyond all hope of recuperation. As for himself, he had determined to emigrate to America.

All this time the poet was vaguely conscious of the admiring gaze that was bent upon him. He experienced something of the same sensation that one has in the fields

in the early evening, when the moon suddenly rises behind you and compels you to turn toward its silent presence. The eyes of this woman magnetized him in the same way. The words she caught in regard to leaving France struck a chill to her heart. A funereal gloom settled over the room. Additional dismay overwhelmed her as D'Argenton wound up with a vigorous tirade against French women,—their lightness and coquetry, the insincerity of their smiles, and the venality of their love.

The poet no longer conversed; he declaimed, leaning against the chimney, and careless who heard either his voice or his words.

Poor Ida, intensely absorbed as she was in him, could not realize that he was indifferent, and fancied that his invectives were addressed to herself.

"He knows who I am," she said, and bowed her head in shame.

Moronval said aloud, "What a genius!" and in a lower voice to himself, "What a boaster!" But Ida needed nothing more; her heart was gone. Had Dr. Hirsch, who was always so interested in pathological singularities, been then at leisure, he might have made a curious study of this case of instantaneous combustion.

An hour before, Madame Moronval had dispatched Jack to bed, with two or three of the younger children; the others were gaping in silent wretchedness, stupefied by all they saw and heard. The Chinese lanterns swung in the wind each side of the garden-gate; the lane was unlighted, and not even a policeman enlivened its muddy sidewalk; but the disputative little group that left the Moronval Academy cared little for the gloom, the cold, or the dampness.

When they reached the avenue they found that the hour for the omnibus had passed. They accepted this as they did the other disagreeables of life—in the same brave spirit.

Art is a great magician. It creates a sunshine from which its devotees, as well as the poor and the ugly, the sick and the sorry, can each borrow a little, and with it gain a grace to suffer, and a calm serenity that may well be envied.

CHAPTER V. A DINNER WITH IDA.

The next day the Moronvals received from Madame de Barancy an invitation for the following Monday; at the bottom of the note was a postscript, expressing the pleasure she should have in receiving also M. d'Argenton.

"I shall not go," said the poet, dryly, when Moronval handed him the coquettish perfumed note. Then the principal grew very angry, as he saw his plans frustrated. "Why would not D'Argenton accept the invitation?"

"Because," was the answer, "I never visit such women."

"You make a great mistake," said Moronval; "Madame de Barancy is not the kind of person you imagine. Besides, to serve a friend, you should lay aside your scruples. You see that I need the countess, that she is disposed to look favorably on my Colonial Review, and you should do all that lies in your power to favor my views. Come, now, think better of it."

D'Argenton, after being properly entreated, finished by accepting the invitation.

On the following Monday, therefore, Moronval and his wife left the academy under the supervision of Dr. Hirsch, and presented themselves in the Boulevard Haussmann, where the poet was to join them.

Dinner was at seven; D'Argenton did not arrive until half an hour past the time. Ida was in a state of great anxiety. "Do you think he will come?" she asked; "perhaps he is ill. He looks very delicate."

At last he appeared with the air of a conquering hero, making some indifferent excuse for his lack of punctuality. His manner, however, was less disdainful than usual, for the hotel had impressed him. Its luxury, the flowers, and thick carpets; the little boudoir with its bouquets of white lilacs; the commonplace salon, like a dentist's waiting-room, a blue ceiling and gilded mouldings, the ebony furniture, cushioned with gold color, and the balcony exposed to the dust of the

boulevard,—all charmed the attaché of the Moronval Academy, and gave him a favorable impression of wealth and high life.

The table equipage, the imposing effect produced by Augustin, in short, all the luxurious details of the house, appealed to his senses, and D'Argenton, without flattering the countess as openly as did Moronval; yet succeeded in doing so in a more subtile manner, by thawing under her influence to a very marked extent.

He was an interminable talker, and submitted with a very bad grace to any interruption. He was arbitrary and egotistical, and rang the changes on the I and the my for a whole evening, without allowing any one else to speak.

Unhappily, to be a good listener is a quality far above natures like that of the countess; and the dinner was characterized by some unfortunate incidents. D'Argenton was particularly fond of repeating the replies he had made to the various editors and theatrical managers who had declined his articles, and refused to print his prose or his verse. His mots on these occasions had been clever and caustic; but with Madame de Barancy he was never able to reach that point, preceded as it must necessarily be with lengthy explanations. At the critical moment Ida would invariably interrupt him,—always, to be sure, with some thought for his comfort.

"A little more of this ice, M. d'Argenton, I beg of you."

"Not any, madame," the poet would answer with a frown, and continue, "Then I said to him—"

"I am afraid you do not like it," urged the lady.

"It is excellent, madame,—and I said these cruel words—"

Another interruption from Ida; who, later, when she saw her poet in a fit of the sulks, wondered what she had done to displease him. Two or three times during dinner she was quite ready to weep, but did her best to hide her feelings by urging all the delicacies of her table upon M. and Madame Moronval. Dinner over, and the guests established in the well warmed and lighted salon, the principal fancied he saw

his way clear, and said suddenly, in a half indifferent tone, to the countess,—

“I have thought much of our little matter of business. It will cost less than I fancied.”

“Indeed!” she answered absently,

“If, madame, you would accord to me a few moments of your attention—”

But madame was occupied in looking at her poet, who was walking up and down the salon silent and preoccupied.

“Of what can he be thinking?” she said to herself.

Of his digestion only, dear reader. Suffering somewhat from dyspepsia, and always anxious in regard to his health, he never failed, on leaving the table, to walk for half an hour, no matter where he might chance to be.

Ida watched him silently. For the first time in her life she loved, really and passionately, and felt her heart beat as it had never beat before. Foolish and ignorant, while at the same time credulous and romantic; very near that fatal age—thirty years—which is almost certain to create in woman a great transformation; she now, aided by the memory of every romance she had ever read, created for herself an ideal who resembled D’Argenton. The expression of her face so changed in looking at him, her laughing eyes assumed so tender an expression, that her passion soon ceased to be a mystery to any one.

Moronval, who looked on, shrugged his shoulders, with a glance at his wife. “She is simply crazy,” he said to himself.

She certainly was crazed in a degree; and, after dinner, she tormented herself to find some way of returning to the good graces of D’Argenton, and, as he approached her in his walk, she said,—

“If M. d’Argenton wished to be very amiable, he would recite to us that beautiful poem which created such a sensation the other evening. I have thought of it all the week. There is one verse that haunts me, especially the final line:

‘And I believe in love, As I believe in a good God above.’”

“As I believe in God above,” said the poet, making as horrible a grimace as if his finger had been caught in a vice.

The countess, who had but a vague idea of prosody, understood simply that she had again incurred the displeasure of D’Argenton. The fact is that he had begun to affect her in a manner quite beyond her own control, and which, in its unreasoning terror, was somewhat like the timid worship offered by the Japanese to their hideous idols.

Under the influence of his presence she was more foolish by far than nature had made her; her piquancy forsook her, and the versatility that rendered her so charmingly absurd was quite gone. But D’Argenton relented, and suspended his hygienic exercise for a moment.

“I shall be most happy to recite anything, madame, at your command; but what?”

Here Moronval interposed. “Recite the ‘Credo,’ my dear fellow,” he said.

“Very well, then; I am satisfied to obey you.”

The poem commenced gently enough with the words,—

“Madame, your toilette is charming.”

Then irony deepened to bitterness, bitterness to fury, and concluded in these terrific words:

“Good Lord, deliver me from this woman so terrible, Who drains from my heart its life-blood.”

As if these extraordinary words had aroused in his memory most painful recollections, D’Argenton relapsed into silence, and said not another word the whole evening. Poor Ida was also thoughtful, haunted by vague fears of the noble ladies who had so warped the gentle spirit of her poet, so drained his heart that there was not a drop left for her.

“You know, my dear fellow,” said Moronval, as they strolled through the empty

boulevards, arm-in-arm, that night, little Madame Moronval pattering on in front of them,—“you know if I can succeed in the establishment of my Review, that I shall make you editor-in-chief!”

Moronval threw the half of his cargo overboard in order to save his ship, for he saw that unless the poet was enlisted, the countess would take no interest in the scheme. D’Argenton made no reply, for he was absorbed in thoughts of Ida.

No man can play the part of a lyric poet, a martyr to love, without being conscious of, and touched by, that silent adoration which appeals to his vanity, both as a man of letters and a man of the world. Since he had seen Ida in her luxurious home, about which there was the same suspicion of vulgarity that clung about herself, the rigidity of his principles had amazingly softened.

CHAPTER VI. AMAURY D’ARGENTON.

Amaury d’Argenton belonged to one of those ancient provincial families whose castles resembled great farms. Impoverished for the three last generations, they had finally sold their property, and come to Paris to seek their fortunes; with little change for the better, however; and for the last thirty years they had dropped the De, which Amaury ventured to resume on adopting his literary career. He meant to make it famous, and even was audacious enough to announce this intention aloud.

The childhood of the poet had been one of gloom and privation; surrounded by anxieties and by tears, by sordid cares, and that constant lack of money which imbitters the lives of so many of us, he had never laughed nor played like other children. A scholarship that was obtained for him enabled him to complete his studies, and his only recreation was obtained through the kindness of an aunt who resided in the Marais, and who gave him gloves and other trifles, which the poet very early in life learned to regard as essentials.

Such a childhood ripens early into bitter maturity. Infinite prosperity is needed to

efface such early impressions, and we often see men who have attained to high honors, who are rich and powerful, and yet who have never conquered the timidity born of their early deprivations. D'Argenton's bitterness was not without reason: at twenty-five he had succeeded in nothing; he had published a volume at his own expense, and had lived on bread and water in consequence for at least six months. He was industrious as well as ambitious; but something more than these qualities are essential to a poet, whose imagination and genius must be endowed with wings. These D'Argenton had not; he felt merely that vague uneasiness which indicates a missing limb, but that was all, and he lost both time and trouble in ineffectual efforts; his aunt aided him by a small allowance, but his life bore not the shadow of a resemblance to the picture drawn by Ida. In fact, D'Argenton had never been entangled in any serious love affair; his nature was cold and prudent, and yet he had been beloved by more than one woman. To D'Argenton, however, their society had always seemed a waste of time. Ida de Barancy was the first who had made upon him any real impression. Of this fact Ida had no idea, and whenever she met the poet on her very frequent visits to Jack, it was always with the same deprecating air and timid voice. The poet, while adopting an air of utter indifference, cultivated the affection and society of little Jack, whom he induced to talk freely of his mother.

Jack being extremely flattered, gladly gave every information in his power, and talked freely of the kind friend who was so good to mamma. The mention of this person cost the poet a strange pang. "He is so kind," babbled Jack, "he comes to see us every day; or, if he does not come, he sends us great baskets of fruit, and playthings for me."

"And is your mother very fond of him, too?" continued D'Argenton, without looking up from his writing.

"Yes, indeed, sir," answered the little fellow, innocently.

But are we quite sure that he spoke so innocently. The minds of children are not

always so transparent as we believe; and it is difficult to say when they understand matters that go on about them, and when they do not. That mysterious growth that is constantly going on within them, has unexpected seasons of bursting into flower, and they suddenly mass together the disconnected fragments of information they have acquired and intuitively attain the result.

Had Jack, therefore, no perception of the hidden rage that filled the heart of his professor when he questioned him in regard to their kind friend? Jack did not like D'Argenton; in addition to his first dislike, he was now actuated by strong jealousy. His mother was too much occupied by this man. When he passed the day with her, she in her turn plied him with questions, and asked if his teacher never spoke to him of her.

"Never," said Jack, calmly. And yet that very day D'Argenton had desired him to present his compliments to the countess, with a copy of his poems; but Jack at first forgot the volume, and finally lost it, as much from cunning as from heedlessness.

Thus, while these two dissimilar natures were attracted toward each other, the child stood between them suspicious and defiant, as if he already foresaw what the future would bring about.

Every two weeks Jack dined with his mother, sometimes alone with her, sometimes with their friend. They went to the theatre in the evening, or to a concert, and Jack was sent back to school with his pockets full of dainties, in which the other children shared.

One evening, as he entered his mother's house, he saw the dining-table laid for three, and a gorgeous display of flowers and crystal. His mother met him, exquisitely dressed, wearing in her hair sprays of white lilacs, like those that filled the vases. The blazing fire alone lighted the salon, into which she gayly drew the boy, as she said, "Guess who is here!"

"O, I know very well!" exclaimed Jack in delight; "it is our good friend."

But it was D'Argenton, who sat in full evening dress on the sofa, near the fire. The enemy was in Jack's own seat, and the child was so overwhelmed by his disappointment that he with difficulty restrained his tears. There was a moment of restraint and discomfort felt by all three. Just then the door was thrown open, and dinner announced by Augustin. The dinner was long and tedious to little Jack. Have you ever felt so entirely out of place that you would have gladly disappeared from off the face of the globe, painfully conscious, withal, that had you so vanished, no one would have missed you? When Jack spoke, no one listened; his questions were unheard and his wants unheeded. The conversation between his mother and D'Argenton was incomprehensible to him, although he saw that his mother blushed more than once, and hastily raised her glass to her lips as if to conceal her rising color. Where were those gay little dinners when Jack sat close at his mother's side and reigned an absolute king at the table? This recollection came to the boy's mind just as Madame de Barancy offered a superb pear to D'Argenton.

"That came from our friend at Tours," said Jack, maliciously.

D'Argenton, who was about to peel the fruit, dropped it upon his plate with a shrug of the shoulders. What an angry glance Ida threw upon her child! She had never looked at him in that way before. Jack did not venture to speak again, and the evening to him was but a dreary continuation of the repast.

Ida and the poet talked in low voices, and in that confidential tone that indicates great intimacy. He told her of his sad childhood and of his early home. He described the ruined towers and the long corridors where the wind raged and howled. He then depicted his early struggles in the great city, the constant obstacles thrown in the way of the development of his genius, of his jealous rivals and literary enemies, and of the terrible epigrams which he had hurled upon them.

"Then I uttered these stinging words." This time she did not interrupt him, but listened with a smile, and her absorption was so great that when he ceased speaking

she still listened, although nothing was to be heard in the salon save the ticking of the clock and the rustling of the leaves of the album that Jack, half asleep, was turning over. Suddenly she rose with a start.

“Come, Jack, my love; call Constant to take you back to school. It is quite time.”

“O, mamma!” said the child, sadly; but he dared not say that he generally remained much later. He did not wish to be troublesome to his mother, nor to meet again such an expression in her ordinarily serene and laughing eyes, as had so startled him at the dinner-table.

She rewarded him for his self-control by a most loving embrace.

“Good night, my child!” said D’Argenton, and he drew the child toward him as if to embrace him, but suddenly, with a movement of repulsion, turned aside as he had done at dinner from the fruit.

“I cannot! I cannot!” he murmured, throwing himself back in his arm-chair and passing his handkerchief over his forehead.

Jack turned to his mother in amazement.

“Go, dear Jack. Take him away, Constant.” And while Madame de Barancy sought to conciliate her poet, the child returned with a heavy heart to his school; and in the cold dormitory, as he thought of the professor installed in his mother’s chimney-corner, said to himself, “He is very comfortable there. I wonder how long he means to stay!”

In D’Argenton’s exclamation and in his repugnance to Jack, there was certainly some acting, but there was also real feeling. He was very jealous of the child, who represented to him Ida’s past, not that the poet was profoundly in love with the countess. He, on the contrary, loved himself in her, and, Narcissus-like, worshipped his own image which he saw reflected in her clear eyes. But D’Argenton would have preferred to be the first to disturb those depths.

But these regrets were useless, though Ida shared them. “Why did I not know him earlier?” she said to herself over and over again.

“She ought to understand by this time,” said D’Argenton, sulkily, “that I do not wish to see that boy.”

But even for her poet’s sake Ida could not keep her child away from her entirely. She did not, however, go so often to the academy, nor summon Jack from school, as she had done, and this change was by no means the smallest of the sacrifices she was called upon to make.

As to the hotel she occupied, her carriage, and the luxury in which she lived, she was ready to abandon them all at a word from D’Argenton.

“You will see,” she said, “how I can aid you. I can work, and, besides, I shall not be completely penniless.”

But D’Argenton hesitated. He was, notwithstanding his apparent enthusiasm and recklessness, extremely methodical and clear-headed.

“No, we will wait a while. I shall be rich some day, and then—”

He alluded to his old aunt, who now made him an allowance and whose heir he would unquestionably be. “The good old lady was very old,” he added. And the two, Ida and D’Argenton, made a great many plans for the days that were to come. They would live in the country, but not so far away from Paris that they would be deprived of its advantages. They would have a little cottage, over the door of which should be inscribed this legend: Parva domus, magna quies. There he could work, write a book—a novel, and later, a volume of poems. The titles of both were in readiness, but that was all.

Then the publishers would make him offers; he would be famous, perhaps a member of the Academy—though, to be sure, that institution was mildewed, moth-eaten, and ready to fall.

“That is nothing!” said Ida; “you must be a member!” and she saw herself already in a corner on a reception-day, modestly and quietly dressed, as befitted the wife of a man of letters. While they waited, however, they regaled themselves on the pears sent by “the kind friend, who was certainly the best and least suspicious of men.”

D’Argenton found these pears, with their satiny skins, very delicious; but he ate them with so many expressions of discontent, and with so many little cutting remarks to Ida, that she spent much of her time in tears.

Weeks and months passed on in this way without any other change in their lives than that which naturally grew out of an increasing estrangement between Moronval and his professor of literature. The principal, daily expecting a decision from Ida on the subject of the Review, suspected D’Argenton of influencing her against the project, and this belief he ended by expressing to the poet.

One morning, Jack, who now went out but rarely, looked out of the windows with longing eyes. The spring sunshine was so bright, the sky so blue, that he longed for liberty and out-door life.

The leaf-buds of the lilacs were swelling, and the flower-beds in the garden were gently upheaved, as if with the movements of invisible life.

From the lane without came the sounds of children at play, and of singing-birds, all revelling in the sunshine. It was one of those days when every window is thrown open to let in the light and air, and to drive away all wintry shadows, all that blackness imparted by the length of the nights and the smoke of the fires.

While Jack was longing for wings, the door-bell rang, and his mother entered in great haste and much agitated, although dressed with great care. She came for him to breakfast with her in the Bois, and would not bring him back until night. He must ask Moronval’s permission first; but as Ida brought the quarterly payment, you may imagine that permission was easily granted.

“How jolly!” cried Jack; “how jolly!” and while his mother casually informed

Moronval that M. d'Argenton had told her the evening previous that he was summoned to Auvergne, to his aunt who was dying, the boy ran to change his dress. On his way he met Mâdou, who, sad and lonely, was busy with his pails and brooms, and had not had time to find out that the air was soft and the sunshine warm. On seeing him, Jack had a bright idea.

"O, mamma, if we could take Mâdou!"

This permission was a little difficult to procure, so multifarious were the duties of the prince; but Jack was so persistent that kind Madame Moronval agreed for that day to assume the black boy's place.

"Mâdou! Mâdou!" cried the child, rushing toward him. "Quick, dress yourself and come out in the carriage with us; we are going to breakfast in the Bois!"

There was a moment of confusion. Mâdou stood still in amazement, while Madame Moronval borrowed a tunic that would be suitable for him in this emergency. Little Jack danced with joy, while Madame de Barancy, excited like a canary by the noise, chattered on to Moronval, giving him details in regard to the illness of D'Argenton's aunt.

At last they started, Jack and his mother seated side by side in the victoria, and Mâdou on the box with Augustin. The progress would hardly be regarded as a royal one, but Mâdou was satisfied. The drive itself was charming, the Avenue de l'Imperatrice was filled with people driving, riding, and walking. Children of all ages enlivened the scene. Babies, in their long white skirts, gazing about with the sweet solemnity of infancy, and older children fancifully dressed, with their tutors or nurses, crowded the pavements. Jack, in an ecstasy of delight, kissed his mother, and pulled Mâdou by the sleeve.

"Are you happy, Mâdou?"

"Yes, sir, very happy," was the answer. They reached the Bois, in places quite green and fresh already. There were some spots where the tops of the trees were in leaf,

but the foliage was so minute that it looked like smoke. The holly, whose crisp, stiff leaves had been covered with snow half the winter, jostled the timid and distrustful lilacs whose leaf-buds were only beginning to swell. The carriage drew up at the restaurant, and while the breakfast ordered by Madame de Barancy was in course of preparation, she and the children took a walk to the lake. At this early hour there were few of those superb equipages to be seen that appeared later in the day. The lake was lovely, with white swans dotting it here and there, and now and then a gentle ripple shook its surface, and miniature waves dashed against the fringe of old willows on one side.

What a walk! And what a breakfast served at the open windows! The children attacked it with the vigor of schoolboys. They laughed incessantly from the beginning to the end of the repast.

When breakfast was over, Ida proposed that they should visit the Jardin d'Acclimation.

"That is a splendid idea," said Jack, "for Mâdou has never been there, and won't he be amused!"

They drove through La Grande Allée in the almost deserted garden, which to the children was full of interest. They were fascinated by the animals, who, as they passed, looked at them with sleepy or inquisitive eyes, or smelled with pink nostrils at the fresh bread they had brought from the restaurant.

Mâdou, who at first had made a pretence of interest only to gratify Jack, now became absorbed in what he saw. He did not need to examine the blue ticket over the little inclosures to recognize certain animals from his own land. With mingled pain and pleasure he looked at the kangaroos, and seemed to suffer in seeing them in the limited space which they covered in three leaps.

He stood in silence before the light grating where the antelopes were inclosed. The birds, too, awakened his compassion. The ostriches and cassowaries looked

mournful enough in the shade of their solitary exotic; but the parrots and smaller birds in a long cage, without even a green leaf or twig, were absolutely pitiful, and Mâdou thought of the Academy Moronval and of himself. The plumage of the birds was dull and torn; they told a tale of past battles, of dismal flutterings against the bars of their prison-house. Even the rose-colored flamingoes and the long-billed ibex, who seem associated with the Nile and the desert and the immovable sphinx, all assumed a thoroughly commonplace aspect among the white peacocks and the little Chinese ducks that paddled at ease in their miniature pond.

By degrees the garden filled up with people, and there suddenly appeared at the end of the avenue so strange and fantastic a spectacle that Mâdou stood still in silent ecstasy. He saw the heads of two elephants, who were slowly approaching, waving their trunks slowly, and bearing on their broad backs a crowd of women with light umbrellas, of children with straw hats and colored ribbons. Following the elephant came a giraffe carrying his small and haughty head very high. This singular caravan wound through the circuitous road, with many nervous laughs and terrified cries.

Under the glowing sunlight every tint of color was thrown out in relief upon the thick and rugged skin of the elephants, who extended their trunks either toward the tops of the trees or to the pockets of the spectators, shaking their long ears when gently touched by some child, or by the umbrella of some laughing girl on their backs.

“What is the matter, Mâdou; you tremble. Are you ill?” asked Jack. Mâdou was absolutely faint with emotion, but when he learned that he too could mount the clumsy animals, his grave face became almost tragic in expression. Jack refused to accompany him, and remained with his mother, whom he considered too grave for this fête-day. He liked to walk close at her side, or linger behind her in the dust of her long silken skirts, which she disdained to lift. They seated themselves, and watched the little black boy climb on the back of the elephant. Once there, the child

seemed in his native place. He was no longer an exile, nor the awkward schoolboy, nor the little servant, humiliated by his menial duties and by his master's tyranny. He seemed imbued with new life, and his eyes sparkled with energy and determination. Happy little king! Two or three times he went around the garden. "Again! again!" he cried, and over the little bridge, between the inclosures of the kangaroos and other animals, he went to and fro, excited almost to madness by the heavy long strides of the elephant. Kérika, Dahomey, war-like scenes, and the hunt, all returned to his memory. He spoke to the elephant in his native tongue, and as he heard the sweet African voice, the huge creature shut his eyes with delight and trumpeted his pleasure. The zebras neighed, and the antelopes started in terror, while from the great cage of tropical birds, where the sun shone most fully, came warblings and flutterings of wings, discordant screams, and an enraged chatter, all the tumult, in short, on a small scale, of a primeval forest in the tropics.

But it was growing late. Mâdou must awaken from this beautiful dream. Besides, as soon as the sun dropped behind the horizon, the wind rose keen and cold, as so often happens in the early spring. This wintry chill affected the spirits of the children, and they grew strangely quiet and sad. Madame de Barancy for a wonder was also very silent. She had something she wished to say, and she probably found some difficulty in selecting her words, for she left them unsaid until the last moment. Then she took Jack's hand in hers. "Listen, child, I have some bad news to tell you!"

He understood at once that some great misfortune was impending, and he turned his supplicating eyes toward his mother. She continued in a low, quick voice,—

"I am going away, my son, on a long journey; I am obliged to leave you behind, but I will write to you. Do not cry, dear, for it hurts me; I shall not be gone long, and we shall soon see each other again. Yes, very soon, I promise you." And she threw out mysterious hints of a fortune to come, and money affairs, and other things that were not at all interesting to the child, who in reality paid little attention to her words, for

he was weeping silently but chokingly. The gay streets seemed no longer the Paris of the morning, the sunshine was gone, the flowers on the corner-stands were faded, and all was very dreary, for he saw through eyes dim with tears, and the child was about to lose his mother.

CHAPTER VII. MÂDOU'S FLIGHT.

Some time after this a letter arrived at the academy from D'Argenton.

The poet wrote to announce that the death of a relative had so changed the position of his private affairs that he must offer his resignation as Professor of Literature. In a somewhat abrupt postscript he added that Madame de Barancy was obliged to leave Paris for an indefinite time, and that she confided her little Jack to M. Moronval's paternal care. In case of illness or accident to the child, a letter could be forwarded to the mother under cover to D'Argenton.

"The paternal care of Moronval!" Had the poet laughed aloud as he penned these words? Did he not know perfectly well the child's fate at the academy as soon as it was understood that his mother had left Paris, and that nothing more was to be expected from her?

The arrival of this letter threw Moronval into a terrible fit of rage, which rage shook the equilibrium of the academy as a violent tornado might have done in the tropics.

The countess gone! and gone too, apparently, with that brainless fellow, who had neither wit nor imagination. Was it not shameful that a woman of her years—for she was by no means in her earliest youth—should be so heartless as to leave her child alone in Paris, among strangers.

But even while he pitied Jack, Moronval said to himself, "Wait a while, young man, and I will show you how paternally I shall manage you."

But if he was enraged when he thought of the Review, his cherished project, he was

more indignant that D'Argenton and Ida should have made use of him and his house to advance their own plans. He hurried off to the Boulevard Haussmann to learn all he could; but the mystery was no nearer elucidation.

Constant was expecting a letter from her mistress, and knew only that she had broken entirely with all past relations; that the house was to be given up, and the furniture sold.

"Ah! sir," said Constant, mournfully, "it was an unfortunate day for us when we set foot in your old barracks!"

The preceptor returned home convinced that at the termination of the next quarter Jack would be withdrawn from the school. Deciding, therefore, that the child was no longer a mine of wealth, he determined to put an end to all the indulgences with which he had been treated. Poor Jack after this day sat at the table no longer as an equal, but as the butt for all the teachers. No more dainties, no more wine for him. There were constant allusions made to D'Argenton: he was selfish and vain, a man totally without genius; as to his noble birth, it was more than doubtful; the château in the mountains, of which he discoursed so fluently, existed only in his imagination. These fierce attacks on the man whom he detested, amused the child; but something prevented him from joining in the servile applause of the other children, who eagerly laughed at each one of Moronval's witticisms. The fact was, that Jack dreaded the veiled allusions to his mother with which these remarks invariably terminated. He, to be sure, rarely caught their full meaning, but he saw by the contemptuous laughter that they were far from kindly. Madame Moronval would sometimes interrupt the conversation by a friendly word to Jack, or by sending him on some trifling errand. During his absence, she administered a reproof to her husband and his friends.

"Pshaw!" said Labassandre, "he does not understand." Perhaps he did not fully, but he comprehended enough to make his heart very sore.

He had known for a long time that he had a father whose name was not the same as

his own, that his mother had no husband; and, one day, when one of the schoolboys made some taunting allusion, he flew at him in a rage. The boy was nearly choked; his cries summoned Moronval to the scene, and Jack for the first time was severely flogged.

From that day the charm was broken, and Jack's daily life did not greatly differ from that of Mâdou, who was at this time very unhappy. The pleasant weather, and the day at the Jardin d'Aclimation, had given him a terrible fit of homesickness. His melancholy at first took the form of a sullen revolt against his exacting masters. Suddenly all this was changed, the boy's eyes grew bright, and he seemed to go about the house and the garden as if in a dream.

One night the black boy was undressing, and Jack heard him singing to himself in a language that was strange.

"What are you singing, Mâdou?"

"I am not singing, sir; I'm talking negro talk!" and Mâdou confided to his friend his intention of running away from school. He had thought of it for some time, and was only waiting for pleasant weather; and now he meant to go to Dahomey, and find Kérika. If Jack would go with him, they would go to Marseilles on foot, and then go on board some vessel. Nothing could happen to them, for he had his amulet all safe. Jack made many objections. Dahomey had no charms for him. He thought of the copper basin, and the terrible heads, with an emotion of sick horror; and, besides, how could he go so far from his mother?

"Good," said Mâdou; "you can remain here, and I will go alone."

"And when?"

"To-morrow," answered the negro, resolutely closing his eyes as if he knew that he would need all the strength that sleep could give him.

The next morning, when Jack passed through the large recitation-room, he saw Mâdou busily scrubbing the floor, and concluded that he had relinquished his

project.

The classes were busy for an hour or two, when Moronval appeared. “Where is Mâdou?” he asked abruptly. “He has gone to market,” answered madame. Jack, however, said to himself that Mâdou would not return.

In a little while Moronval came back and asked the same question. His wife answered, uneasily, that she could not understand the boy’s prolonged absence.

Dinner-time came, but no Mâdou, no vegetables, and no meat.

“Something must have happened,” said Madame Moronval, more indulgent than her impatient husband, who paced up and down the corridor with his rod in his hand, while the hungry schoolboys were quite ready to devour each other. Finally, Madame Moronval sallied forth herself to buy some provisions; and on her return, burdened with packages, she was greeted by an enthusiastic shout from the children, who, when the fierceness of their hunger abated, ventured on surmises as to Mâdou’s whereabouts. Moronval shrewdly suspected the truth. “How much money did he have?” he asked.

“Fifteen francs,” was his wife’s timid answer.

“Fifteen francs! Then it is certain he has run away!”

“But where has he gone?” asked the doctor; “he could hardly reach Dahomey with that amount.”

Moronval scowled fiercely, and went to report to the police, for it was very essential to him that the child should be found, or, at all events, prevented from reaching Marseilles. Moronval was in wholesome fear of Monsieur Bonfils. “The world is so wicked, you know,” he said to his wife; “the boy might make some complaints which would injure the school.” Consequently, in making his report at the police office, he stated that Mâdou had carried away a large sum. “But,” he added, assuming an air of indifference, “the money part of the matter is of very little importance, compared to the dangers that the poor child runs—this dethroned king

without country or people;" and Moronval dashed away a tear.

"We will find him, my good sir," said the official; "have no anxiety."

But Moronval was anxious, nevertheless, and so agitated, that, instead of awaiting quietly at home the result of the investigations, as he had been advised to do, he started out himself, with all the children to join in the search.

They went to each one of the gates, interrogated the custom-house officers, and gave them a description of Mâdou. Then the party repaired to the police court, for Moronval had the singular idea that in this way his pupils might learn something of Parisian life. The children, fortunately, were too young to understand all they saw, but they carried away with them a most sinister impression. Jack especially, who was the most intelligent of the boys, returned to the academy with a heavy heart, shocked at the glimpse he had caught of this under-current of life. Over and over again he said to himself, "Where can Mâdou be?"

Then the child consoled himself with the thought that the negro was far on the road to Marseilles; which road little Jack pictured to himself as running straight as an arrow, with the sea at its termination, and the vessel lying ready to sail. Only one thing disturbed him in regard to Mâdou's journey: the weather, that had been so fine the day of his departure, had suddenly changed; and now the rain fell in torrents,—hail too, and even snow; and the wind blew around their frail dwelling, causing the poor little children of the sun to shiver in their sleep, and dream of a rocking ship and a heavy sea. Curled up under his blankets one night, listening to the howling of the fierce wind, Jack thought of his friend, imagined him half frozen lying under a tree, his thin clothing thoroughly wet. But the reality was worse than this.

"He is found!" cried Moronval, rushing into the dining-room, one morning. "He is found; I have just been notified by the police. Give me my hat and my cane!"

He was in a state of great excitement. As much from the desire to flatter the master,

as from the love of noise that characterizes boys, the children hailed this news with a wild hurrah. Jack did not speak, but sighed as he said to himself, “Poor Mâdou!”

Mâdou had been, in fact, at the station-house since the evening before. It was there, amid criminals of all grades, that the presumptive heir of the kingdom of Dahomey was found by his excellent tutor.

“Ah, my unfortunate child! have I found you at last?”

The worthy Moronval could say no more; and, on seeing him throw his long arms eagerly about the neck of the little black boy, the inspector of police could not help thinking: “At last I have seen one teacher who loves his pupils!” Mâdou, however, displayed the utmost indifference. His face was positively without expression; not a ray of shame or of apprehension was visible. His eyes were wide open, but he seemed to see nothing; his face was pale—and the pallor of a negro is something appalling. He was covered with mud from head to foot, and looked like some amphibious animal who, after swimming in the water, had rolled in the mud on the shore. No hat, and no shoes. What had happened to him? He alone could have told you, and he would not speak. The policeman said, that, making his rounds the evening before, he had found the boy hidden in a lime-kiln, that he was half-starved, and stupefied by the excessive heat. Why had he lingered in Paris?

This question Moronval did not ask; nor, indeed, did he speak one word to Mâdou during their long drive to the academy. The boy was so worn out and crushed that he sank into a corner, while Moronval glanced at him occasionally with an expression of rage that at any other time would have terrified him.

Moronval’s glance was like a keen rapier, with a flash like lightning, crossing a poor little broken blade, shivered and rusty.

When Jack saw the pitiful black face, the rags and the dirt, he could hardly recognize the little king. Mâdou, as he passed, said good morning in so mournful a tone that Jack’s eyes filled with tears. The children saw nothing more of the black

boy that day. Recitations went on in their usual routine, and at intervals the sound of a lash was heard, and heavy groans from Moronval's private study. Madame Moronval turned pale, and the book she held trembled. Even when all was again silent, Jack fancied that he still heard the groans.

At dinner the principal was radiant, though seemingly exhausted by fatigue. "The little wretch!" he said to Dr. Hirsch and his wife. "The little wretch! Just, see the state he has put me into!"

That night Jack found the bed next to his occupied. Poor Mâdou had put his master into such a state that he himself had not been able to go to bed without assistance. Madame Moronval and Dr. Hirsch were there watching the lad, whose sleep was broken by those heavy sighs and sobs common to children after a day of painful excitement.

"Then, Dr. Hirsch, you don't think him ill?" asked Madame Moronval, anxiously.

"Not in the least, madame; that race has a covering like a monitor!"

When they were alone, Jack took Mâdou's hand and found it as burning hot as a brick from the furnace. "Dear Mâdou," he whispered. Mâdou half opened his eyes and looked at his friend with an expression of utter discouragement.

"It's all over with Mâdou," he murmured; "Mâdou has lost his Gri-gri, and will never see Dahomey again."

This was the reason, then, that he had not left Paris. Two hours after he had run away from the academy, the fifteen francs of market-money and his medal had been stolen from him. Then, relinquishing all idea of Marseilles, of the ship and of the sea, knowing that without his Gri-gri Dahomey was unattainable, Mâdou had spent eight days and nights in the lowest depths of Paris, looking for his amulet. Fearing that Moronval would discover his whereabouts, he hid during the day and ventured into the streets only after nightfall. He slept by the side of piles of bricks and mortar, which partly protected him from the wind; or crawled into an open doorway, or

under the arches of a bridge.

Favored by his size and by his color, Mâdou glided about almost unseen; he had associated with criminals of all classes, and had escaped without contamination, for he thought only of finding his amulet. He had shared a crust of bread with assassins, and drank with robbers; but the little king escaped from these dangers as he had from others in Dahomey, where, when hunting with Kérika, he had been awakened by the trumpeting of elephants and the roaring of wild beasts, and saw, under some gigantic tree, the dim shadow of some strange animal passing between himself and the bivouac fires; or caught a glimpse of some great snake slowly winding through the underbrush. But the monsters to be found in Paris are more terrible even than those in the African forests; or they would have been, had he understood the dangers he incurred. But he could not find his Gri-gri. Mâdou could not talk much, his exhaustion was so great; and Jack fell asleep with his curiosity but partially satisfied.

In the middle of the night he was awakened suddenly by a shout from Mâdou, who was singing and talking in his own language with frightful volubility. Delirium had begun.

In the morning, Dr. Hirsch announced that Mâdou was very ill. “A brain-fever!” he said, rubbing his hands in glee.

This Dr. Hirsch was a terrible man. His head was stuffed full of all sorts of Utopian ideas, of impracticable theories, and notions absolutely without method. His studies had been too desultory to amount to anything. He had mastered a few Latin phrases, and covered his real ignorance by a smattering of the science of medicine as practised among the Indians and the Chinese. He even had a strong leaning toward the magic arts, and when a human life was intrusted to his care he took that opportunity to try some experiments. Madame Moronval was inclined to call in another physician, but the principal, less compassionate, and unwilling to incur the additional expense, determined to leave the case solely in the hands of Dr. Hirsch.

Wishing to have no interference, this singular physician pretended that the disease was contagious, and ordered Mâdou's bed to be placed at the end of the garden in an old hot-house. For a week he tried on his little victim every drug he had ever heard of, the child making no more resistance than a sick dog would have done. When the doctor, armed with his bottles and his powders, entered the hot-house, the "children of the sun," to whose minds a physician was always more or less of a magician, gathered about the door and listened, saying to each other in awed tones, "What is he going to do now to Mâdou?" But the doctor locked the door, and peremptorily ordered the children from its vicinity, telling them that they would be ill too, that Mâdou's illness was contagious; and this last idea added additional mystery to that corner of the garden.

Jack, nevertheless, desired to see his friend so much that he alone of all the boys would have gladly passed the threshold, had it not been too closely guarded. One day, however, he seized an occasion when the doctor had gone in search of some forgotten drug, and crept softly into the improvised infirmary.

It was one of those half rustic buildings which are used as a shelter for rakes and hoes, or even to house some tender plants. Close by the side of Mâdou's iron bed, in the corner, was a pile of earthen flowerpots; a broken trellis, some panes of glass, and a bundle of dried roots, completed the dismal picture; and in the chimney, as if for the protection of some fragile tropical plant, flickered a tiny fire.

Mâdou was not asleep. His poor little thin face had still the same expression of absolute indifference. His black hands, tightly clenched, lay on the outside of the bedclothes. There was a look of a sick animal in his whole attitude, and in the manner in which he turned his face toward the wall, as if an invisible road was open to his eyes through the white stones, and every chink in the wall had become a brilliant outlook toward a country known to him alone.

Jack whispered, "It is I, Mâdou,—little Jack."

The child looked at him vacantly; he no longer understood the French language. In his fever, all recollection of it had vanished. Instinct had effaced all that art had inculcated, and Mâdou understood and spoke nothing save his savage dialect. At this moment, another of “the children of the sun,” Said, encouraged by Jack’s example, followed him into the sick-room, but, startled and disturbed by the strange scene, retreated to the doorway, and stood with affrighted eyes.

Mâdou drew one long, shivering sigh.

“He is going to sleep, I think,” whispered Said, shivering with terror; for, older than Jack, he intuitively felt the cold blast from the wings of Death, which already fanned the brow of the sick boy.

“Let us go,” said Jack, pale and troubled; and they hastily ran down the garden-walk, leaving their comrade alone in the twilight. Night came on. In that silent room, which the children had left, the fire crackled cheerfully, burning brightly, and illuminating every corner as if in search of something that was hidden. The light flickered on the ceiling and was reflected on every small window-pane, glanced over the little bed, and brought out the color of Mâdou’s red sleeve, until tired apparently of its fruitless search, discouraged and exhausted, and convinced that its heat was useless, for no one was there to warm. The fire gave one last expiring flicker, and then, like the poor little half-frozen king, who had so loved it, sank into eternal rest.

Poor Mâdou! The irony of destiny pursued him even after death, for Moronval hesitated whether the interment should be that of a royal prince or of a servant. On one side there were reasons of economy; on the other, vanity and policy had a word to say. After much indecision, Moronval decided to strike a great blow, thinking that, perhaps, as he had not profited much by the prince living, he might gain something from him dead. So a pompous funeral was arranged. All the daily papers published a biography of the little king of Dahomey. It was a short one, to be sure,

but lengthened by a panegyric of the Moronval Institute, and of its principal. The discipline of the establishment was commended; its hygienic regulations, the peculiar skill of its medical adviser,—nothing had been forgotten, and the unanimity of the eulogiums was something quite touching.

One day in May, therefore, Paris, which, notwithstanding its innumerable occupations and its feverish excitements, has always one eye open to all that goes on,—Paris saw on its principal boulevards a singular procession. Four black boys walked by the side of a bier. Behind, a taller lad, a tone lighter in complexion, wearing a fez,—our friend Said,—carried on a velvet cushion an order or two, some royal insignia fantastic in character. Then came Moronval, with Jack and the other schoolboys. The professors followed with the habitués of the house, the literary men whom we met at the soiree. How shabby were these last! How many worn-out coats and worn-out hearts were there! How many disappointed hopes and unattainable ambitions! All these slowly marched on, embarrassed by the full light of day to which they were unaccustomed; and this melancholy escort precisely suited the little deposed king. Were not all of these persons pretendents, too, to some imaginary kingdom to which they would never succeed? Where but in Paris could such a funeral be seen? A king of Dahomey escorted to the grave by a procession of Bohemians!

To increase the dreariness of the scene, a fine cold rain began to fall, as if fate pursued the little prince, who so hated cold weather, even to the very grave. Yes, to the grave; for when the coffin had been lowered, Moronval pronounced a discourse so insincere and hard that it would not have warmed you, my poor Mâdou! Moronval spoke of the virtues and estimable qualities of the defunct, of the model sovereign he would one day have made had he lived. To those who had been familiar with that pitiful little face, who had seen the child abased by servitude, Moronval’s discourse was at once heart-breaking and absurd.

CHAPTER VIII. JACK'S DEPARTURE.

The only sincere grief for the negro boy was felt by little Jack. The death of his comrade had impressed him to an extraordinary degree, and the lonely deathbed he had witnessed haunted him for days. Jack knew too that now he must bear alone all Moronval's whims and caprices, for the other pupils all had some one who came occasionally to see them, and who would report any brutalities of which they were the victims. Jack's mother never wrote to him nowadays, and no one at the Institute knew even where she was. Ah! had he but been able to ascertain, how quickly would the child have gone to her, and told her all his sorrows. Jack thought of all this as they returned from the cemetery. Labassandre and Dr. Hirsch were in front of him, talking to each other.

"She is in Paris," said Labassandre, "for I saw her yesterday."

Jack listened eagerly.

"And was he with her?"

She—he. These designations were certainly somewhat vague, and yet Jack knew of whom they were speaking. Could his mother be in Paris and yet not have hastened to him? All the way back to the Institute he was meditating his escape.

Moronval, surrounded by his professors and friends, walked at the head of the procession, and turned occasionally to look back upon them with a rallying gesture. This gesture was repeated by Said to the little boys, whose legs were very weary with the distance they had walked. They would increase their speed for a few rods, and then gradually drop off again. Jack contrived to linger more and more among the last.

"Come!" cried Moronval.

"Come, come!" repeated Said.

At the entrance of the Champs Elysées Saïd turned for the last time, gesticulating

violently to hasten the little group. Suddenly the Egyptian's arms fell at his side in amazement, for Jack was missing!

At first the child did not run, he was sagacious enough to avoid any look of haste. He affected, on the contrary, a lounging air. But as he drew nearer the Boulevard Haussmann, a mad desire to run took possession of him, and his little feet, in spite of himself, went faster and faster. Would the house be closed? And if Labassandre were mistaken, and his mother not in Paris, what would become of him? The alternative of a return to the academy never occurred to him. Indeed, if he had thought of it, the remembrance of the heavy blows and heartfelt sobs that he had heard all one afternoon would have filled him with terror.

"She is there," cried the child, in a transport of joy, as he saw all the windows of the house open, and the door also as it was always when his mother was about going out. He hastened on, lest the carriage should take her away before he could arrive. But as he entered the vestibule, he was struck by something extraordinary in its appearance. It was full of people all busily talking. Furniture was being carried away: sofas and chairs, covered for a boudoir in such faint and delicate hues that in the broad light of day they looked faded. A mirror, framed in silver, and ornamented with cupids, was leaning against one of the stone pillars; a jardinière without flowers, and curtains that had been taken down and thrown over a chair, were near by. Several women richly dressed were talking together of the merits of a crystal chandelier.

Jack, in great astonishment, made his way through the crowd, and could hardly recognize the well-known rooms, such was their disorder. The visitors opened the drawers wide, tapped on the wood of the sideboard, felt of the curtains, and sometimes, as she passed the piano, a lady, without stopping or removing her gloves, would lightly strike a chord or two. The child thought himself dreaming. And his mother, where was she? He went toward her room, but the crowd surged at

that moment in the same direction. The child was too little to see what attracted them, but he heard the hammer of the auctioneer, and a voice that said,—

“A child’s bed, carved and gilded, with curtains!”

And Jack saw his own bed, where he had slept so long, handled by rough men. He wished to exclaim,

“The bed is mine—my very own—I will not have it touched;” but a certain feeling of shame withheld him, and he went from room to room looking for his mother, when suddenly his arm was seized.

“What! Master Jack, are you no longer at the school?”

It was Constant, his mother’s maid—Constant, in her Sunday dress, wearing pink ribbons, and with an air of great importance.

“Where is mamma?” asked the child, in a low voice, a voice that was so pitiful and troubled that the woman’s heart was touched.

“Your mother is not here, my poor child,” she said.

“But where is she? And what are all these people doing?”

“They have come for the auction. But come with me to the kitchen, Master Jack, we can talk better there.”

There was quite a party in the kitchen,—the old cook, Augustin, and several servants in the neighborhood. They were drinking champagne around the same table where Jack’s future had been one evening decided. The child’s arrival made quite a sensation. He was caressed by them all, for the servants were really attached to his kind-hearted mother. As he was afraid that they would take him back to the Institute, Jack took good care not to say that he had run away, and merely spoke of an imaginary permission he had received to enable him to visit his mother.

“She is not here, Master Jack,” said Constant, “and I really do not know whether I ought—” Then, interrupting herself, Constant exclaimed, “O! it is too bad. I cannot

keep this child from his mother!”

Then she informed little Jack that madame was at Etiolles.

The child repeated the name over and over again to himself. “Is it far from here?” he asked.

“Eight good leagues,” answered Augustin.

But the cook disputed this point; and then followed an animated discussion as to the route to be taken to reach Etiolles. Jack listened eagerly, for he had already decided to attempt the journey alone and on foot.

“Madame lives in a pretty little cottage just at the edge of a wood,” said Constant.

Jack understood by this time which side of Paris he should go out. This and the name of the village were the two distinct ideas he had. The distance did not frighten him. “I can walk all night,” he said to himself, “even if my legs are little.” Then he spoke aloud. “I must go now,” he said, “I must go back to school.” One question, however, burned on his lips. Was Argenton at Etiolles? Should he find this powerful barrier between his mother and himself? He dared not ask Constant, however. Without understanding the truth precisely, he yet felt very keenly that this was not the best side of his mother’s life, and he avoided all mention of it.

The servants said “good-bye,” the coachman shook hands with him, and then the boy found himself in the vestibule among a bustling crowd. He did not linger in this chaos, for the house had no longer any interest for him, but hurried into the street, eager to start on the journey that would end by placing him with his mother.

Bercy! Yes, Bercy was the name of the village the cook had mentioned as the first after leaving Paris. The way was not difficult to find, although it was a good distance off, but the fear of being caught by Moronval spurred him on. An inquisitive look from a policeman startled him, a shadow on the wall, or a hurried step behind, made his heart beat, and over and above the noise and confusion of the streets he seemed to hear the cry of “Stop him! Stop him!” At last he climbed over

the bank and began to run on the narrow path by the water's edge. The day was coming to an end. The river was very high and yellow from recent rains, the water rolled heavily against the arches of the bridge, and the wind curled it in little waves, the tops of which were just touched by the level rays of the setting sun. Women passed him bearing baskets of wet linen, fishermen drew in their lines, and a whole river-side population, sailors and bargemen, with their rounded shoulders and woollen hoods, hurried past him. With these there was still another class, rough and ferocious of aspect, who were quite capable of pulling you out of the Seine for fifteen francs, and of throwing you in again for a hundred sous. Occasionally one of these men would turn to look at this slender schoolboy who seemed in such a hurry.

The appearance of the shore was continually changing. In one place it was black, and long planks were laid to boats laden with charcoal. Farther on, similar boats were crowded with fruit, and a delicious odor of fresh orchards was wafted on the air. Suddenly there was a look of a great harbor; steamboats were loading at the wharves; a few rods more, and a group of old trees bathed their distorted roots in a limpid stream, and one could easily fancy one's self twenty leagues from Paris, and in an earlier century.

But night was close at hand.

The arches of the bridges vanished in darkness; the bank was deserted, and illuminated only by that vague light which comes from even the very darkest body of water.

But still the child toiled on, and at last found himself on a long wharf, covered with warehouses and piled with merchandise. He had reached Bercy, but it was night, and he was filled with terror lest he should be stopped at the gate; but the little fugitive was hardly noticed. He passed the barrier without hindrance, and soon found himself in a long, narrow street, solitary and dimly lighted. While the child was in the life and motion of the city, he was terrified only by one thought, and that was that

Moronval would find him. Now he was still afraid, but his fear was of another character—born of silence and solitude.

Yet the place where he now found himself was not the country. The street was bordered with houses on both sides, but as the child slowly toiled on, these buildings became farther and farther apart, and considerably lower in height. Although barely eight o'clock, this road was almost deserted. Occasional pedestrians walked noiselessly over the damp ground, while the dismal howling of a dog added to the cheerlessness of the scene. Jack was troubled. Each step that he took led him further from Paris, its light and its noise. He reached the last wineshop. A broad circle of light barred the road, and seemed to the child the limits of the inhabited world.

After he had passed that shop, he must go on in the dark. Should he go into the shop and ask his way? He looked in. The proprietor was seated at his desk; around a small table sat two men and a woman, drinking and talking. When Jack lifted the latch, they looked up; the three had hideous faces—such faces as he had seen at the police stations the day they were looking for Mâdou. The woman, above all, was frightful.

"What does he want?" said one of the men.

The other rose; but little Jack with one bound leaped the stream of light from the open door, hearing behind him a volley of abuse. The darkness now seemed to the child a refuge, and he ran on quickly until he found himself in the open country. Before him stretched field after field; a few small, scattered houses, white cubes, alone varied the monotony of the scene. Below was Paris, known by its long line of reddish vapor, like the reflection of a blacksmith's forge. The child stood still. It was the first time that he had ever been alone out of doors at night. He had neither eaten nor drank all day, and was now suffering from intense thirst. He was also beginning to understand what he had undertaken.

Had he strength enough to reach his mother?

He finally decided to lie down in a furrow in the bank on the side of the road, and

sleep there until daybreak. But as he went toward the spot he had selected, he heard heavy breathing, and saw that a man was stretched out there, his rags making a confused mass of dark shadow against the white stones.

Jack stood petrified, his heart in his mouth, unable to take a step forward or back. At this instant the sleeping figure began to move, and to talk, still without waking. The child thought of the woman in the wine-shop, and feared that this creature was she, or some other equally repulsive.

The shadows all about were now to his fancy peopled with these frightful beings. They climbed over the bank, they barred his further progress. If he extended his hand to the right or the left, he felt certain that he should touch them. A light and a voice aroused the child from this stupor. An officer, accompanied by his orderly, bearing a lantern, suddenly appeared.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” said the child, gently, breathless with emotion.

The soldier who carried the lantern raised it in the direction of the voice.

“This is a bad hour to travel, my boy,” remarked the officer; “are you going far?”

“O, no, sir; not very far,” answered Jack, who did not care to tell the truth.

“Ah, well! we can go on together as far as Charenton.”

What a delight it was to the child to walk for an hour at the side of these two honest soldiers, to regulate his steps by theirs, and to see the cheerful light from the lantern! From the soldier, too, he casually learned that he was on the right road.

“Now we are at home,” said the officer, halting suddenly. “Good night. And take my advice, my lad, and don’t travel alone again at night—it is not safe.” And with these parting words, the men turned up a narrow lane, swinging the lantern, leaving Jack alone at the entrance of the principal street in Charenton. The child wandered on until he found himself on the quay; he crossed a bridge which seemed to him to be thrown over an abyss, so profound were the depths below. He lingered for a

moment, but rough voices singing and laughing so startled him that he took to his heels and ran until he was out of breath, and was again in the open fields. He turned and looked back; the red light of the great city was still reflected on the horizon. Afar off he heard the grinding of wheels. “Good!” said the child; “something is coming.” But nothing appeared. And the invisible wagon, whose wheels moved apparently with difficulty, turned down some unseen lane.

Jack toiled on slowly. Who was that man that stood waiting for him at the turning of the road? One man! Nay, there were two or three. But they were trees,—tall, slender poplars,—or a clump of elms—those lovely old elms which grow to such majestic beauty in France; and Jack was environed by the mysteries of nature,—nature in the springtime of the year, when one can almost hear the grass grow, the buds expand, and the earth crackle as the tender herbage shoots forth. All these faint, vague noises bewildered little Jack, who began to sing a nursery rhyme with which his mother formerly rocked him to sleep.

It was pitiful to hear the child, alone in the darkness, encouraging himself by these reminiscences of his happy, petted infancy. Suddenly the little trembling voice stopped.

Something was coming—something blacker than the darkness itself, sweeping down on the child as if to swallow him up. Cries were heard; human voices, and heavy blows. Then came a drove of enormous cattle, which pressed against little Jack on all sides; he feels the damp breath from their nostrils; their tails switch violently, and the heat of their bodies, and the odor of the stable, is almost stifling. Two boys and two dogs are in charge of these animals; the dogs bark, and the uncouth peasants yell, until the noise is appalling.

As they pass on, the child is absolutely stupefied by terror. These animals have gone, but will there not be others? It begins to rain, and Jack, in despair, fails on his knees, and wishes to die. The sound of a carriage, and the sight of two lamps like

friendly eyes coming quickly toward him, revives him suddenly. He calls aloud.

The carriage stops. A head, with a travelling cap drawn closely down over the ears, bends forward to ascertain the whereabouts of the shrill cry.

“I am very tired,” pleaded Jack; “would you be so kind as to let me come into your carriage?”

The man hesitated, but a woman’s voice came to the child’s assistance. “Ah, what a little fellow! Let him come in here.”

“Where are you going?” asked the traveller.

The child hesitated. Like all fugitives, he wished to hide his destination. “To Villeneuve St George,” he answered, nervously.

“Come on, then,” said the man, with gruff kindness.

The child was soon curled up under a comfortable travelling rug, between a stout lady and gentleman, who both examined him curiously by the light of the little lamp.

Where was he going so late, and all alone, too? Jack would have liked to tell the truth, but he was in too great fear of being carried back to the Institute. Then he invented a story to suit the occasion. His mother was very ill in the country, where she was visiting. He had been told of this the night before, and he had at once started off on foot, because he had not patience to wait for the next day’s train.

“I understand,” said the lady. And the gentleman looked as if he understood also, but made many wise observations as to the imprudence of running about the country alone, there were so many dangers. Then he was asked in what house in Villeneuve his mother’s friends resided.

“At the end of the town,” answered Jack, promptly,—“the last house on the right.”

It was lucky that his rising color was hidden by the darkness. His cross-examination, however, was by no means over. The husband and wife were great talkers, and, like all great talkers, extremely curious, and could not be content until they had learned

the private affairs of all those persons with whom they came in contact. They kept a little store, and each Saturday went into the country to get rid of the dust of the week; but they were making money, and some day would live altogether at Soisy-sous-Etiolles.

“Is that place far from Etiolles?” asked Jack, with a start.

“O, no, close by,” answered the gentleman, giving a friendly cut with his whip to his beast.

What a fatality for Jack! Had he not told the falsehood, he could have gone on in this comfortable carriage, have rested his poor little weary legs, and had a comfortable sleep, wrapped in the good woman’s shawl, who asked him, every little while, if he was warm enough.

If he could but summon courage enough to say, “I have told you a falsehood; I am going to the same place that you are;” but he was unwilling to incur the contempt and distrust of these good people; yet, when they told him that they had reached Villeneuve, the child could not restrain a sob.

“Do not cry, my little friend,” said the kind woman; “your mother, perhaps, is not so ill as you think, and the sight of you will make her well.”

At the last house the carriage stopped.

“Yes, this is it,” said Jack, sadly. The good people said a kind good-bye. “How lucky you are to have finished your journey,” said the woman; “we have four good leagues before us.”

Little Jack had the same, but durst not say so. He went toward the garden-gate. “Good night,” said his new friends, “good night.”

He answered in a voice choked by tears, and the carriage turned toward the right. Then the child, overwhelmed with vain regrets, ran after it with all his speed; but his limbs, weakened instead of strengthened by inadequate repose, refused all service.

At the end of a few rods he could go no further, but sank on the roadside with a burst of passionate tears, while the hospitable proprietors of the carriage rolled comfortably on, without an idea of the despair they had left behind them.

He was cold, the earth was wet. No matter for that; he was too weary to think or to feel. The wind blows violently, and soon the poor little boy sleeps quietly. A frightful noise awakens him. Jack starts up and sees something monstrous—a howling, snorting beast, with two fiery eyes that send forth a shower of sparks. The creature dashed past, leaving behind him a train like a comet's tail. A grove of trees, quite unsuspected by Jack, suddenly flashed out clearly; each leaf could have been counted. Not until this apparition was far away, and nothing of it was visible save a small green light, did Jack know that it was the express train.

What time was it? How long had he slept? He knew not, but he felt ill and stiff in every limb. He had dreamed of Mâdou,—dreamed that they lay side by side in the cemetery; he saw Mâdou's face, and shivered at the thought of the little icy fingers touching his own. To get away from this idea Jack resumed his weary journey. The damp earth had stiffened in the cold night wind, and his own footfall sounded in his ears so unnaturally heavy, that he fancied Mâdou was at his side or behind him.

The child passes through a slumbering village; a clock strikes two. Another village, another clock, and three was sounded. Still the boy plods on, with swimming head and burning feet. He dares not stop. Occasionally he meets a huge covered wagon, driver and horses sound asleep. He asks, in a timid, tired voice, "Is it far now to Etiolles?" No answer comes save a loud snore.

Soon, however, another traveller joins the child—a traveller whose praises are sung by the cheery crowing of the cocks, and the gurgles of the frogs in the pond. It is the dawn. And the child shares the anxiety of expectant nature, and breathlessly awaits the coming of the new-born day.

Suddenly, directly in front of him, in the direction in which lay the town where his

mother was, the clouds divide—are torn apart suddenly, as it were; a pale line of light is first seen; this line gradually broadens, with a waving light like flames. Jack walks toward this light with a strength imparted by incipient delirium.

Something tells him that his mother is waiting there for him, waiting to welcome him after this horrible night. The sky was now clear, and looked like a large blue eye, dewy with tears and full of sweetness. The road no longer dismayed the child. Besides, it was a smooth highway, without ditch or pavement, intended, it seemed, for the carriages of the wealthy. Superb residences, with grounds carefully kept, were on both sides of this road. Between the white houses and the vineyards were green lawns that led down to the river, whose surface reflected the tender blue and rosy tints of the sky above. O sun, hasten thy coming; warm and comfort the little child, who is so weary and so sad!

“Am I far from Etiolles?” asked Jack of some laborers who were going to their work.

“No, he was not far from Etiolles; he had but to follow the road straight on through the wood.”

The wood was all astir now, resounding with the chirping of birds and the rustling of squirrels. The refrain of the birds in the hedge of wild roses was repeated from the topmost branches of the century-old oak-trees; the branches shook and bent under the sudden rush of winged creatures; and while the last of the shadows faded away, and the night-birds with silent, heavy flight hurried to their mysterious shelters, a lark suddenly rises from the field with its wings wide-spread, and flies higher and higher until it is lost in the sky above. The child no longer walks, he crawls; an old woman meets him, leading a goat; mechanically he asks if it is far to Etiolles.

The ragged creature looks at him ferociously, and then points out a little stony path. The sunshine warms the little fellow, who stumbles over the pebbles, for he has no strength to lift his feet. At last he sees a steeple and a cluster of houses; one more

effort, and he will reach them. But he is dizzy and falls; through his half-shut eyes he sees close at hand a little house covered with vines and roses. Over the door, between the wavering shadows of a lilac-tree already in flower, he saw an inscription in gold letters:—

PARVA DOMUS, MAGNA QUIES.

How pretty the house was, bathed in the fresh morning light! All the blinds are still closed, although the dwellers in the cottages are awake, for he hears a woman's voice singing,—singing, too, his own cradle-song, in a fresh, gay voice. Was he dreaming? The blinds were thrown open, and a woman appeared in a white négligée, with her hair lightly twisted in a simple knot.

"Mamma, mamma!" cried Jack, in a weak voice.

The lady turned quickly, shaded her eyes from the sun, and saw the poor little worn and travel-stained lad.

She screamed "Jack!" and in a moment more was beside him, warming him in her arms, caressing and soothing the little fellow, who sobbed out the anguish of that terrible night on her shoulder.

CHAPTER IX. PARVA DOMUS, MAGNA QUIES.

"No, no, Jack; no, dear child; do not be alarmed, you shall never go back to that school. Did they dare to strike you? Cheer up, dear. I tell you that you shall never go there again, but shall always be with me. I will arrange a little room for you to-day, and you will see how nice it is to be in the country. We have cows and chickens, and that reminds me the poultry has not yet been fed. Lie down, dear, and rest a while. I will wake you at dinner-time, but first drink this soup. It is good, is it not? And to think that while I was calmly sleeping, you were alone in the cold and dark night. I must go. My chickens are calling me;" and with a loving kiss Ida went off on tiptoe, happy and bright, browned somewhat by the sun, and dressed with rather a theatrical

idea of the proprieties. Her country costume had a great deal of black velvet about it, and she wore a wide-brimmed Leghorn hat, trimmed with poppies and wheat.

Jack could not sleep, but his bath and the soup prepared by Mère Archambauld, his mother's cook, had restored his strength to a very great degree, and he lay on the couch, looking about him with calm, satisfied eyes.

There was but little of the old luxury. The room he was in was large, furnished in the style of Louis XVI., all gray and white, without the least gilding. Outside, the rustling of the leaves, the cooing of the pigeons on the roof, and his mother's voice talking to her chickens, lulled him to repose.

One thing troubled him: D'Argenton's portrait hung at the foot of the bed, in a pretentious attitude, his hand on an open book.

The child said to himself, "Where is he? Why have I not seen him?" Finally, annoyed by the eyes of the picture, which seemed to pursue him either with a question or a reproach, he rose and went down to his mother.

She was busy in the farm-yard; her gloves reached above her elbows, and her dress, looped on one side, showed her wide striped skirt and high heels.

Mère Archambauld laughed at her awkwardness. This woman was the wife of an employé in the government forests, who attended to the culinary department at Aulnettes, as the house was called where Jack's mother lived.

"Heavens! how pretty your boy is!" said the old woman, delighted by Jack's appearance.

"Is he not, Mère Archambauld? What did I tell you?"

"But he looks a good deal more like you, madame, than like his papa. Good day, my dear! May I give you a kiss?"

At the word papa, Jack looked up quickly.

"Ah, well! if you can't sleep, let us go and look at the house," said his mother, who

quickly wearied of every occupation. She shook down her skirts, and took the child over this most original house, which was situated a stone's throw from the village, and realized better than most poets' dreams those of D'Argenton. The house had been originally a shooting-box belonging to a distant château. A new tower had been added, and a weathercock, which last gave an aspect of intense respectability to the place. They visited the stable and the orchard, and finished their examination by a visit to the tower.

A winding staircase, lighted by a skylight of colored glass, led to a large, round room containing four windows, and furnished by a circular divan covered with some brilliant Eastern stuff. A couple of curious old oaken chests, a Venetian mirror, some antique hangings, and a high carved chair of the time of Henri II., drawn up in front of an enormous table covered with papers, composed the furniture of the apartment. A charming landscape was visible from the windows, a valley and a river, a fresh green wood, and some fair meadow-land.

"It is here that HE works," said his mother, in an awed tone.

Jack had no need to ask who this HE might be.

In a low voice, as if in a sanctuary, she continued, without looking at her son,—

"At present he is travelling. He will return in a few days, however. I shall write to him that you are here; he will be very glad, for he is very fond of you, and is the best of men, even if he does look a little severe sometimes. You must learn to love him, little Jack, or I shall be very unhappy."

As she spoke she looked at D'Argenton's picture hung at the end of this room, a picture of which the one in her room was a copy; in fact, a portrait of the poet was in every room, and a bronze bust in the entrance-hall, and it was a most significant fact that there was no other portrait than his in the whole house. "You promise me, Jack, that you will love him?"

Jack answered with much effort, "I promise, dear mamma."

This was the only cloud on that memorable day. The two were so happy in that quaint old drawing-room. They heard Mère Archambauld rattling her dishes in the kitchen. Outside of the house there was not a sound. Jack sat and admired his mother. She thought him much grown and very large for his age, and they laughed and kissed each other every few minutes. In the evening they had some visitors. Père Archambauld came for his wife, as he always did, for they lived in the depths of the forest. He took a seat in the dining-room.

“You will drink a glass of wine, Father Archambauld. Drink to the health of my little boy. Is he not nice? Will you take him with you sometimes into the forest?”

And as he drank his wine, this tawny giant, who was the terror of the poachers throughout the country, looked about the room with that restless glance acquired in his nightly watchings in the forest, and answered timidly,—

“That I will, Madame d’Argenton.”

This name of D’Argenton, thus given to his mother, mystified our little friend. But as he had no very accurate idea of either the duties or dignities of life, he soon ceased to take any notice of his mother’s new title, and became absorbed in a rough game of play with the two dogs under the table. The old couple had just gone, when a carriage was heard at the door.

“Is it you, doctor?” cried Ida from within, in joyous greeting,

“Yes, madame; I come to learn something about your sick son, of whose arrival I have heard.”

Jack looked inquisitively at the large, kindly face crowned by snowy locks. The doctor wore a coat down to his heels, and had a rolling walk, the result of twenty years of sea-life as a surgeon.

“Your boy is all right, madame. I was afraid, from what I heard through my servant, that he and you might require my services.”

What good people these all were, and how thankful little Jack felt that he had forever left that detestable school!

When the doctor left, the house was bolted and barred, and the mother and child went tranquilly to their bedroom.

There, while Jack slept, Ida wrote to D'Argenton a long letter, telling him of her son's arrival, and seeking to arouse his sympathy for the little lonely fellow, whose gentle, regular breathing she heard at her side. She was more at her ease when two days later came a reply from her poet.

Although full of reproaches and of allusions to her maternal weakness, and to the undisciplined nature of her child, the letter was less terrible than she had anticipated. In fact, D'Argenton concluded that it was well to be relieved of the enormous expenses at the academy, and while disapproving of the escapade, he thought it no great misfortune, as the Institution was rapidly running down. "Had he not left it?" As to the child's fixture, it should be his care, and when he returned a week later, they would consult together as to what plan to adopt.

Never did Jack, in his whole life, as child or man, pass such a week of utter happiness. His mother belonged to him alone. He had the dogs and the goat, the forest and the rabbits, and yet he did not leave his mother for many minutes at a time. He followed her wherever she went, laughed when she laughed without asking why, and was altogether content.

Another letter. "He will come to-morrow!"

Although D'Argenton had written kindly, Ida was still nervous, and wished to arrange the meeting in her own way. Consequently she refused to permit him to go with her to the station in the little carriage. She gave him several injunctions, painful to them both, as if they had each been guilty of some great fault, and to the boy inexpressibly mortifying.

"You will remain at the end of the garden," she said, "and do not come until I call

you."

The child lingered an hour in expectation, and when he heard the grinding of the wheels, ran down the garden walk, and concealed himself behind the gooseberry bushes. He heard D'Argenton speak. His tone was harder, sterner than ever. He heard his mother's sweet voice answer gently, "Yes, my dear—no, my dear." Then a window in the tower opened. "Come, Jack, I want you, my child!"

The boy's heart beat quickly as he mounted the stairs. D'Argenton was leaning back in the tall armchair, his light hair gleaming against the dark wood. Ida stood by his side, and did not even hold out her hand to the little fellow. The lecture he received was short and affectionate to a certain extent. "Jack," he said, in conclusion, "life is not a romance; you must work in earnest. I am willing to believe in your penitence; and if you behave well, I will certainly love you, and we three may live together happily. Now listen to what I propose. I am a very busy man.—I am, nevertheless, willing to devote two hours every day to your education. If you will study faithfully, I can make of you, frivolous as you are by nature, a man like myself."

"You hear, Jack," said his mother, alarmed at his silence, "and you understand the sacrifice that your friend is ready to make for you—"

"Yes, mamma," stammered Jack.

"Wait, Charlotte," interrupted D'Argenton; "he must decide for himself: I wish to force no one."

Jack, petrified at hearing his mother called Charlotte, and unable to find words to express his sense of such generosity, ended by saying nothing. Seeing the child's embarrassment, his mother gently pushed him into the poet's arms, who pressed a theatrical kiss on his brow.

"Ah, dear, how good you are!" murmured the poor woman, while the child, dismissed by an imperative gesture, hastily ran down the stairs.

In reality Jack's installation in the house was a relief to the poet. He loved Ida,

whom he called Charlotte in memory of Goethe, and also because he wished to obliterate all her past, and to wipe out even the name of Ida de Barancy. He loved her in his own fashion, and made of her a complete slave. She had no will, no opinion of her own, and D'Argenton had grown tired of being perpetually agreed with. Now, at least, he would have some one to contradict, to argue with, to tutor, and to bully; and it was in this spirit that he undertook Jack's education, for which he made all arrangements with that methodical solemnity characteristic of the man's smallest actions.

The next morning, Jack saw, when he awoke, a large card fastened to the wall, and on it, inscribed in the beautiful writing of the poet, a carefully prepared arrangement for the routine of the day.

"Rise at six. From six to seven, breakfast; from seven to eight, recitation; from eight to nine," and so on.

Days ordered in this systematic manner resemble those windows whose shutters hardly permit the entrance of air enough to breathe, or light to see with. Generally these rules are made only to be broken, but D'Argenton allowed no such laxity.

D'Argenton's method of education was too severe for Jack, who was, however, by no means wanting in intelligence, and was well advanced in his studies. He was disturbed, too, by the personality of the poet, to whom he had a very strong aversion, and above all he was overwhelmed by the new life he was leading.

Suddenly transported from the mouldy lane, and from the academy, to the country, to the woods and the fields, he was at once excited and charmed by Nature. The truest way would have been to have laid aside all books until the child himself demanded them. Often of a sunny day, when he sat in the tower opposite his teacher, he was seized with a strong desire to leap out of the window, and rush into the fresh woods after the birds that had just flown away, or in search of the squirrel of which he had caught a glimpse. What a penance it was to write his copy, while the wild

roses beckoned him to come and pluck them!

“This child is an idiot,” cried D’Argenton, when to all his questions Jack stammered some answer as far from what he should have said as if he had that moment fallen from the light cloud he had been steadily watching. At the end of a month the poet announced that he relinquished the task, that it was a mere loss of precious time to himself, and of no use to the boy, who neither could nor would learn anything. In reality, he was by no means unwilling to abandon the iron rules he had established, and which pressed with severity on himself as well as on the child. Ida, or rather Charlotte, made no remonstrance. She preferred to think her boy incapable of study rather than endure the daily scenes, and the incessant lectures and tears of this educational experiment.

Above everything she longed for peace. Her aims were as restricted as her intellect, and she lived solely in the present, and any future, however brilliant, seemed to her too dearly purchased at the price of present tranquillity.

Jack was very happy when he no longer saw under his eyes that placard: “Rise at six. From six to seven, breakfast; from seven to weight,” &c. The days seemed to him longer and brighter. As if he understood that his presence in the house was often an annoyance, he absented himself for the whole day with that absolute disregard of time natural to children and loungers.

He had a great friend in the forester. As soon as he was dressed in the morning he started for Father Archambauld’s, just as the old man’s wife, before going to her Parisians, as she called her employers, served her husband’s breakfast in a fresh, clean room hung with a light green paper that represented the same hunting-scene over and over again.

When the forester had finished his meal, he and little Jack started out on a long tramp. Father Archambauld showed the child the pheasants’ nests, with their eggs like large pearls, built in the roots of the trees; the haunts of the partridges, the

frightened hares, and the young kids. The hawthorn's white blossoms perfumed the air, and a variety of wild flowers enamelled the turf. The forester's duty was to protect the birds and their young broods from all injury, and to destroy the moles and snakes. He received a certain sum for the heads or tails of these vermin, and every six months carried to Corbiel a bag of dry and dusty relics. He would have been better pleased could he have taken also the heads of the poachers, with whom he was in constant conflict. He had also a great deal of trouble with the peasants who injured his trees.

A doe could be replaced, a dead pheasant was no great matter; but a tree, the growth of years, was a vastly different affair. He watched them so carefully that he knew all their maladies. One species of fir was attacked by tiny worms, which come in some mysterious way by thousands. They select the strongest and handsomest specimens, and take possession of them. The trees have only their resinous sap as a weapon of defence. This sap they pour over their enemies, and over their eggs deposited in the crevices of the bark. Jack watched this unequal contest with the greatest interest, and saw the slow dropping of these odorous tears. Sometimes the fir-tree won the victory, but too often it perished and withered slowly, until at last the giant of the forest; whose lofty top had been the haunt of singing-birds, where bees had made their home, and which had sheltered a thousand different lives, stood white and ghastly as if struck by lightning.

During these walks through the woods, the forester and his companion talked very little. They listened rather to the sweet and innumerable sounds about them. The sound of the wind varied with every tree that it touched. Among the pines it moaned and sighed like the sea. Among the birches and aspens, it rattled the leaves like castanets; while from the borders of the ponds, which were numerous in this part of the forest, came gentle rustlings from the long, slender, silken-coated reeds. Jack learned to distinguish all these sounds and to love them.

The little boy, however, had incurred the enmity of many of the peasants, who saw him constantly with the forester, to whom they had sworn eternal hatred. Cowardly and sulky, they touched their hats respectfully enough to Jack when they met him with Father Archambauld, but when he was alone, they shook their fists at him with horrible oaths.

There was one old woman, brown as an Indian squaw, who haunted the very dreams of the child. On his way home at sunset, he always met her with her fagots on her back. She stood in the path and assailed him with her tongue; and sometimes, merely to frighten him, ran after him for a few steps. Poor little Jack often reached his mother's side breathless and terrified, but, after all, this only added another interest to his life. Sometimes Jack found his mother in the kitchen talking in a low voice; no sound was to be heard in the house save the ticking of the great clock in the dining-room. "Hush, my dear," said his mother; "He is up-stairs. He is at work!"

Jack sat down in a corner and watched the cat lying in the sun. With the awkwardness of a child who makes a noise merely because he knows he ought not to do so, he knocked over something, or moved the table.

"Hush, dear," exclaimed Charlotte, in distress, while Mother Archambauld, laying the table, moved on the points of her big feet—moved as lightly as possible, so as not to disturb "her master who was at work."

He was heard up-stairs—pushing back his chair, or moving his table. He had laid a sheet of paper before him; on this paper was written the title of his book, but not another word. And yet he now had all that formerly he had said would enable him to make a reputation,—leisure, sufficient means, freedom from interruption, a pleasant study, and country air. When he had had enough of the forest, he had but to turn his chair, and from another window he obtained an admirable view of sky and water. All the aroma of the woods, all the freshness of the river, came directly to him. Nothing could disturb him, unless it might be the cooing and fluttering of the

pigeons on the roof above.

“Now to work!” cried the poet. He opened his portfolio, and seized his pen, but not one line could he write. Think of it! To live in a pavilion of the time of Louis XV., on the edge of a forest in that beautiful country about Etiolles, to which the memory of the Pompadour is attached by knots of rose-colored ribbons and diamond buckles. To have around him every essential for poetry,—a charming woman named in memory of Goethe’s heroine, a Henri II. chair in which to write, a small white goat to follow him from place to place, and an antique clock to mark the hours and to connect the prosaic Present with the romance of the Past! All these were very imposing, but the brain was as sterile as when D’Argenton had given lessons all day and retired to his garret at night, worn out in body and mind.

When Charlotte’s step was heard on the stairs, he assumed an expression of profound absorption. “Come in,” he said, in reply to her knock, timidly repeated. She entered fresh and gay, her beautiful arms bared to the elbows, and with so rustic an air that the rice-powder on her face seemed to be the flour from some theatrical mill in an opéra bouffe.

“I have come to see my poet,” she said, as she came in. She had a way of drawling out the word poet that exasperated him. “How are you getting on?” she continued. “Are you pleased?”

“Pleased? Can one ever be pleased or satisfied in this terrible profession, which is a perpetual strain on every nerve!”

“That is true enough, my friend; and yet I would like to know—”

“To know what? Have you any idea how long it took Goethe to write his Faust? And yet he lived in a thoroughly artistic atmosphere. He was not condemned, as I am, to absolute solitude—mental solitude, I mean.”

The poor woman listened in silence. From having so often listened to similar complaints from D’Argenton, she had at last learned to understand the reproaches

conveyed in his words.

The poet's tone signified, "It is not you who can fill the blank around me." In fact, he found her stupid, and was bored to death when alone with her.

Without really being conscious of it, the thing that had fascinated him in this woman was the frame in which she was set. He adored the luxury by which she was surrounded. Now that he had her all to himself—transformed and rechristened her, she had lost half her charm in his eyes, and yet she was more lovely than ever. It was amusing to witness the air of business with which he opened each morning the three or four journals to which he subscribed. He broke the seals as if he expected to find in their columns something of absorbing personal interest; as, for example, a critique of his unwritten poem, or a resume of the book that he meant some day to write. He read these journals without missing one word, and always found something to arouse his contempt or anger. Other people were so fortunate: their pieces were played; and what pieces they were! Their books were printed; and such books! As for himself, his ideas were stolen before he could write them down.

"You know, Charlotte, yesterday a new play by Emile Angier was produced; it was simply my Pommes D'Atlante."

"But that is outrageous! I will write myself to this Monsieur Angier," said poor Lottie, in a great state of indignation.

During these remarks, Jack said not one word; but as D'Argenton lashed himself into frenzy, his old antipathy to the child revived, and the heavy frowns with which he glanced toward the little fellow showed him very clearly that his hatred was only smothered, and would burst forth on the smallest provocation.

CHAPTER X. THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF BÉLISAIRE.

One afternoon, when D'Argenton and Charlotte had gone to drive, Jack, who was alone with Mother Archambauld, saw that he must relinquish his usual excursion to the forest on account of a storm that was coming up.

The July sky was heavy with black clouds, copper-colored on the edges; distant rumblings of thunder were heard, and the valley had that air of expectation which often precedes a storm.

Fatigued by the child's restlessness, the forester's wife looked out at the weather, and said to Jack,—

"Come, Master Jack, it does not rain; and it would be very kind of you to go and get me a little grass for my rabbits."

The child, enchanted at being of use, took a basket and went gayly off to search in a ditch for the food the rabbits liked.

The white road stretched before him, the rising wind blew the dust in clouds, when suddenly Jack heard a voice crying, "Hats! Hats to sell! Nice Panamas!"

Jack looked over the edge of the ditch, and saw a pedler carrying on his shoulders an enormous basket piled with straw hats. He walked as if he were footsore and weary.

Have you ever thought how dismal the life of an itinerant salesman must be? He knows not where he will sleep at night, or even that he can obtain the shelter of a barn; for the average peasant always regards a pedler, or any stranger, indeed, as an adventurer, and watches him with distrustful eyes.

"Hats! Hats to sell!" For whose ears did he intend this repetition of his monotonous cry? There was not a person in sight, nor a house. Was it for the benefit of the birds, who, feeling the coming of the storm, had taken shelter in the trees? The man took a seat on a pile of stones, while Jack, on the other side of the road, examined him with much curiosity. His face was forbidding to a certain extent, but expressed so much suffering in the heavy features, that Jack's kind heart was filled with pity. At that moment a thunder-clap was heard; the man looked up at the skies anxiously, and

then called to Jack to ask how far off the village was.

“Half a mile exactly,” answered the child.

“And the shower will be here in a few moments,” said the pedler, despairingly. “All my hats will be wet, and I shall be ruined.”

The child thought of his own memorable journey, and he wished to do a kind act.

“You can come to our house,” he said, “and then your hats will not be injured.” The pedler grasped eagerly at this permission, for his merchandise was so delicate. The two hurried on as fast as possible; the man walking, however, as if he were treading on hot iron.

“Are you in pain?” asked the child.

“Yes, indeed, I am; my shoes are too small for me; you see my feet are so big that I can never find anything large enough for them. O, if I should ever be rich, I would have a pair of shoes made to measure!”

They reached Aulnettes. The pedler deposited in the hall his scaffold of hats, and stood there humbly enough. But Jack led him into the dining-room, saying, “You must have a glass of wine and a bit of bread.”

Mother Archambauld frowned, but nevertheless put on the table a big loaf and a pot of wine.

“Now a slice of ham,” said Jack, in a tone of command.

“But the master does not wish any one to touch the ham,” said the old woman, grumbling. In fact, D’Argenton was something of a glutton, and there were always some dainties in the pantry preserved for his especial enjoyment.

“Never mind! bring it out!” said the child, delighted at playing the part of host.

The good woman obeyed reluctantly. The pedler’s appetite was of the most formidable description, and while he supped he told his simple story. His name was Bélisaire, and he was the eldest of a large family, and spent the summer wandering

from town to town.—A violent thunder-clap shook the house, the rain fell in torrents, and the noise was terrific. At that moment some one knocked. Jack turned pale. “They have come!” he said with a gasp.

It was D’Argenton who entered, accompanied by Charlotte. They were not to have returned until late, but seeing the approach of the storm, they had given up their plan. They were, however, wet to the skin, and the poet was in a fearful rage with himself and every one else. “A fire in the parlor,” he said, in a tone of command.

But while they were taking off their wraps in the hall; D’Argenton perceived the formidable pile of hats.

“What is that?” he asked. Ah! if Jack could but have sunk a hundred feet under ground with his stranger guest and the littered table! The poet entered the room, looked about, and understood everything. The child stammered a word or two of apology, but the other did not listen.

“Come here, Charlotte. Master Jack receives his friends to-day, it seems.”

“O, Jack! Jack!” cried the mother in a horrified tone of reproach.

“Do not scold him, madame,” stammered Bélisaire. “I only am in fault!”

Here D’Argenton, out of all patience, threw open the door with a most imposing gesture. “Go at once,” he said, violently; “how dare you come into this house?”

Bélisaire, to whom no manner of humiliation was new, offered no word of remonstrance, but snatched up his basket, cast one look of distress at the tempest out-of-doors, and another of gratitude toward little Jack—who sighed as he heard the rain falling like hail on the Panamas,—and hurried down the garden walk. No sooner had the man reached the highway, than his melancholy voice resumed the cry, “Hats! Hats to sell!”

In the dining-room profound silence reigned; the servant was kindling a fire, and Charlotte was shaking the poet’s coat, while he sulkily strode up and down the

room.

As he passed the table he caught sight of the ham on which the pedler's knife had made sad havoc. D'Argenton turned pale. Remember that the ham was sacred, like his wine, his mustard, and mineral water. "What! the ham, too!" he exclaimed.

Charlotte, utterly stupefied by such audacity, could only mechanically repeat his words.

"I said, madame, that they ought not to cut the ham, that such pork was too good for such a vagabond. But the little fellow does not know much yet, he is so young."

Jack by this time was quite alarmed at what he had done, and could only beg pardon in a troubled tone.

"Pardon, indeed!" cried the poet, giving way, as it must be admitted he rarely did, to his temper, and shaking the boy violently, exclaimed, "What right had you to touch that ham? You knew it was not yours. You know that nothing here is yours; for the bed you sleep on, for the food you eat, you are indebted to my bounty. And why should I care for you? I know not even your name!" Here an imploring gesture from Charlotte stopped the torrent of words. Mother Archambauld was still in the room, and listening with eagerness. The poet turned away suddenly, and rushed up stairs, banging the door after him.

Jack remained, looking at his mother in consternation. She wrung her pretty hands, and again implored heaven to tell her what she had done to merit such a hard fate.

This was her only resource in the serious perplexities of life; and, naturally, her question remained unanswered.

To add the finishing touch to the discomfort of the house, D'Argenton was now taken with one of "his attacks," a form of bilious fever.

Charlotte petted and soothed him, and waited upon him by inches. The sister-of-charity spirit, that lies in the depths of every womanly nature, made her

love her poet the more because he was suffering. How tenderly she protected his nerves! She laid a woollen cloth on the table under the white one to soften the noise of the plates and the silver. She piled the Henry II. chair with cushions, and had her rolls of hot flannels and her tisanes in readiness at all hours of the day and night.

Sometimes the poor little woman was fearfully rebuffed and mortified by a fretful exclamation from the poet. “Do be quiet, Charlotte; you talk too much!”

This illness brought the good-natured doctor to the house once more. Charlotte met him in the hall. “Come quick, doctor, our dear poet is suffering,” she said, anxiously.

“Nonsense, my dear; he only wants a little amusement.”

In fact, D’Argenton, who greeted the physician in the most languid tones, soon forgot to keep up the farce in the pleasure of seeing a new face, which made a pleasant break in his monotonous life, and a few moments later beheld him launched on some dazzling episode of his Parisian life. The doctor saw no reason to doubt the truth of these narrations told in such measured and careful phrases, and was always pleased with the appearance of the family,—the intellectual husband, the pretty gay wife, and the amusing child; and no intuition gave him a hint, as might have been the case with a more delicate organization, of the peculiarity and bitterness of the ties which bound the household together.

Often, therefore, on these bright midsummer days, the doctor’s horse was fastened to the palisades, while the old man drank the cool glass carefully mixed for him by Charlotte herself, and as he drank, he told of his wonderful adventures in India. Jack listened with eyes and ears wide open.

“Jack!” said D’Argenton, peremptorily, and pointed to the door.

“Let him stay, I beg of you; I like to have children around me. I am quite sure that your boy has discovered that I have a grandchild;” and the old man talked of his little Cécile, who was two years younger than Jack.

“Bring her to see us, doctor,” said Charlotte; “the two children would be so happy

together."

"Thank you, dear madame; but her grandmother would never consent. She never trusts the child to any one; and she herself never goes anywhere since our great sorrow."

This sorrow, of which the old doctor often spoke, was the loss of his daughter and his son-in-law within a year after their marriage. Some mystery surrounded this double catastrophe. Even Mother Archambauld, who knew everything, contented herself with saying, "Yes, poor things! they have had a great deal of trouble."

The only prescription given by the doctor was a verbal one, "Keep him amused, madame; keep him amused!"

How could poor Charlotte do this? They went off together in a little carriage; breakfast, books, and a butterfly-net accompanied them to the forest; but he was bored to death. They bought a boat, but a tête-à-tête in the middle of the Seine was worse than one on shore; and the little boat soon lay moored at the landing, half full of water and dead leaves.

Then the poet took to building; he planned a new staircase and an Italian terrace: but even this did not amuse him.

One day a man, who came to tune the pianoforte, extolled the merits of an AEolian harp. D'Argenton immediately ordered one made on a gigantic scale, and placed it on his roof. From that moment poor little Jack's life was a burden to him. The melancholy wail of the instrument, like a soul in purgatory, pursued him in his dreams. To the child's great relief, the poet was equally disturbed, and the harp was ordered to the end of the garden; but its shrieks and moans were still heard. D'Argenton fiercely commanded that the instrument should be buried, which was done, and the earth heaped upon it as over some mad animal. All these various occupations failing to amuse her poet, Charlotte reluctantly decided to invite some of his old friends, but was repaid for her sacrifice by witnessing D'Argenton's joy

on being told that Dr. Hirsch and Labassandre were soon to visit them.

When Jack entered the house, a few days later, he heard the voices of his old professors. The child felt an emotion of sick terror, for the sounds recalled the memory of so many wretched hours. He slipped quietly into the garden, there to await the dinner-bell.

“Come, gentlemen,” said Charlotte, smilingly, as she appeared on the terrace,—her large white apron indicating that as a good housekeeper she by no means disdained on occasion to lay aside her lace ruffles and take an active part.

The professors promptly obeyed this summons to dinner, and greeted Jack as he took his seat with every appearance of cordiality. Two large doors opened on the lawn, beyond which lay the forest.

“You are a lucky fellow,” said Labassandre. “Tomorrow I shall be in that hot, dusty town, eating a miserable dinner.”

“It is a good thing to be certain of having even a miserable dinner,” grumbled Dr. Hirsch.

“Why not remain here for a time?” said D’Argenton, cordially. “There is a room for each of you; the cellar has some good wine in it—”

“And we can make excursions,” interrupted Charlotte, gayly.

“But what would become of my rehearsals?” said Labassandre.

“But you, Dr. Hirsch,” continued Charlotte, “you are tied down to the opera-house!”

“Certainly not; and my patients are nearly all in the country at this season.”

The idea of Dr. Hirsch having any patients was very funny, and yet no one laughed.

“Well, decide!” cried the poet, “In the first place, you would be doing me a favor, and could prescribe for me.”

“To be sure. The physician here knows nothing of your constitution, while I can soon set you on your feet again. I am sick of the Institute and of Moronval, and

never wish to see either more." Thereupon the doctor launched forth in a philippic against the school which supported him. Moronval was a thorough humbug, he never paid anybody, and every one was giving him up; the affair of Mâdou had done him great injury; and finally Dr. Hirsch went so far as to compliment Jack on his energetic departure.

At this moment Dr. Rivals was shown into the dining-room; he was overjoyed at finding so gay and talkative a circle. "You see, madame, I was right: our invalid only needed a little excitement."

"There I differ from you!" cried Dr. Hirsch, fiercely, snuffing the battle from afar.

Old Rivals examined this singular person with some distrust. "Dr. Hirsch," said D'Argenton, "allow me to present you to Dr. Rivals." They bowed like two duellists on the field who salute each other before crossing their swords. The country physician concluded his new acquaintance to be some famous Parisian practitioner, full of eccentricities and hobbies. D'Argenton's illness was the occasion of a long discussion between the physicians.

It was droll to see the poet's expression. He was inclined to take offence that Dr. Rivals should consider him a mere hypochondriac, and again to be equally annoyed when Dr. Hirsch insisted upon his having a hundred diseases, each one with a worse name than the others.

Charlotte listened with tears in her eyes.

"But this is utter nonsense," cried Rivals, who had listened impatiently; "there are no such diseases, in the first place, and if there were, our friend has no such symptoms."

This was too much for Dr. Hirsch, and the battle began in earnest. They hurled at each other titles of books in every language, names of every drug known and unknown to the faculty. The scene was more laughable than terrific, and was very much like one from "Molière." Jack and his mother escaped to the piazza, Where

Labassandre was already trying his voice. The winged inhabitants of the forest twittered in terror; the peacocks in the neighboring château answered by those alarmed cries with which they greet the approach of a thunder-shower; the neighboring peasants started from their sleep, and old Mother Archambauld wondered what was going on in the little house, where the moon shone so whitely on the legend in gold characters over the door:

PARVA DOMUS, MAGNA QUIES.

CHAPTER XI. CÉCILE.

“Where are you going so early?” asked Dr. Hirsch, indolently, as he saw Charlotte, gayly dressed, prayer-book in hand, come slowly down the stairs, followed by Jack, who was once more clad in the pet costume of Lord Pembroke.

“To church, my dear sir. Has not D’Argenton told you that I have an especial duty to perform there this morning? Come with us, will you not?”

It was Assumption Day, and Charlotte had been much flattered by being asked to distribute the bread. She, with her child, took the seats reserved for them on a bench close to the choir. The church was adorned with flowers. The choir-boys were in surplices freshly ironed, and on a rustic table the loaves of bread were piled high. To complete the picture, all the foresters, in their green costumes, with their knives in their belts and their carbines in their hands, had come to join in the Te Deum of this official fête.

Ida de Barancy would have been certainly much astonished had some one told her a year before, that she would one day assist at a religious festival in a village church, under the name of the Vicomtesse D’Argenton, and that she would have all the consideration and prestige of a married woman. This new rôle amused and interested her. She corrected Jack, turned the pages of her prayer-book, and shook out her rustling silk skirts in the most edifying fashion.

When it was time for the offertory, the tall Swiss, armed with a halberd, came for Jack, and bending low whispered in his mother's ear a question as to what little girl should be chosen to assist him; Charlotte hesitated, for "she knew so few persons in the church. Then the Swiss suggested Dr. Rivals' grandchild—a little girl on the opposite side sitting next an old lady in black. The two children walked slowly behind the majestic official, Cécile carrying a velvet bag much too large for her little fingers, and Jack bearing an enormous wax candle ornamented with floating ribbons and artificial flowers. They were both charming: he in his Scotch costume, and she simply dressed, with waves of soft brown hair parted on her childish brow, and her face illuminated by large gray eyes. The breath of fresh flowers mingled with the fumes of incense that hung in clouds throughout the church. Cécile presented her bag with a gentle, imploring smile. Jack was very grave. The little fluttering hand in its thread glove, which he held in his own, reminded him of a bird that he had once taken from its nest in the forest. Did he dream that the little girl would be his best friend, and that, later, all that was most precious in life for him would come from her?

"They would make a pretty pair," said an old woman, as the children passed her, and in a lower voice added, "Poor little soul, I hope she will be more fortunate than her mother!"

Their duties over, Jack returned to his place, still under the influence of the hand he had so lightly held. But additional pleasure was in store for him. As they left the church, Madame Rivals approached Madame D'Argenton and asked permission to take Jack home with her to breakfast. Charlotte colored high with gratification, straightened the boy's necktie, and, kissing him, whispered, "Be a good child!"

From this day forth, when Jack was not at home he was at the old doctor's, who lived in a house in no degree better than that of his neighbors, and only distinguished from them by the words Night-Bell on a brass plate above a small button at the side

of the door. The walls were black with age. Here and there, however, an observant eye could see that some attempts had been made to rejuvenate the mansion; but everything of that nature had been interrupted on the day of their great sorrow, and the old people had never had the heart to go on with their improvements since; an unfinished summer-house seemed to say, with a discouraged air, “What is the use?” The garden was in a complete state of neglect. Grass grew over the walks, and weeds choked the fountain. The human beings in the house had much the same air. From Madame Rivals, who, eight years after her daughter’s death, still wore the deepest of black, down to little Cécile, whose childish face had a precocious expression of sorrow, and the old servant who for a quarter of a century had shared the griefs and sorrows of the family,—all seemed to live in an atmosphere of eternal regret. The doctor, who kept up a certain intercourse with the outer world, was the only one who was ever cheerful.

To Madame Rivals, Cécile was at once a blessing and a sorrow, for the child was a perpetual reminder of the daughter she had lost. To the doctor, on the contrary, it seemed that the little girl had taken her mother’s place, and sometimes, when he was with her alone, he would give way to a loud and merry laugh, which would be quickly silenced on meeting his wife’s sad eyes, full of astonished reproach.

Little Cécile’s life was by no means a gay one. She lived in the garden, or in a large room where a door, that was always closed, led to the apartment that had once been her mother’s, and which was full of the souvenirs of that short life. Madame Rivals alone ever entered this room, but little Cécile often stood on the threshold, awed and silent. The child had never been sent to school, and this isolation was very bad for her; she needed the association of other children. “Let us ask little D’Argenton here,” said her grandfather: “the boy is charming!”

“Yes; but who knows anything about these people? Whence do they come?” answered his wife. “Who knows them?”

“Everybody, my dear. The husband is very eccentric, certainly, but he is an artist, or a journalist rather, and they are privileged. The woman is not quite a lady, I admit, but she is well enough. I will answer for their respectability.”

Madame Rivals shook her head. She had but slight confidence in her husband’s insight into character, and sighed in an ostentatious way.

Old Rivals colored guiltily, but returned in a moment to his original idea.

“The child will be ill if she has not some change. Besides, what harm could possibly happen?”

The grandmother then consented, and Jack and Cécile became close companions. The old lady grew very fond of the little fellow. She saw that he was neglected at home, that the buttons were off his coat, and that he had no lesson-hours.

“Do you not go to school, my dear?”

“No, madame,” was the answer; and then quickly added,—for a child’s instinct is very delicate,—“Mamma teaches me.”

“I cannot understand,” said Madame Rivals to her husband, “how they can let this child grow up in this way, idling his time from morning till night.”

“The child is not very clever,” answered the doctor, anxious to excuse his friends.

“No, it is not that; it is that his stepfather does not like him.”

Jack’s best friends were in the doctor’s house. Cécile adored him. They played together in the garden if the weather was fair, in the pharmacy if it was stormy. Madame Rivals was always there, and as there was no apothecary’s store in Etiolles, put up simple prescriptions herself. She had done this for so many years, that she had attained considerable experience, and was often consulted in her husband’s absence. The children found vast amusement in deciphering the labels on the bottles, and pasting on new ones. Jack did this with all a boy’s awkwardness, while little Cécile used her hands as gravely and deftly as a woman grown.

The old physician delighted in taking the children with him when he went about the country to visit his patients. The carriage was large, the children small, so that the three were stowed in very comfortably, and merrily jogged over the rough roads. Wherever they went they were warmly welcomed, and while the doctor climbed the narrow stairs, the children roamed at will through the farm-yard and fields.

Illness among these peasant homes assumes a very singular aspect. It is never allowed to interfere with the routine and labors of daily life. The animals must be fed and housed for the night, and driven out to pasture in the morning, whether the farmer be well or ill. If ill, the wife has no time to nurse him, or even to be anxious. After a hard day's toil she throws herself on her pallet and sleeps soundly until dawn, while her good man tosses feverishly at her side, longing for morning. Every one worshipped the doctor, who they affirmed would have been very rich, had he not been so generous.

His professional visits over, the old man and the children started for home. The Seine, misty and dark with the approach of evening, had yet occasional bars of golden light crossing its surface. Slender trees, with their foliage heavily massed at the top, like palms, and the low white houses along the brink, gave a vague suggestion of an Eastern scene. "It is like Nazareth," said little Cécile; and the two children told each other stories while the carriage rolled slowly homeward.

Doctor Rivals soon discovered that Jack was by no means wanting in intelligence, and determined, with his natural kindness of heart, to himself supply the great deficiencies in education by giving him an hour's instruction daily. Those of my readers who are in the habit of enjoying a siesta after dinner, will appreciate the sacrifice made by the old man, when I add that it was this precise time that he now freely gave to the little boy, who, in his turn, gratefully applied himself with his whole heart to his lessons. Cécile was almost always present, and was as pleased as Jack himself when her grandfather, examining the copy-book, said, "Well done!" To

his mother, Jack said nothing of his labors; he determined to prove to her at some future day that the diagnosis of the poet had been incorrect. This concealment was rendered very easy, as the mother grew hourly more and more indifferent to her child, and more completely absorbed in D'Argenton. The boy's comings and goings were almost unnoticed. His seat at the table was often vacant, but no one asked where he had been. New guests filled the board, for D'Argenton kept open house; yet the poet was by no means generous in his hospitality, and when Charlotte would say to him, timidly, "I am out of money, my friend," he would reply by a wry face and the word, "Already?" But vanity was stronger than avarice, and the pleasure of patronizing his old friends, the Bohemians, with whom he had formerly lived, carried the day. They all knew that he had a pleasant home, that the air was good and the table better; consequently, one would say to another, "Who wants to go to Etiolles to-night?" They came in droves.

Poor Charlotte was in despair. "Madame Archambauld, are there eggs?—is there any game? Company has come, and what shall we give them?"

"Anything will suit, madame, I fancy, for they look half starved," said the old woman, astonished at the unkempt, unshorn, and hungry aspect of her master's friends.

D'Argenton delighted in showing them over the house; and then they dispersed to the fields, to the river-side, and into the forest, as happy and frolicsome as old horses turned out to grass. In the fresh country, in the full sunlight, those rusty coats and worn faces seemed more rusty and more worn than when seen in Paris; but they were happy, and D'Argenton radiant. No one ventured to dispute his eternal "I think," and "I know." Was he not the master of the house, and had he not the key of the wine cellar?

Charlotte, too, was well pleased. It was to her inconsequent nature and Bohemian instincts a renewal of the excitement of her old life. She was flattered and admired,

and, while remaining true to her poet, was pleased to show him that she had not lost her power of charming.

Months passed on. The little house was enveloped in the melancholy mists of autumn; then winter snows whitened the roof, followed by the fierce winds of March; and finally a new spring, with its lilacs and violets, gladdened the hearts of the inmates of the cottage. Nothing was changed there. D'Argenton, perhaps, had two or three new symptoms, dignified by Doctor Hirsch with singular names. Charlotte was as totally without salient characteristics, as pretty and sentimental, as she had always been. Jack had grown and developed amazingly, and having studied industriously, knew quite as much as other boys of his age.

"Send him to school now," said Doctor Rivals to his mother, "and I answer for his making a figure."

"Ah, doctor, how good you are!" cried Charlotte, a little ashamed, and feeling the indirect reproach conveyed in the interest expressed by a stranger, as contrasted with her own indifference.

D'Argenton answered coldly that he would reflect upon the matter, that he had grave objections to a school, &c., and when alone with Charlotte, expressed his indignation at the doctor's interference, but from that time took more interest in the movements of the boy.

"Come here, sir," said Labassandre, one day, to Jack. The child obeyed somewhat anxiously. "Who made that net in the chestnut-tree at the foot of the garden?"

"It was I, sir."

Cécile had expressed a wish for a living squirrel, and Jack had manufactured a most ingenious snare of steel wire.

"Did you make it yourself, without any aid?"

"Yes, sir," answered the child.

“It is wonderful, very wonderful,” continued the singer, turning to the others. “The child has a positive genius for mechanics.”

In the evening there was a grand discussion. “Yes, madame/,” said Labassandre, addressing Charlotte; “the man of the future, the coming man, is the mechanic. Rank has had its day, the middle classes theirs, and now it is the workman’s turn. You may to-day despise his horny hands, in twenty years he will lead the world.”

“He is right,” interrupted D’Argenton, and Doctor Hirsch nodded approvingly. Singularly enough, Jack, who generally heard the conversation going on about him without heeding it, on this occasion felt a keen interest, as if he had a presentiment of the future.

Labassandre described his former life as a blacksmith at the village forge. “You know, my friends,” he said, “whether I have been successful. You know that I have had plenty of applause, and of medals. You may believe me or not, as you please, but I assure you I would part with all sooner than with this;” and the man rolled up his shirt-sleeve and displayed an enormous arm tattooed in red and blue. Two blacksmith’s hammers were crossed within a circle of oak-leaves; an inscription was above these emblems in small letters: Work and Liberty. Labassandre proceeded to deplore the unhappy hour when the manager of the opera at Nantes had heard him sing. Had he been let alone, he would by this time have been the proprietor of a large machine shop, with a provision laid up for his old age.

“Yes,” said Charlotte, “but you were very strong, and I have heard you say that the life was a hard one.”

“Precisely; but I am inclined to believe that the individual in question is sufficiently robust.”

“I will answer for that,” said Dr. Hirsch.

Charlotte made other objections. She hinted that some natures were more refined than others—“that certain aristocratic instincts—”

Here D'Argenton interrupted her in a rage. "What nonsense! My friends occupy themselves in your behalf, and then you find fault, and utter absurdities."

Charlotte burst into tears. Jack ran away, for he felt a strong desire to fly at the throat of the tyrant who had spoken so roughly to his pretty mother.

Nothing more was said for some days; but the child noticed a change in his mother's manner toward him: she kissed him often, and kissed him with that lingering tenderness we show to those we love and from whom we are about to part. Jack was the more troubled as he heard D'Argenton say to Dr. Rivals, with a satirical smile, "We are all busy, sir, in your pupil's interest. You will hear some news in a few days that will astonish you."

The old man was delighted, and said to his wife, "You see, my dear, that I did well to make them open their eyes."

"Who knows? I distrust that man, and do not believe he intends any good to the child. It is better sometimes that your enemy should sit with folded arms than trouble himself about you."

CHAPTER XII. LIFE IS NOT A ROMANCE.

One Sunday morning, just after the arrival of the train that had brought Labassandre and a noisy band of friends, Jack, who was in the garden busy with his squirrel-net, heard his mother call him. Her voice came from the window of the poet's room. Something in its tone, or a certain instinct so marked in some persons, told the child that the crisis had come, and he tremblingly ascended the stairs. On the Henri Deux chair D'Argenton sat, throned as it were, while Labassandre and Dr. Hirsch stood on either side. Jack saw at once that there were the tribunal, the judge, and the witnesses, while his mother sat a little apart at an open window.

"Come here!" said the poet, sternly, and with such an assumption of dignity that one was tempted to believe that the Henry Deux chair itself had spoken. "I have often

told you that life is not a romance; you have seen me crushed, worn and weary with my literary labors; your turn has now come to enter the arena. You are a man,"—the child was but twelve,—"you are a man now, and must prove yourself to be one. For a year,—the year that I have been supposed to neglect you,—I have permitted you to run free, and, thanks to my peculiar talents of observation, I have been able to decide on your path in life. I have watched the development of your instincts, tastes, and habits, and, with your mother's consent, have taken a step of importance." Jack was frightened, and turned to his mother for sympathy. Charlotte still sat gazing from the window, shading her eyes from the sun. D'Argenton called on Labassandre to produce the letter he had received. The singer pulled out a large, ill-folded peasant's letter, and read it aloud:—

"FOUNDRY D'INDRET. "My Dear Brother: I have spoken to the master in regard to the young man, your friend's son, and he is willing, in spite of his youth, to accept him as an apprentice. He may live under our roof, and in four years I promise you that he shall know his trade. Everybody is well here. My wife and Zénaïde send messages.

"Rondic."

"You hear, Jack," interrupted D'Argenton; "in four years you will hold a position second to none in the world,—you will be a good workman."

The child had seen the working classes in Paris; above all, he had seen a noisy crowd of men in dirty blouses leaving a shop at six o'clock in the Passage des Douze Maisons. The idea of wearing a blouse was the first that struck him. He remembered his mother's tone of contempt,—"Those are workmen, those men in blouses!"—he remembered the care with which she avoided touching them in the street as she passed. But he was more moved at the thought of leaving the beautiful forest, the summits of whose waving trees he even now caught a glimpse of from the window, the Rivals, and above all his mother, whom he loved so much and had found again

after so much difficulty.

Charlotte, at the open window, shivered from head to foot, and her hand dashed away a tear. Was she watching in that western sky the fading away of all her dreams, her illusions, and her hopes?

“Then must I go away?” asked the child, faintly.

The men smiled pityingly, and from the window came a great sob.

“In a week we will go, my boy,” said Labassandre, cheeringly. But D’Argenton, with a frown directed to the window, said, “You can leave the room now, and be ready for your journey in a week.”

Jack ran down the stairs, and out into the village street, and did not stop to take breath until he reached the house of Dr. Rivals, who listened to his story with indignation.

“It is preposterous!” he cried. “The very idea of making a mechanic of you is absurd. I will see your father at once.”

The persons who saw the two pass through the street—the doctor gesticulating, and little Jack without a hat—concluded that some one must be ill at Aulnettes. This was not the case, however; for Dr. Rivals heard loud talking and laughing as he entered the house, and Charlotte, as she descended the stairs, was singing a bar from the last opera.

“I wish to say a few words in private to you, sir,” said Mr. Rivals.

“We are among friends,” answered D’Argenton, “and have no secrets. You have something to say, I suppose, in regard to Jack. These gentlemen know all that I have done for him, my motives, and the peculiar circumstances of the case.”

“But, my friend “—Charlotte said, timidly, fearing the explanation that was forthcoming.

“Go on, doctor,” interrupted the poet, sternly.

“Jack has just told me that you have apprenticed him to the Forge at Indret. This, of course, is a mistake on his part.”

“Not in the least, sir.”

“But you can have no conception of the child’s nature, nor of his constitution. It is his health, his very existence, with which you are trifling. I assure you, madame,” he continued, turning toward Charlotte, “that your child could not endure such a life. I am speaking now simply of his physique. Mentally and spiritually, he is equally unfitted for it.”

“You are mistaken, doctor,” interrupted D’Argenton; “I know the boy better than you possibly can. He is only fit for manual labor, and now that I offer him the opportunity of earning his daily bread in this way, of exercising the one talent he may have, he goes to you and makes complaints of me.”

Jack tried to excuse himself. His friend bade him be silent, and continued,—

“He did not complain to me. He simply informed me of your decision. I told him to come at once to his mother, and to you, and entreat you to reconsider your determination, and not degrade him in this way.”

“I deny the degradation,” shouted Labassandre. “Manual labor does not degrade a man. The Saviour of the world was a carpenter.”

“That is true,” murmured Charlotte, before whose eyes at once floated a vision of her boy as the infant Jesus in a procession on some feast-day.

“Do not listen to such utter nonsense, dear madame,” cried the doctor, exasperated out of all patience. “To make your boy a mechanic is to separate from him forever. You might send him to the other end of the world, and yet he would not be so far from you. You will see when it is too late; the day will come that you will blush for him, when he will appear before you, not as the loving, tender son, but humble and servile, as holding a social position far inferior to your own.”

Jack, who had not yet said a word, dismayed at this vivid picture of the future, started up from his seat in the corner.

“I will not be a mechanic!” he said, in a firm voice.

“O, Jack!” cried his mother, in consternation.

But D’Argenton thundered out, “You will not be a mechanic, you say? But you will eat, and sleep, and be clothed at my expense! No, sir; I have had enough of you, and I never cared much for parasites.” Then, suddenly cooling down, he concluded in a lower tone by a command to the boy to retire to his bedroom. There the child heard a loud and angry discussion going on below, but the words were not to be understood. Suddenly the hall-door opened, and Mr. Rivals was heard to say,—

“May I be hanged if I ever cross this threshold again!”

At this moment Charlotte came in, her eyes red with weeping. For the first time she seemed to have lost all consciousness of self, and had laid aside her rôle of the coquettish, pretty woman. The tears she had shed had been those that age a mother’s face, and leave ineffaceable marks upon it.

“Listen to me, Jack,” she said, tenderly. “You have made me very unhappy. You have been impertinent and ungrateful to your best friends. I know, my child, that you will be happy in your new life. I acknowledge that at first I was troubled at the idea; but you heard what they said, did you not? A mechanic is very different nowadays from what it was once. And, besides, at your age you should rely on the judgment of those older than yourself, who have only your interests at heart.”

A sob from the child interrupted her.

“Then you, too, send me away!”

The mother snatched him to her heart, and kissed him passionately. “I send you away, my darling! You know that if the matter rested with me, you should never leave me; but, my child, we must both of us be reasonable, and think a little of the

future, which is dreary enough for us." And then Charlotte hesitatingly continued, "You know, dear, you are very young, and there are many things you cannot understand. Some day, when you are older, I will tell you the secret of your birth. It is an absolute romance: some day you shall learn your father's name. But now all that is necessary for you to understand is, that we have not a penny in the world, and are absolutely dependent on—D'Argenton." This name the poor woman uttered with shame and hesitation, accompanied, at the same time, with a touching look of appeal to her son. "I cannot," she continued, "ask him to do anything more for us; he has already done so much. Besides, he is not rich. What am I to do between you both? Ah, if I could only go in your place to Indret and earn my bread! And yet you would refuse an opening that gives you a certainty of earning your livelihood, and of becoming your own master."

By the sparkle in her boy's eyes the mother saw that these words had struck home, and in a caressing tone she continued, "Do this for me, Jack; do this for your mother. The time may come when I shall have to look to you as my sole support." Did she really believe her own words? Was it a presentiment, one of those momentary flashes of light that illuminate the future's dark horizon? or had she simply talked for effect?

At all events, she could have found no better way to conquer this generous nature. The effect was instantaneous. The idea that his mother some day would lean on him suddenly decided him to yield at once. He looked her straight in the eyes. "Promise me that you will never be ashamed of me when my hands are black, and that you will always love me."

She covered her boy with kisses, concealing in this way her trouble and remorse, for from this time henceforward the unhappy woman was a prey to remorse, and never thought of her child without an agonized contraction of the heart.

But he, supposing that her embarrassment came from anxiety, and possibly from

shame, tore himself away, and ran toward the stairs.

“Come, mama, I will tell him that I accept.”

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said the little fellow to D’Argenton, as he opened the door; “I was very wrong in refusing your kindness. I accept it with thanks.”

“I am happy to find that reflection has taught you wisdom. But now express your gratitude to M. Labassandre: it is he to whom you are indebted.”

The child extended his hand, which was quickly ingulfed in the enormous paw of the artist.

This last week Jack spent in his former haunts he was more anxious than sad, and the responsibility he felt made itself seen in two little wrinkles on his childish brow. He was determined not to go away without seeing Cécile.

“But, my dear, after the scene here the other day, it would not be suitable,” remonstrated his mother. But the night before Jack’s departure, D’Argenton, full of triumph at the success of his plans, consented that the boy should take leave of his friends. He went there in the evening. The house was dark, save a streak of light coming from the library—if library it could be called—a mere closet, crammed with books. The doctor was there, and exclaimed, as the door opened, “I was afraid they would not let you come to say good-bye, my boy! It was partially my fault. I was too quick-tempered by far. My wife scolded me well. She has gone away, you know, with Cécile, to pass a month in the Pyrenees with my sister. The child was not well; I think I told her of your impending departure too abruptly. Ah, these children! we think they do not feel, but we are mistaken, and they feel quite as deeply as we ourselves.” He spoke to Jack as one man to another. In fact, every one treated him in the same way at present. And yet the little fellow now burst into a violent passion of tears at the thought of his little friend having gone away without his seeing her.

“Do you know what I am doing now, my lad?” asked the old man. “Well, I am selecting some books that you must read carefully. Employ in this way every leisure

moment. Remember that books are our best friends. I do not think you will understand this just yet, but one day you will do so, I am sure. In the mean time, promise me to read them,"—the old man kissed the boy twice,—"for Cécile and myself," he said, kindly; and, as the door closed, the child heard him say, "Poor child, poor child!"

The words were the same as at the Jesuits' College; but by this time Jack had learned why they pitied him. The next morning they started, Labassandre in a most extraordinary costume, dressed, in fact, for an expedition across the Pampas,—high gaiters, a green velvet vest, a knapsack, and a knife in his girdle. The poet was at once solemn and happy: solemn, because he felt that he had accomplished a great duty; happy, because this departure filled him with joy.

Charlotte embraced Jack tenderly and with tears. "You will take good care of him, M. Labassandre?"

"As of my best note, madame."

Charlotte sobbed. The boy sought to hide his emotion, for the thought of working for his mother had given him courage and strength. At the end of the garden path he turned once more, that he might carry away in his memory a last picture of the house, and the face of the woman who smiled through her tears.

"Write often!" cried the mother.

And the poet shouted, in stentorian tones, "Remember, Jack, life is not a romance!"

Life is not a romance; but was it not one for him? The selfish egotist! He stood on the threshold of his little home, with one hand on Charlotte's shoulder, the roses in bloom all about him, and he himself in a pose pretentious enough for a photograph, and so radiant at having won the day, that he forgot his hatred, and waved a paternal adieu to the child he had driven from the shelter of his roof.

CHAPTER XIII. INDRET.

The opera-singer stood upright in the boat and cried, “Is not the scene beautiful, Jack?”

It was about four o’clock—a July evening; the waves glittered in the sunlight, and the air palpitated with heat. Large sails, that in the golden atmosphere looked snowy white, passed by from time to time; they were boats from Noirmoutiers, loaded to the brim with sparkling white salt. Peasants in their picturesque costumes were crowded in, and the caps of the women were as white as the salt Other boats were laden with grain. Occasionally a three-masted vessel came slowly up the stream, arriving, perhaps, from the end of the world after a two years’ voyage, and bearing with it something of the poetry and mystery of other lands. A fresh breeze came from the sea, and made one long for the deep blue of the ocean.

“And Indret—where is it?” asked Jack.

“There, that island opposite.”

Through the silvery mists that enveloped the island, Jack saw dimly a row of poplar-trees, and some high chimneys from which poured out a thick black smoke; at the same time he heard loud blows of hammers on iron, and a continual whistling and puffing, as if the island itself had been an enormous steamer. As the boat slowly made her way to the wharf, the child saw long, low buildings on every side, and close at the river-side a row of enormous furnaces, which were filled from the water by coal barges.

“There is Rondic!” cried the opera-singer, and from his stupendous chest sent forth a hurrah so formidable that it was heard above all the clatter of machinery.

The boat stopped, and the brothers met with effusion. The two resembled each other very much, though Rondic was older and not so stout. His face was closely shaven, and he wore a sailor’s hat that shaded a true Breton peasant face tanned by the sea, and a pair of eyes as keen as steel.

“And how are you all?” asked Labassandre.

“Well enough, well enough, thank Heaven! And this is our new apprentice?—he looks very small and not over-strong.”

“Strong as an ox, my dear; and warranted by all the physicians in Paris!”

“So much the better, for it is a hard life here. But now hasten, for we must present ourselves to the Director at once.”

They turned into a long avenue lined by fine trees. The avenue terminated in a village street, with white houses on both sides, inhabited by the master and head-workmen. At this hour all was silent; life and movement were concentrated at the factory; and, but for the linen drying in the yards, an occasional cry of an infant, and a pot of flowers at the window, one would have supposed the place uninhabited.

“Ah, the flag is lowered!” said the singer, as they reached the door. “Once that terrified me!” and he explained to Jack that when the flag was dropped from the top of the staff, it meant that the doors of the factory were closed. So much the worse for late comers; they were marked as absent, and at the third offence dismissed. They were now admitted by the porter. There was a frightful tumult pervading the large halls which were crossed by tramways. Iron bars and rolls of copper were piled between old cannons brought there to be recast. Rondic pointed out all the different branches of the establishment; he could not make himself understood save by gestures, for the noise was deafening.

Jack was able to see the interiors of the various workshops, the doors being set widely open on account of the heat; he saw rapid movements of arms and blackened faces; he saw machines in motion, first in shadow, and then with a red light playing over their polished surface.

Puffs of hot air, a smell of oil and of iron, accompanied by an impalpable black dust, a dust that was as sharp as needles and sparkled like diamonds,—all this Jack felt; but the peculiar characteristic of the place was a certain jarring, something like the effort of an enormous beast to shake off the chains that bound him in some

subterranean dungeon.

They had now reached an old château of the time of the League.

“Here we are,” said Rondic; and addressing his brother, “Will you go up with us?”

“Indeed I will; I am, besides, by no means unwilling to see ‘the monkey’ once more, and to show him that I have become somebody and something.”

He pulled down his velvet vest, and glanced at his yellow boots and knapsack. Rondic made no remark, but seemed somewhat annoyed.

They passed through the low postern; on either side of the hall were small and badly lighted rooms, where clerks were very busy writing. In the inner room, a man with a stern and haughty face sat writing under a high window.

“Ah, it is you, Père Rondic!”

“Yes, sir; I come to present the new apprentice, and to thank you for—”

“This is the prodigy, then, is it? It seems, young man, that you have an absolute talent for mechanics. But, Rondic, he does not look very strong. Is he delicate?”

“No, sir; on the contrary, I have been assured that he is remarkably robust.”

“Remarkably,” repeated Labassandre, coming forward, and, in reply to the astonished glance of the Director, proceeded to say that he left the manufactory six years before to join the opera in Paris.

“Ah, yes, I remember,” answered the Director, coldly enough, rising at the same time as if to indicate that the conversation was at an end. “Take away your apprentice, Rondic, and try and make a good workman of him. Under you he must turn out well.”

The opera-singer, vexed at having produced no effect, went away somewhat crestfallen. Rondic lingered and said a few words to his master, and then the two men and the child descended the stairs together, each with a different impression. Jack thought of the words “he does not look very strong,” while Labassandre

digested his own mortification as he best might. “Has anything gone wrong?” he suddenly asked his brother,—“the Director seems even more surly now than in my day.”

“No; he spoke to me of Chariot, our poor sister’s son, who is giving us a great deal of trouble.”

“In what way?” asked the artist.

“Since his mother’s death he drinks and gambles, and has contracted debts. He is a wonderful draughtsman, and has high wages, but spends them before he has them. He has promised us all to reform, but he breaks his promises as fast as he makes them. I have paid his debts for him several times, but I can never do it again. I have my own family, you see, and Zénaïde is growing up, and she must be established. Poor girl! Women have more sense than we. I wanted her to marry her cousin, but she would not consent. Now we are trying to separate him from his bad acquaintances here, and the Director has found a situation at Nantes; but I dare say the obstinate fellow will object. You will reason with him to-night, can’t you? He will, perhaps, listen to you.”

“I will see what I can do,” answered Labassandre, pompously.

As they talked they reached the main street, crowded at this hour with all classes of people, some in mechanics’ blouses, others wearing coats. Jack was struck with the contrast presented by a crowd like this to one in Paris, composed of similar classes.

Labassandre was greeted with enthusiasm. The whisper went about that he received a hundred thousand francs per year for merely singing. His theatrical costume won universal admiration, and his bland smile shone first on one side and then on the other, as he nodded patronizingly to first one and then another of his old friends.

At the door of Rondic’s house stood a young woman talking to a youth two or three steps below. Jack thought she must be the old man’s daughter, and then remembered that he had married a second time. She was tall and slender, young and pretty, with a

gentle face, white throat, and a graceful head which bent slightly forward as if bowed by its rich weight of hair. Unlike the Breton peasants, she wore no cap; her light dress and black apron were totally unlike the costume of a working woman.

“Is she not pretty?” asked Rondic of his brother. “She has been giving a lecture to her nephew.”

Madame Rondic turned at that moment, and greeted them warmly. “I hope,” she said to the child, “that you will be happy with us.”

They entered the house, and as they took their seats at the table, Labassandre said with a theatrical start, “And where is Zénaïde?”

“We will not wait for her,” answered Rondic; “she will be here presently. She is at work now at the château, for she has become a famous seamstress.”

“Indeed! Then she must have learned also to keep her temper well under control, if she can work at the Director’s,” said Labassandre, “for he is such an arrogant, haughty person—”

“You are very much mistaken,” interrupted Rondic; “he is, on the contrary, a most excellent man; strict, perhaps, but when a master has to manage two thousand operatives, he must be somewhat of a disciplinarian. Is not that so, Clarisse?” and the old man turned to his wife, who, seemingly occupied with her dinner, paid no attention to him. A certain preoccupation was very evident.

At this moment the youth, with whom Madame Rondic had been talking at the door, came in and shook hands with his uncle Labassandre, who replied coldly to his greeting; thinking, possibly, of the remonstrances he had promised to lavish upon him. Zénaïde quickly followed: a plump little girl, red and out of breath; not pretty, and square in face and figure, she looked like her father. She wore a white cap, and her short skirts, and small shawl pinned over her shoulders, increased her general clumsiness. But her heavy eyebrows and square chin indicated an unusual amount of firmness and decision, offering the strongest possible contrast to the gentle,

irresolute expression of her stepmother's sweet face. Without a moment's delay, not waiting to detach the enormous shears that hung at her side, or to disembarrass herself of the needles and pins which glittered on her breast like a cuirass, the girl slipped into a seat next to Jack. The presence of the strangers did not abash her in the least. Whatever she had to say she said, simply and decidedly; but when she spoke to her cousin Chariot, it was in a vexed tone.

He did not appear to notice this, but replied with jests which left more than one scar.

"And I wished them to marry each other," said Father Rondic, in a despairing, complaining tone, as he heard them dispute.

"And I made no objection," said the young man with a laugh, as he looked at his cousin.

"But I did, then," answered the girl abruptly, frowning and unabashed. "And I am glad of it. Had I married you, my handsome cousin, I should have drowned myself by this time!"

These words were said with so much unction that for a few moments the handsome cousin was silent and discomfited.

Clarisse was startled, and turned to her daughter-in-law with a timid look of appeal.

"Listen, Chariot," said Rondic, anxious to change the conversation: "to prove to you that the Director is a good man. He has found a splendid place at Guérigny for you. You will have a better salary there than here, and "—here Rondic hesitated, glanced at the irresponsive face of the youth, then at his daughter and at his wife, as if at a loss to finish his phrase.

"And, it is better to go away, uncle, than to be dismissed!" answered Chariot, roughly. "But I do not agree with you. If the Director does not want me, let him say so,—and I will then look out for myself!"

"He is right!" cried Labassandre, thumping loud applause on the table. A hot

discussion now arose; but Chariot was firm in his refusal.

Zénaïde did not open her lips, but she never took her eyes from her stepmother, who was busy about the table.

“And you, mamma,” said she at last, “is it not your opinion that Chariot should go to Guérigny?”

“Certainly, certainly,” answered Madame Rondic, quickly, “I think he ought to accept the offer.”

Chariot rose quickly from his chair.

“Very well,” he said, moodily, “since every one wishes to get rid of me here, it is easy for me to decide. I shall leave in a week; in the meantime I do not wish to hear any more about it.”

The men now adjourned to a table in the garden, neighbors came in, and to each as he entered Rondic offered a measure of wine; they smoked their pipes, and talked and laughed loudly and roughly.

Jack listened to them sadly. “Must I become like these?” he said to himself, with a thrill of horror.

During the evening Rondic presented the lad to the foreman of the workshops. Labescam, a heavy Cyclops, opened his eyes wide when he saw his future apprentice, dressed like a gentleman, with such dainty white hands. Jack was very delicate and girlish in his appearance. His curls were cut, to be sure, but the short hair was in crisp waves, and the air of distinction characteristic of the boy, and which so irritated D’Argenton, was more apparent in his present surroundings than in his former home. Labescam muttered that he looked like a sick chicken.

“O,” said Rondic, “it is only the fatigue of his journey and these clothes that give him that look;” and then turning to his wife, the good man said,

“You must find a blouse for the apprentice; and now send him to bed, he is half

asleep, and to-morrow the poor lad must be up at five o'clock!"

The two women took Jack into the house: it was small and of two stories, the first floor divided into two rooms—one called the parlor, which had a sofa, armchairs, and some large shells on the chimney-piece.

One of the rooms above was nearly filled by a very large bed hung with damask curtains trimmed with heavy ball fringe. In Zénaïde's room the bed was in the wall, in the old Breton style. A wardrobe of carved oak filled one side of the room; a crucifix and holy images, hung over by rosaries of all kinds, made of ivory, shells, and American corn, completed the simple arrangements. In a corner, however, stood a screen which concealed the ladder that led to the loft where the apprentice was to sleep.

"This is my room," said Zénaïde, "and you, my boy, will be up there just over my head. But never mind that; you may dance as much as you please, I sleep too soundly to be disturbed."

A lantern was given to him. He said good-night, and climbed to his loft, which even at that hour of the night was stifling. A narrow window in the roof was all there was. The dormitory at Moronval had prepared Jack for strange sleeping-places; but there he had companionship in his miseries: here he had no Mâdou, here he had nobody. The child looked about him. On the bed lay his costume for the next day; the large pantaloons of blue cloth and the blouse looked as if some person had thrown himself down exhausted with fatigue.

Jack said half aloud, "It is I lying there!" and while he stood, sadly enough, he heard the confused noise of the men in the garden, and at the same time an earnest discussion in the room below between Zénaïde and her stepmother.

The young girl's voice was easily distinguished, heavy like a man's; Madame Rondic's tones, on the contrary, were thin and flute-like, and seemed at times choked by tears.

“And he is going!” she cried, with more passion than her ordinary appearance would have led one to suppose her capable of.

Then Zénaïde spoke—remonstrating, reasoning.

Jack felt himself in a new world; he was half afraid of all these people, but the memory of his mother sustained him. He thought of her as he looked at the sky set thick with stars. Suddenly he heard a long, shivering sigh and a sob, and found that Madame Rondic was looking out into the night, and weeping like himself, at a window below.

In the morning, Father Rondic called him; he swallowed a tumbler of wine and ate a crust of bread, and hurried to the machine-shop. And there, could his foolish mother have seen him, how quickly would she have taken her child from his laborious task, for which he was so totally unfitted by nature and education. The regulations for lack of punctuality were very strict. The first offence was a fine, and the third absolute dismissal. Jack was generally at the door before the first sound of the bell; but one day, two or three months after his arrival on the island, he was delayed by the ill-nature of others. His hat had been blown away by a sudden gust of wind just as he reached the forge. “Stop it!” cried the child, running after it. Just as he reached it, an apprentice coming up the street gave the hat a kick and sent it on; another did the same, and then another. This was very amusing to all save Jack, who, out of breath and angry, felt a strong desire to weep, for he knew that a positive hatred toward him was hidden under all this apparent jesting. In the meantime the bell was sounding its last strokes, and the child was compelled to relinquish the useless pursuit. He was utterly wretched, for it was no small expense to buy a new cap; he must write to his mother for money, and D’Argenton would read the letter. This was bad enough; but the consciousness that he was disliked among his fellow-workmen troubled him still more.

Some persons need tenderness as plants need heat to sustain life. Jack was one of

these, and he asked himself sadly why no one loved him in his new abiding-place. Just as he arrived at the open door, he heard quick breathing behind him, a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and turning, he saw a smiling, hideous face, while a rough hand extended the missing cap.

Where had he seen that face? “I have it!” he cried at last; but at that moment there was no time to renew his acquaintance with the pedler, to whom, and to whose fragile stock of goods, he had given such timely shelter on that showery summer’s day.

The child’s spirits rose, he was less sad, less lonely. While his hands were busy with his monotonous toil, his mind was occupied with thoughts of the past: he saw again the lovely country road near his mother’s house; he heard the low rumbling of the doctor’s gig, and felt the fresh breeze from the river, even there in the stifling atmosphere of the machine-shop.

That evening he searched for Bélisaire, but in vain; again the next day, but could learn nothing of him; and by degrees the uncouth face that had revived so many beautiful memories, in the child’s sick heart faded and died away, and he was again left alone.

The boy was far from a favorite among the men; they teased, and played practical jokes upon him. Sunday was his only day of rest and relaxation. Then, with one of Dr. Rivals’ books, Jack sought a quiet nook on the bank of the river. He had found a deep fissure in the rocks, where he sat quite concealed from view, his book open on his knee, the rush, the magic, and the extent of the water before him. The distant church-bells rang out praises to the Lord, and all was rest and peace. Occasionally a vessel drifted past, and from afar came the laughter of children at play.

He read, but his studies were often too deep for him, and he would lift his eyes from the pages, and listen dreamily to the soft lapping of the water on the pebbles of the shore, while his thoughts wandered to his mother and his little friend.

At last autumnal rains came, and then the child passed his Sundays at the Rondics, who were all very kind to him, Zénaïde in particular. The old man felt a certain contempt for Jack's physical delicacy, and said the boy stunted his growth by his devotion to books, but "he was a good little fellow all the same!" In reality, old Rondic felt a great respect for Jack's attainments, his own being of the most superficial description. He could read and write, to be sure, but that was all; and since he had married the second Madame Rondic, he had become painfully conscious of his deficiencies. His wife was the daughter of a subordinate artillery officer, the belle and beauty of a small town. She was well brought up,—one of a numerous family, where each took her share of toil and economy. She accepted Rondic, notwithstanding the disparity of years and his lack of education, and entertained for her husband the greatest possible affection. He adored his wife, and would make any sacrifice for her happiness or her gratification. He thought her prettier than any of the wives of his friends,—who were all, in fact, stout Breton peasants, more occupied with their household cares than with anything else. Clarisse had a certain air about her, and dressed and arranged her hair in a way that offered the greatest contrast to the monastic aspect of the women of the country, who covered their hair with thick folds of linen, and concealed their figures with the clumsy fullness of their skirts.

His house, too, was different from those about him. Behind the full white curtains stood a pot of flowers, sweet basil or gillyflowers, and the furniture was carefully waxed and polished; and Rondic was delighted, when he returned home at night, to find so carefully arranged a home, and a wife as neatly dressed as if it were Sunday. He never asked himself why Clarisse, after the house was in order for the day, took her seat at the window with folded hands, instead of occupying herself with needlework, like other women whose days were far too short for all their duties.

He supposed, innocently enough, that his wife thought only of him while adorning herself; but the whole village of Indret could have told him that another occupied all

her thoughts, and in this gossip the names of Madame Rondic and Chariot were never separated. They said that the two had known each other before Madame Rondic's marriage, and that if the nephew had wished he could have married the lady, instead of his uncle.

But the young fellow had no such desire. He merely thought that Clarisse was charmingly pretty, and that it would be very nice to have her for his aunt. But later, when they were thrown so much together, while Father Rondic slept in the arm-chair and Zénaïde sewed at the château, these two natures were irresistibly attracted toward each other. But no one had a right to make any invidious remark; they had, besides, always watching over them a pair of frightfully suspicious eyes, those of Zénaïde. She had a way of interrupting their interviews, of appearing suddenly, when least expected; and, however fatigued she might be by her day's work, she took her seat in the chimney-corner with her knitting. Zénaïde, in fact, played the part of the jealous and suspicious husband. Picture to yourself, if you please, a husband with all the instincts and clearsightedness of a woman!

The warfare between herself and Chariot was incessant, and the little outbursts served to conceal the real antipathy; but while Father Rondic smiled contentedly, Clarisse turned pale as if at distant thunder.

Zénaïde had triumphed: she had so managed at the château that the Director had decided to send Chariot to Guérigny, to study a new model of a machine there. Months would be necessary for him to perfect his work. Clarisse understood very well that Zénaïde was at the bottom of this movement, but she was not altogether displeased at Chariot's departure; she flung herself on Zénaïde's stronger nature, and entreated her protection.

Jack had understood for some time that between these two women there was a secret. He loved them both: Zénaïde won his respect and his admiration, while Madame Rondic, more elegant and more carefully dressed, seemed to be a remnant

of the refinements of his former life. He fancied that she was like his mother; and yet Ida was lively, gay, and talkative, while Madame Rondic was always languid and silent. They had not a feature alike, nor was there any similarity in the color of their hair. Nevertheless, they did resemble each other, but it was a resemblance as vague and indefinite as would result from the same perfume among the clothing, or of something more subtile still, which only a skilful chemist of the human soul could have analyzed.

Sometimes on Sunday, Jack read aloud to the two women and to Rondic. The parlor was the room in which they assembled on these occasions. The apartment was decorated with a highly colored view of Naples, some enormous shells, vitrified sponges, and all those foreign curiosities which their vicinity to the sea seemed naturally to bring to them. Handmade lace trimmed the curtains, and a sofa and an arm-chair of plush made up the furniture of the apartment. In the arm-chair Father Rondic took his seat to listen to the reading, while Clarisse sat in her usual place at the window, idly looking out. Zénaïde profited by her one day at home to mend the house-hold linen, disregarding the fact of the day being Sunday. Among the books given to Jack by Dr. Rivals was Dante’s Inferno. The book fascinated the child, for it described a spectacle that he had constantly before his eyes. Those half naked human forms, those flames, those deep ditches of molten metal, all seemed to him one of the circles of which the poet wrote.

One Sunday he was reading to his usual audience from his favorite book; Father Rondic was asleep, according to his ordinary custom, but the two women listened with fixed attention. It was the episode of Francesca da Rimini. Clarisse bowed her head and shuddered. Zénaïde frowned until her heavy eyebrows met, and drove her needle through her work with mad zeal.

Those grand sonorous lines filled the humble roof with music. Tears stood in the eyes of Clarisse as she listened. Without noticing them, Zenaïde spoke abruptly as

the voice of the reader ceased.

“What a wicked, impudent woman,” she cried, “not only to relate her crime, but to boast of it!”

“It is true that she was guilty,” said Clarisse, “but she was also very unhappy.”

“Unhappy! Don’t say that, mamma; one would think that you pitied this Francesca.”

“And why should I not, my child? She loved him before her marriage, and she was driven to espouse a man whom she did not love.”

“Love him or not makes but little difference. From the moment she married him she was bound to be faithful. The story says that he was old, and that seems to me an additional reason for respecting him more, and for preventing other people from laughing at him. The old man did right to kill them,—it was only what they deserved!”

She spoke with great violence. Her affection as a daughter, her honor as a woman, influenced her words, and she judged and spoke with that cruel candor that belongs to youth, and which judges life from the ideal it has itself created, without comprehending in the least any of the terrible exigencies which may arise.

Clarisse did not answer. She turned her face away, and was looking out of the window. Jack, with his eyes on his book, thought of what he had been reading. Here, amid these humble surroundings, this immortal legend of guilty love had echoed “through the corridors of time,” and after four hundred years had awakened a response. Suddenly through the open casement came a cry, “Hats! hats to sell!” Jack started to his feet and ran into the street; but quick as he was, Clarisse had preceded him, and as he went out, she came in, crushing a letter into her pocket.

The pedler was far down the street.

“Bélisaire!” shouted Jack.

The man turned. “I was sure it was you,” continued Jack, breathlessly. “Do you

come here often?”

“Yes, very often;” and then Bélisaire added, after a moment, “How happens it, Master Jack, that you are here, and have left that pretty house?”

The boy hesitated, and the pedler seeing this, continued,—

“That was a famous ham, was it not? And that lovely lady, who had such a gentle face, she was your mother, was she not?”

Jack was so happy at hearing her name mentioned that he would have lingered there at the corner of the street for an hour, but Bélisaire said he was in haste, that he had a letter to deliver, and must go.

When Jack entered the house, Madame Rondic met him at the door. She was very pale, and said, in a low voice, with trembling lips,—

“What did you want of that man?”

The child answered that he had known him at Etiolles, and that they had been talking of his parents.

She uttered a sigh of relief. But that whole evening she was even quieter than usual, and her head seemed bowed by more than the weight of her blonde braids.

CHAPTER XIV. A MIDNIGHT INTERVIEW.

“Chateau des Aulnettes.

“I am not pleased with you, my child. M. Rondic has written to his brother a long letter, in which he says, that in the year that you have been at Indret you have made no progress. He speaks kindly of you, nevertheless, but does not seem to think you adapted for your present life. We are all grieved to hear this, and feel that you are not doing all that you might do. M. Rondic also says that the air of the workshops is not good for you, that you are pale and thin, and that at the least exertion the perspiration rolls down your face. I cannot understand this, and fear that you are

imprudent, that you go out in the evening uncovered, that you sleep with your windows open, and that you forget to tie your scarf around your throat. This must not be; your health is of the first importance.

“I admit that your present occupation is not as pleasant as running wild in the forest would be, but remember what M. D’Argenton told you, that ‘life is not a romance.’ He knows this very well, poor man!—better, too, to-day, than ever before. You have no conception of the annoyances to which this great poet is exposed. The low conspiracies that have been formed against him are almost incredible. They are about to bring out a play at the Théâtre Français called ‘La Fille de Faust’ It is not D’Argenton’s play, because his is not written, but it is his idea, and his title! We do not know whom to suspect, for he is surrounded with faithful friends. Whoever the guilty party may be, our friend has been most painfully affected, and has been seriously ill. Dr. Hirsch fortunately was here, for Dr. Rivals still continues to sulk. That reminds me to tell you that we hear that you keep up your correspondence with the doctor, of which M. d’Argenton entirely disapproves. It is not wise, my child, to keep up any association with people above your station; it only leads to all sorts of chimerical aspirations. Your friendship for little Cécile M. d’Argenton regards also as a waste of time. You must, therefore, relinquish it, as we think that you would then enter with more interest into your present life. You will understand, my child, that I am now speaking entirely in your interest. You are now fifteen. You are safely launched in an enviable career. A future opens before you, and you can make of yourself just what you please.

“Your loving mother,

“Charlotte.”

“P. S. Ten o’clock at night.

“Dearest,—I am alone, and hasten to add a good night to my letter, to say on paper what I would say to you were you here with me now. Do not be discouraged. You

know just what he is. He is very determined, and has resolved that you shall be a machinist, and you must be. Is he right? I cannot say. I beg of you to be careful of your health; it must be damp where you are; and if you need anything, write to me under cover to the Archambaulds. Have you any more chocolate? For this, and for any other little things you want, I lay aside from my personal expenses a little money every month. So you see that you are teaching me economy. Remember that some day I may have only you to rely upon.

"If you knew how sad I am sometimes in thinking of the future! Life is not very gay here, and I am not always happy. But then, as you know, my sad moments do not last long. I laugh and cry at the same time without knowing why. I have no reason to complain, either. He is nervous like all artists, but I comprehend the real generosity and nobility of his nature. Farewell! I finish my letter for Mère Archambauld to mail as she goes home. We shall not keep the good woman long. M. d'Argenton distrusts her. He thinks she is paid by his enemies to steal his ideas and titles for books and plays! Good night, my dearest."

Between the lines of this lengthy letter Jack saw two faces,—that of D'Argenton, dictatorial and stern,—and his mother's, gentle and tender. How under subjection she was! How crushed was her expansive nature! A child's imagination supplies his thoughts with illustrations. It seemed to Jack, as he read, that his Ida—she was always Ida to her boy—was shut up in a tower, making signals of distress to him.

Yes, he would work hard, he would make money, and take his mother away from such tyranny; and as a first step he put away all his books.

"You are right," said old Rondic; "your books distract your attention."

In the workshop Jack heard constant allusions made to the Rondic household, and particularly to the relations existing between Clarisse and Chariot.

Every one knew that the two met continually at a town half-way between Saint Nazarre and Indret. Here Clarisse went under pretence of purchasing provisions that

could not be procured on the island. In the contemptuous glances of the men who met her, in their familiar nods, she read that her secret was known, and yet with blushes of shame dyeing the cheeks that all the fresh breezes from the Loire had no power to cool, she went on. Jack knew all this. No delicacy was observed in the discussion of such subjects before the child. Things were called by their right names, and they laughed as they talked. Jack did not laugh, however. He pitied the husband so deluded and deceived. He pitied also the woman whose weakness was shown in her very way of knotting her hair, in the way she sat, and whose pleading eyes always seemed to be asking pardon for some fault committed. He wanted to whisper to her, “Take care—you are watched.” But to Chariot he would have liked to say, “Go away, and let this woman alone!”

He was also indignant in seeing his friend Bélisaire playing such a part in this mournful drama. The pedler carried all the letters that passed between the lovers. Many a time Jack had seen him drop one into Madame Rondic’s apron while she changed some money, and, disgusted with his old ally, the child no longer lingered to speak when they met in the street.

Bélisaire had no idea of the reason of this coolness. He suspected it so little, that one day, when he could not find Clarisse, he went to the machine-shop, and with an air of great mystery gave the letter to the apprentice. “It is for madame; give it to her secretly!”

Jack recognized the writing of Chariot. “No,” he said at once; “I will not touch this letter, and I think you would do better to sell your hats than to meddle with such matters.”

Bélisaire looked at him with amazement.

“You know very well,” said the boy, “what these letters are; and do you think that you are doing right to aid in deceiving that old man?”

The pedler’s face turned scarlet.

“I never deceived any one; if papers are given to me to carry, I carry them, that is all. Be sure of one thing, and that is, if I were the sort of person you call me, I should be much better off than I am today!”

Jack tried to make him see the thing as he saw it, but evidently the man, however honest, was without any delicacy of perception. “And I, too,” thought Jack, suddenly, “am of the people now. What right have I to any such refinements?”

That Father Rondic knew nothing of all that was going on, was not astonishing. But Zênaïde, where was she? Of what was she thinking?

Zénaïde was on the spot,—more than usual, too, for she had not been at the château for a month. Her eyes were also widely open, and were more keen and vivacious than ever, for Zénaïde was about to be married to a handsome young soldier attached to the customhouse at Nantes, and the girl’s dowry was seven thousand francs. Père Rondic thought this too much, but the soldier was firm. The old man had made no provision for Clarisse. If he should die, what would become of her?

But his wife said, “You are yet young—we will be economical. Let the soldier have Zénaïde and the seven thousand francs, for the girl loves him!”

Zénaïde spent a great deal of time before her mirror. She did not deceive herself. “I am ugly, and M. Maugin will not marry me for my beauty, but let him marry me, and he shall love me later.”

And the girl gave a little nod, for she knew the unselfish devotion of which she was capable, the tenderness and patience with which she would watch over her husband. But all these new interests had so absorbed her that Zénaïde had partially forgotten her suspicions; they returned to her at intervals, while she was sewing on her wedding-dress, but she did not notice her mother’s pallor nor uneasiness, nor did she feel the burning heat of those slender hands. She did not notice her long and frequent disappearances, and she heard nothing of what was rumored in the town. She saw and heard nothing but her own radiant happiness. The banns were published, the

marriage-day fixed, and the little house was full of the joyous excitement that precedes a wedding. Zénaïde ran up and down stairs twenty times each day with the movements of a young hippopotamus. Her friends came and went, little gifts were pouring in, for the girl was a great favorite in spite of her occasional abruptness. Jack wished to make her a present; his mother had sent him a hundred francs.

“This money is your own, my Jack,” Charlotte wrote. “Buy with it a gift for M’lle Rondic, and some clothes for yourself. I wish you to make a good appearance at the wedding, and I am afraid that your wardrobe is in a pitiable condition. Say nothing about it in your letters, nor of me to the Rondics. They would thank me, which would be an annoyance, and bring me a reproof besides.”

For two days Jack carried this money with pride in his pocket. He would go to Nantes and buy a new suit. What a delight it would be! and how kind his mother was! One thing troubled him: What could he purchase for Zénaïde; he must first see what she had.

So thinking one dark night, as he entered the house, he ran against some one who was coming down the steps.

“Is that you, Bélisaire?”

There was no reply, but as Jack pushed open the door, he saw that he was not mistaken, that Bélisaire had been there.

Clarisse was in the corridor, shivering with the cold, and so absorbed by the letter she was reading in the gleam of light from the half open door of the parlor, that she did not even look up as Jack went in. The letter evidently contained some startling intelligence, and the boy suddenly remembered having that day heard that Chariot had lost a large sum of money in gambling with the crew of an English ship that had just arrived at Nantes from Calcutta.

In the parlor Zénaïde and Maugin were alone.

Père Rondic had gone to Chateaubriand and would not return until the next day,

which did not prevent her future husband from dining with them. He sat in the large arm-chair, his feet comfortably extended. While Zénaïde, carefully dressed, and her hair arranged by her stepmother, laid the table, this calm and reasonable lover entertained her by an estimate of the prices of the various grains, indigos, and oils that entered the port of Nantes. And such a wonderful prestidigitateur is love that Zénaïde was moved to the depths of her soul by these details, and listened to them as to music.

Jack's entrance disturbed the lovers. "Ah, here is Jack! I had no idea it was so late!" cried the girl. "And mamma, where is she?"

Clarisse came in, pale but calm.

"Poor woman!" thought Jack, as he watched her trying to smile, to talk, and to eat, swallowing at intervals great draughts of water, as if to choke down some terrible emotion. Zénaïde was blind to all this. She had lost her own appetite, and watched her soldier's plate, seeming delighted at the rapidity with which the delicate morsels disappeared.

Maugin talked well, and ate and drank with marvellous appetite; he weighed his words as carefully as he did the square bits into which he cut his bread; he held his wine-glass to the light, testing and scrutinizing it each time he drank. A dinner, with him, was evidently a matter of importance as well as of time. This evening it seemed as if Clarisse could not endure it; she rose from the table, went to the window, listened to the rattling of the hail on the glass, and then turning round, said,—

"What a night it is, M. Maugin! I wish you were safely at home."

"I don't, then!" cried Zénaïde, so earnestly that they all laughed. But the remark made by Clarisse bore its fruit, and the soldier rose to go. But it took him some time to get off. There was his lantern to light, his gloves to button; and the girl took all these duties on herself. At last the soldier was in readiness; his hood was pulled over his eyes, a scarf wound about his throat, then Zénaïde said good night, and watched

her Esquimau-looking lover somewhat anxiously down the street. What perils might he not have to run in that thick darkness!

Her stepmother called her impatiently. The nervous excitement of Clarisse had momentarily increased. Jack had noticed this, and also that she looked constantly at the clock.

“How cold it must be to-night on the Loire,” said Zénaïde.

“Cold, indeed!” answered Clarisse, with a shiver.

“Come,” she said, as the clock struck ten, “let us go to bed.”

Then seeing that Jack was about to lock the outer door as usual, she stopped him, saying,—

“I have done it myself. Let us go up stairs.”

But Zénaïde had not finished talking of M. Maugin. “Do you like his moustache, Jack?” she asked.

“Will you go to bed?” asked Madame Rondic, pretending to laugh, but trembling nervously.

At last the three are on the narrow staircase.

“Good night,” said Clarisse; “I am dying with sleep.”

But her eyes were very bright. Jack put his foot on his ladder, but Zénaïde’s room was so crowded with her gifts and purchases, that it seemed to him a most auspicious occasion to pass them in review. Friends had had them under examination, and they were still displayed on the commode: some silver spoons, a prayer-book, gloves, and all about tumbled bits of paper and the colored ribbon that had fastened these gifts from the château; then came the more humble presents from the wives of the employés. Zénaïde showed them all with pride. The boy uttered exclamations of wonder. “But what shall I give her?” he said to himself over and over again.

“And my trousseau, Jack, you have not seen it! Wait, and I will show it to you.”

With a quaint old key she opened the carved wardrobe that had been in the family for a hundred years; the two doors swung open, a delicious violet perfume filled the room, and Jack could see and admire the piles of sheets spun by the first Madame Rondic, and the ruffled and fluted linen piled in snowy masses.

In fact, Jack had never seen such a display. His mother’s wardrobe held laces and fine embroideries, not household articles. Then, lifting a heavy pile, she showed Jack a casket. “Guess what is in this,” Zénaïde said, with a laugh; “it contains my dowry, my dear little dowry, that in a fortnight will belong to M. Maugin. Ah, when I think of it, I could sing and dance with joy!”

And the girl held out her skirts with each hand, and executed an elephantine gambol, shaking the casket she still held in her hand. Suddenly she stopped; some one had rapped on the wall.

“Let the boy go to bed,” said her stepmother in an irritated tone; “you know he must be up early.”

A little ashamed, the future Madame Maugin shut her wardrobe, and said good night to Jack, who ascended his ladder; and five minutes later the little house, wrapped in snow and rocked by the wind, slept like its neighbors in the silence of the night.

There is no light in the parlor of the Rondic mansion save that which comes from the fitful gleam of the dying fire in the chimney. A woman sat there, and at her feet knelt a man in vehement supplication.

“I entreat you,” he whispered, “if you love me—”

If she loved him! Had she not at his command left the door open that he might enter? Had she not adorned herself in the dress and ornaments that he liked, to make herself beautiful in his eyes? What could it be that he was asking her now to grant to him? How was it that she, usually so weak, was now so strong in her denials? Let us listen for a moment.

“No, no,” she answered, indignantly, “it is impossible.”

“But I only ask it for two days, Clarisse. With these six thousand francs I will pay the five thousand I have lost, and with the other thousand I will conquer fortune.”

She looked at him with an expression of absolute terror.

“No, no,” she repeated, “it cannot be. You must find some other way.”

“But there is none.”

“Listen. I have a rich friend; I will write to her and ask her to lend me the money.”

“But I must have it to-morrow.”

“Well, then, find the Director; tell him the truth.”

“And he will dismiss me instantly. No; my plan is much the best. In two days I will restore the money.”

“You only say that.”

“I swear it.” And, seeing that his words did not convince her, he added, “I had better have said nothing to you, but have gone at once to the wardrobe and taken what I needed.”

But she answered, trembling, for she feared that he would yet do this, “Do you not know that Zénaïde counts her money every day? This very night she showed the casket to the apprentice.”

Chariot started. “Is that so?” he asked.

“Yes; the poor girl is very happy. It would kill her to lose it. Besides, the key is not in the wardrobe.”

Suddenly perceiving that she was weakening her own position, she was silent. The young man was no longer the supplicating lover, he was the spoiled child of the house, imploring his aunt to save him from dishonor.

Through her tears she mechanically repeated the words, “It is impossible.”

Suddenly he rose to his feet.

“You will not? Very good. Only one thing remains then. Farewell! I will not survive disgrace.”

He expected a cry. No; she came toward him.

“You wish to die! Ah, well, so do I! I have had enough of life, of shame, of falsehood, and of love—love that must be concealed with such care that I am never sure of finding it. I am ready.”

He drew back. “What folly!” he said, sullenly. “This is too much,” he added, vehemently, after a moment’s silence, and hurried to the stairs.

She followed him. “Where are you going?” she asked.

“Leave me!” he said, roughly. She snatched his arm.

“Take care!” she whispered with quivering lips. “If you take one more step in that direction, I will call for assistance!”

“Call, then! Let the world know that your nephew is your lover, and your lover a thief.”

He hissed these words, in her ear, for they both spoke very low, impressed, in spite of themselves, by the silence and repose of the house. By the red light of the dying fire he appeared to her suddenly in his true colors, just what he really was, unmasked by one of those violent emotions which show the inner workings of the soul.

She saw him with his keen eyes reddened by constant examination of the cards; she thought of all she had sacrificed for this man; she remembered the care with which she had adorned herself for this interview. Suddenly she was overwhelmed by profound disgust for herself and for him, and sank, half-fainting, on the couch; and while the thief crept up the familiar staircase, she buried her face in the pillows to stifle her cries and sobs, and to prevent herself from seeing and hearing anything.

The streets of Indret were as dark as at midnight, for it was not yet six o'clock. Here and there a light from a baker's window or a wine-shop shone dimly through the thick fog. In one of these wineshops sat Chariot and Jack.

"Another glass, my boy!"

"No more, thank you. I fear it would make me very ill."

Chariot laughed. "And you a Parisian! Waiter, bring more wine!"

The boy dared make no farther objection. The attentions of which he was the object flattered him immensely. That this man, who for eighteen months had never vouchsafed him any notice, should, meeting him by chance that morning in the streets, have invited him to the cabaret and treated him, was a matter of surprise and congratulation to himself. At first Jack was somewhat distrustful of such courtesy, for the other had such a singular way of repeating his question, "Is there nothing new at the Rondics? Really, nothing new?"

"I wonder," thought the apprentice, "if he wishes me to carry his letters, instead of Bélisaire!"

But after a little while the boy became more at ease. Perhaps Chariot, he thought, may not be such a bad fellow. A good friend might induce him to relinquish play, and make him a better man.

After Jack had taken his third glass of wine, he became very cordial, and offered to become this good friend. Chariot accepting the offer with enthusiasm, the boy thought himself justified in at once offering his advice.

"Look here, M. Chariot, listen to me, and don't play any more."

The blow struck home, for the young man's lips trembled nervously, and he swallowed a glass of brandy at one gulp.

At that moment the factory-bell sounded.

"I must go," cried Jack, starting to his feet. And, as his friend had paid for the first

and second wine they had drank, he considered it essential that he should now pay in his turn; so he drew a louis from his pocket, and tossed it on the table.

“Hallo! a yellow boy!” said the barkeeper, unaccustomed to seeing such in the possession of apprentices. Chariot started, but made no remark.

“Had Jack been to the wardrobe also?” he said to himself. The boy was delighted at the sensation he had created. “And I have more of the same kind,” he added, tapping his pocket. And then he whispered in his companion’s ear, “It is for a present that I mean to buy Zénaïde.”

Chariot said, mechanically, “Is it?” and turned away with a smile.

The innkeeper fingered the gold piece with some uneasiness.

“Hurry,” said Jack, “or I shall be late.”

“I wish, my boy,” said Chariot, “that you could have remained with me until my boat left, which will not be for an hour.”

And he gently drew the lad toward the Loire. It was easily done, for, coming out from the cabaret into the cold air, the wine the child had drank made him giddy. It seemed to him that his head weighed a thousand pounds. This did not last long, however. “Hark!” he said; “the bell has stopped, I think.” They turned back. Jack was terrified, for it was the first time that he had ever been late at the Works. But Chariot was in despair. “It is my fault,” he reiterated. He declared that he would see the Director and explain matters, and was altogether so utterly miserable, that Jack was obliged to console him by saying that it was of no great consequence, after all; that he could afford to be marked ‘absent’ for once. “I will go with you to the boat.”

The boy was so gratified by what he believed to be the good effect of his words on Chariot, that he enlarged on the noble nature of Père Rondic and of Clarisse.

“O, had you seen her this morning, you would have pitied her. She was so pale that she looked as if she were dead.”

Chariot started.

“And she ate nothing. I am afraid she will be ill. And she never spoke.”

“Poor woman!” said Chariot, with a sigh of relief which Jack took for one of sorrow.

They reached the wharf. The boat was not there. A thick fog covered the river from one shore to the other.

“Let us go in here,” said Chariot It was a little wooden shed, intended as a shelter for workmen while waiting in bad weather. Clarisse knew this shed very well, and the old woman who sold brandy and coffee in the corner had seen Madame Rondic many a time when she crossed the Loire.

“Let us take a drop of brandy to keep out the cold,” said Chariot. At that moment a shrill whistle was heard; it was the boat for Saint Nazarre. “Good-bye, Jack, and a thousand thanks for your good advice!”

“Don’t mention it,” said the lad, heartily; “but pray give up gambling.”

“Of course I will,” answered the other, hurrying on board to hide his amusement. When Jack was again alone he felt no desire to return to the Works; he was in a state of unusual excitement. Even the heavy fog hanging over the Loire interested him. Suddenly he said to himself, “Why do I not go to Nantes and buy Zénaïde’s gift to-day?” A few moments saw him on the way; but as there was no train until noon, he must wait for some time, and was compelled to pass that time in a room where there were several of the old employés of the Works, who had been discharged for various misdemeanors. They received the lad civilly enough, and listened attentively when he took up some remark that was made, and uttered some platitudes, stolen from D’Argenton, on the rights of labor.

“Listen!” they said to each other; “it is easy to see that the boy comes from Paris.”

Jack, excited by this applause and sympathy, talked fast and freely. Suddenly the room swam around—all grew dark. A fresh breeze restored him to consciousness.

He was seated on the bank of the river, and a sailor was bathing his forehead.

“Are you better?” said the man.

“Yes, much better,” answered Jack, his teeth chattering.

“Then go on board.”

“Go where?” said the apprentice, in amazement.

“Why, have you forgotten that you hired a boat, and sent for provisions? And here comes the man with them.”

Jack was stupefied with amazement, but he was too weak to argue any point; he embarked without remonstrance. He had a little money left, with which he could buy some little souvenir for Zénaïde, so that his trip to Nantes would not be thrown away absolutely. He breakfasted with a poor enough appetite, and sat at the end of the boat, wrapped in thought. He dreamily recalled books that he had read—tales of strange adventures on the sea; but why did a certain old volume of Robinson Crusoe persistently come before him? He saw the rubbed and yellowed page, the vignette of Robinson in his hammock surrounded by drunken sailors, and above it the inscription, “And in a night of debauch I forgot all my good resolutions.”

He was brought back to real life by the songs of his companions, and by a pair of keen bright eyes that were fixed upon his own. Jack was annoyed by this gaze, and leaned forward with a bottle in his hand.

“Drink with me, captain!” he said.

The man declined abruptly. The younger sailor whispered to Jack, “Let him alone; he did not wish to take you on board; his wife settled things for him; he thought you had more money than you ought to have!”

Jack was indignant at being treated like a thief. He exclaimed that his money was his own, that it had been given him by———. Here he stopped, remembering that his mother had forbidden him to mention her name. “But,” he continued, “I can have

more money when I wish it, and I am going to buy a wedding present for Zénaïde."

He talked on, but no one listened, for a grand dispute between the two men was well under way as to the place where they should land.

At last they entered the harbor of Nantes. Old houses, with carved fronts and stone balconies, met his eyes, crowded as it were among the shipping at the wharves. Large vessels lay at anchor in the harbor, looking to the boy like captives who panted for liberty, sunshine, and space. Then he thought of Mâdou, of his flight and concealment among the cargo in the hold. But this thought was gone in a moment, and he found himself on shore between his two companions, whom he soon loses and finds again. They cross one bridge, and then another, and wander with neither end nor aim. They drink at intervals; night comes, and the boy accompanies the sailors to a low dance-house, still in the strange excitement in which he has been all day. Finally, he finds himself alone on a bench, in a public square, in a state of exhaustion that is far from sleep. The profound solitude terrifies him, when suddenly he hears the well-known cry,—

"Hats! hats! Hats to sell!"

"Bélisaire!" called the boy.

It was Bélisaire. Jack made a futile effort at explanation. The man scolded the boy gently, lifted him up, and led him away.

Where are they going? And who comes here? and what do they want of him? Rough men accost him; they shake him and put irons on his wrists, and he cannot resist, for he is still more than half asleep. He sleeps in the wagon into which he is thrust; in the boat, where he lies utterly inert; and how happy he is after being thus buffeted about to finally throw himself on a straw pallet, shut out from all further disturbance by huge locks and bolts.

In the morning a frightful noise over his head awoke Jack suddenly. Ah, what a dismal awakening is that of drunkenness! The nervous trembling in every limb, the

intense thirst and exhaustion, the shame and inexpressible anguish of the human being seeing himself reduced to the level of a beast, and so disgusted with his tarnished existence that he feels incapable of beginning life again.

It was still too dark to distinguish objects, but he knew that he was not in his little attic. He caught a glimpse of the coming dawn in the white light from two high windows. Where was he? In the corner he began to see a confused mass of cords and pulleys. Suddenly he heard the same noise that had awakened him: it was a clock, and one that he well knew. He was at Indret, then, but where?

Could it be that he was shut in the tower where refractory apprentices were occasionally put? And what had he done? He tried to recall the events of the day before, and, confused as his mind still was, he remembered enough to cover him with shame. He groaned heavily. The groan was answered by a sigh from the corner. He was not alone, then!

“Who is there?” asked Jack, uneasily; “is it Bélisaire?” he added. But why should Bélisaire be there with him?

“Yes, it is I,” answered the man, in a tone of desperation.

“In the name of heaven tell me why we are shut up here like two criminals?”

“What other people have been doing I can’t tell,” muttered the old man; “I only speak for myself, and I have done no harm to any one. My hats are ruined,—and I, too, for that matter!” continued Bélisaire, dolefully.

“But what have I done?” asked Jack, for he could not imagine that among the many follies of which he had been guilty there was one more grave than another.

“They say—But why do you make me tell you? You know well enough what they say.”

“Indeed, I do not; pray, go on.”

“Well, they say that you have stolen Zénaïde’s dowry.”

The boy uttered an exclamation of horror. “But you do not believe this, Bélisaire?”

The old man did not answer. Every one at Indret thought Jack guilty. Every circumstance was against the boy. On the first report of the robbery, Jack was looked for, but was not to be found. Chariot had very well managed matters. All along the road there were traces of the robbery in the gold pieces displayed so liberally. Only one thing disturbed the belief of the boy’s guilt in the minds of the villagers: what could he have done with the six thousand francs? Neither Bélisaire’s pocket nor his own displayed any indication that such a sum of money had been in their possession.

Soon after daybreak the superintendent sent for the prisoners. They were covered with mud, and were unwashed and unshorn; yet Jack had a certain grace and refinement in spite of all this; but Bélisaire’s naturally ugly countenance was so distorted by grief and anxiety, that, as the two appeared, the spectators unanimously decided that this gentle-looking child was the mere instrument of the wretched being with whom he was unfortunately connected. As Jack looked about he saw several faces which seemed like those of some terrible nightmare, and his courage deserted him. He recognized the sailors, and the proprietors of several of the wineshops, with many others of those whom he had seen on that disastrous yesterday. The child begged for a private interview with the superintendent, and was admitted to the office, where he found Father Rondic, whom Jack went forward at once to greet with extended hand. The old man drew back sadly but resolutely.

“Out of regard for your youth, Jack,” said the Director, “and from respect to your parents, and in consideration of your hitherto good behavior, I have begged that, instead of being carried to Nantes and placed in prison, you shall remain here. I now tell you that it is for you to decide what will be done. Tell me the truth. Tell Father Rondic and myself what you have done with the money, give him back what is left, and—no, do not interrupt me,” continued the Director, with a frown. “Return the

money, and I will then send you to your parents."

Here Bélisaire attempted to speak. "Be quiet, fellow!" said the superintendent; "I cannot understand how you can have the audacity to speak. We believe you to be in reality the guilty party, and that this child has simply been your tool."

Jack wished to protest against this condemnation of his friend; but old Rondic gave him no time.

"You are quite right, sir, it is bad company that has led the lad astray. Everybody loved him in my house; we had every confidence in him until he met this miserable wretch."

Bélisaire looked so heart-broken at this wholesale condemnation that Jack rushed boldly forward in his defence. "I assure you, sir, that I met Bélisaire late in the day."

"Do you mean," said the superintendent, "that you committed this robbery all alone?"

"I have done no wrong, sir."

"Take care, my lad—you are going down hill with rapidity. Your guilt is very evident, and it is useless to deny it. You were alone with the Rondic women in their house all night. Zénaïde showed you the casket, and even showed you where it was kept. In the night she heard some one moving in your attic; she spoke; naturally you made no reply. She knew that it must be you, for there was no one else in the house. Then you must remember that we know how much money you threw away yesterday."

Jack was about to say, "My mother sent it to me," when he remembered that she had forbidden him to mention this. So he hesitatingly murmured that he had been saving his money for some time.

"What nonsense!" cried the Director. "Do you think you can make us believe that with your small wages you could have laid aside the amount you squandered

yesterday? Tell the truth, my lad, and repair the evil you have done as well as possible."

Then Father Rondic spoke. "Tell us, my boy, where this money is. Remember that it is Zénaïde's dowry, that I have toiled day and night to lay it aside for her, feeling that with it I might make her happy. You did not think of all this, I am sure, and were led away by the temptation of the moment. But now that you have had time to reflect, you will tell us the truth. Remember, Jack, that I am old, that time may not be given me to replace this money. Ah, my good lad, speak!"

The poor man's lips trembled. It must have been a hardened criminal who could have resisted such a touching appeal. Bélisaire was so moved that he made a series of the most extraordinary gestures. "Give him the money, Jack, I beg of you!" he whispered.

Alas! if the child had had the money, how gladly he would have placed it in the hands of old Rondic, but he could only say,—

"I have stolen nothing—I swear I have not!"

The superintendent rose from his chair impatiently. "We have had enough of this. Your heart must be of adamant to resist such an appeal as has been made to you. I shall send you up-stairs again, and give you until to-night to reflect. If you do not then make a full confession, I shall hand you over to the proper tribunal."

The boy was then left all the long day in solitude. He tried to sleep, but the knowledge that every one thought him guilty, that his own shameful conduct had given ample reason for such a judgment, overwhelmed him with sorrow. How could he prove his innocence? By showing his mother's letter. But if D'Argenton should know of it? No, he could not sacrifice his mother! What, then, should he do? And the boy lay on the straw bed, turning over in his bewildered brain the difficulties of his position. Around him went on the business of life; he heard the workmen come and go. It was evening, and he would be sent to prison. Suddenly he heard the stairs

creak under a heavy tread, then the turning of the key, and Zénaïde entered hastily.

“Good heavens,” she cried, “how high up you are!”

She said this with a careless air, but she had wept so much that her eyes were red and inflamed, her hair was roughened and carelessly put up. The poor girl smiled at Jack. “I am ugly, am I not? I have no figure nor complexion. I have a big nose and small eyes; but two days ago I had a handsome dowry, and I cared but little if some of the malicious young girls said, ‘It is only for your money that Maugin wishes to marry you,’ as if I did not know this! He wanted my money, but I loved him! And now, Jack, all is changed. To-night he will come and say farewell, and I shall not complain. Only, Jack, before he comes, I thought I would have a little talk with you.”

Jack had hidden his face, and was crying. Zénaïde felt a ray of hope at this.

“You will give me back my money, Jack, will you not?” she added entreatingly.

“But I have not got it, I assure you.”

“Do not say that. You are afraid of me, but I will not reproach you. If you have spent a little you are quite welcome, but tell me where the rest is!”

“Listen to me, Zénaïde: this is horrible. Why should every one think me guilty?”

She went on as if he had not spoken. “Do you understand that without this money I shall be miserable? In your mother’s name I entreat you here on my knees!”

She threw herself on the floor by the side of the bed where the boy sat, and gave way to tears and sobs. Jack, who was as unhappy as she, tried to take her hand. Suddenly she started up. “You will be punished. No one will ever love you because your heart is bad!” and she left the room. She ran hastily down the stairs to the superintendent’s room, whom she found with her father. She could not speak, for her tears choked her.

“Be comforted, my child!” said the Director. “Your father tells me that the mother of

this boy is married to a very rich man. We will write to them. If they are good people, your dowry will be restored to you."

He wrote the following letter:—

"Madame: Your son has stolen a sum of money from the honest and hard-working man with whom he lived. This sum represents the savings of years. I have not yet handed him over to the authorities, hoping that he might be induced to restore at least a portion of this money. But I am afraid that it has all been squandered among drunken companions. If that is the case, you should indemnify the Rondics for their loss. The amount is six thousand francs. I await your decision before taking any further steps."

And he signed his name.

"Poor things—it is terrible news for them!" said Père Rondic, who amid his own sorrows could still think of those of others.

Zénaïde looked up indignantly. "Why do you pity these people? If the boy has taken my money, let them replace it."

How pitiless is youth! The girl gave not one thought to the mother's despair when she should hear of her son's crime. Old Rondic, on the contrary, said to himself, "She will die of shame!"

In due time this letter written by the superintendent reached its destination, as letters which contain bad news generally do.

CHAPTER XV. CHARLOTTE'S JOURNEY.

One gray morning Charlotte was cutting the last bunches from the vines; the poet was at work, and Dr. Hirsch was asleep, when the postman reached Aulnettes.

"Ah! a letter from Indret!" said D'Argenton, slowly opening his newspapers,—"and some verses by Hugo!"

Why did the poet watch this unopened letter as a dog watches a bone that he does not wish himself, and is yet determined that no one else shall touch? Simply because Charlotte's eyes had kindled at the sight of it, and because this most selfish of beings felt that for a moment he had become a secondary object in the mother's eyes.

From the hour of Jack's departure, his mother's love for him had increased. She avoided speaking of him, however, lest she should irritate her poet. He divined this, and his hatred and jealousy of the child increased. And when the early letters of Rondic contained complaints of Jack, he was very much delighted. But this was not enough. He wished to mortify and degrade the boy still more. His hour had come. At the first words of the letter, for he finally opened it, his eyes flamed with malicious joy. "Ah! I knew it!" he cried, and he handed the sheet to Charlotte.

What a terrible blow for her! Wounded in her maternal pride before the poet, wounded, too, by his evident satisfaction, the poor woman was still more overwhelmed by the reproaches of her own conscience. "It is my own fault!" she said to herself, "why did I abandon him?"

Now he must be saved, and at all hazards. But where should she find the money? She had nothing. The sale of her furniture had brought in some millions of francs, but they had been quickly spent. The trifles of jewelry she had would not bring half the necessary sum. She never thought of appealing to D'Argenton. First, he hated the boy; and next, he was very miserly. Besides, he was far from rich. They lived with great economy in the winter, the better to keep up their hospitality during the summer.

"I have always felt," said D'Argenton, after leaving her time to finish the letter, "that this boy was bad at heart!"

She made no reply; indeed she hardly heard what he said. She was thinking that her child would go to prison if she could not obtain the money.

He continued, "What a disgrace this is to me!" The mother was still saying to

herself, “The money, where shall I get it?”

He determined to prevent her asking him the question he saw on her lips.

“We are not rich enough to do anything!”

“Ah! if you could,” she murmured.

He became very angry. “If I could!” he cried. “I expected that! You know better than any one else how enormous our expenses are here. It is enough that for two years I have supported that boy without paying for the thefts he has committed. Six thousand francs! where shall I find them?”

“I did not think of you,” she answered, slowly.

“Of whom, then?” he questioned, sternly.

With heightened color, and with lips quivering with shame, she uttered a name, expecting from her poet an explosion of wrath.

He was silent for a moment.

“I can but make one more sacrifice for you, Charlotte,” he said, pompously.

“Thanks! thanks! How good you are!” she cried.

And they lowered their voices, for Dr. Hirsch was heard descending the stairs.

It was a most singular conversation—syllabic and disjointed—he affecting great repugnance, she great brevity. “It was impossible to trust to a letter,” Charlotte said. Then, terrified at her own audacity, she added, “Suppose I go to Tours myself.”

With the utmost tranquillity he answered, “Very well, we will go.”

“How good you are, dear!” she cried: “you will go with me there, and then to Indret with the money!” and the foolish creature kissed his hands with tears. The truth was that he did not care for her to go to Tours without him; he knew that she had lived there and been happy. Suppose she should never return to him! She was so weak, so shallow, so inconsistent! The sight of her old lover, of the luxury she had relinquished—the influence of her child, might decide her to cast aside the heavy

chains with which he had loaded her. In addition, he was by no means averse to this little journey, nor to playing his part in the drama at Indret.

He told Charlotte that he would never abandon her, that he was ready to share her sorrows as well as her joys; and, in short, convinced Charlotte that he loved her more than ever.

At dinner he said to Doctor Hirsch, “We are obliged to go to Indret, the child has got into trouble, and you must keep house in our absence.” They left by the night express and reached Tours early in the morning. The old friend of Ida de Barancy lived in one of those pretty châteaux overlooking the Loire. He was a widower without children, an excellent man, and a man of the world. In spite of her infidelity, he had none but the kindest recollection of the light-hearted woman who for a time had brightened his solitude. He consequently replied to a little note sent by Charlotte that he was ready to receive her.

D’Argenton and she took a carriage from the hotel, and as they approached the château, Charlotte began to grow uneasy. “It cannot be,” she said to herself, “that he intends to go in with me!” She sat in the corner of the carriage, looking out at the fields where she had so often wandered with the boy, who was now wearing a workman’s blouse.

D’Argenton watched her from the corner of his eyes, gnawing his moustache with fury. She was very pretty that morning, a little pale from emotion and from a night of travel. D’Argenton was uneasy and restless; he began to regret having accompanied her, and felt embarrassed by the part he was playing.

When he saw the château, with its grounds and fountains, its air of wealth, he reproached himself for his own imprudence. “She will never return to Aulnettes,” he thought. At the end of the avenue he stopped the carriage. “I will wait here,” he said, abruptly; and added, with a sad smile, “Do not be long.”

Ten minutes later he saw Charlotte on the terrace with a tall and elegant-looking

man. Then began for him a terrible anguish. What were they saying? Should he ever see her again? And it was that detestable boy that had given him all this disturbance. The poet sat on the fallen trunk of a tree, watching feverishly the distant door. Before him was outspread a charming landscape—wooded hills, sloping vineyards, and meadows overhung with willows; on one side a ruin of the time of Louis IX., and on the other, one of those châteaux common enough on the shores of the Loire. Just below him a sort of canal was in process of building. He watched the workmen in a mechanical sort of way; they were clothed in uniform, and seemed an organized body. He rose and sauntered toward them. The laborers were only children, and their reddened eyes and pale faces told the story of their confinement to the poorer quarters of the town.

“Who are these children?” questioned the poet.

“They belong to the penitentiary,” was the answer from the official who superintended them.

D’Argenton asked question after question, saying that he was intimately connected with a family whose only son had just plunged them into deep affliction.

“Send him to us,” was the curt reply, “as soon as he leaves the prison.”

“But I doubt if he goes to prison,” said D’Argenton, with a shade of regret in his voice; “the parents have paid the amount.”

“Well, then, we have another establishment—the Maison Paternelle. I have some of the circulars here in my pocket, and perhaps you would glance over them, sir.”

D’Argenton took the papers and turned back toward the house. The carriage was coming down the avenue, and soon Charlotte, her color heightened and her eyes bright with hope for her child, appeared.

“I have succeeded,” she cried, as the poet entered the carriage.

“Ah!” he answered, dryly, relapsing into silence, turning over his circulars with an

air of affected interest. Charlotte, too, was silent, supposing his pride wounded; and finally he was obliged to say, “You succeeded, then?”

“Completely. It has always been his intention to give Jack, on his coming of age, a present of ten thousand francs. He has given it to me now. Six thousand will repay the money, and the other four thousand I am to employ as I think best for my child’s advantage.”

“Employ it, then, in placing him in the Maison Paternelle, at Mertray, for two or three years. It is there only that one can learn to make an honest man from out of a thief.”

She started, for the harsh word recalled her to reality. We know that in that poor little brain impressions are very transitory.

“I am ready to do whatever you choose,” she said, “you have been so good and generous!”

The poet was enchanted; he was still master, and he proceeded to read Charlotte a long lecture. Her maternal weakness was the cause of all that had happened. The master-hand of a man was absolutely essential. She did not answer, being occupied with joy at the thought of her child not being sent to prison.

It was on Sunday morning that they reached Basse Indret. The poet went at once to the superintendent’s, while Charlotte remained alone at the inn, for hotel there was none at the village. The rain beating against the windows, and the loud talking in the house, gave her the first clear impression she had received of the exile to which she had condemned her boy. However guilty he might be, he was still her child—her Jack. She remembered him as a little fellow, bright, intelligent, and sensitive, and the idea that he would presently appear before her as a thief and in a workman’s blouse, seemed almost incredible. Ah! had she kept her child with her, or had she sent him with other boys of his age to school, he would have been kept from temptation. The old doctor was right, after all. And Jack had lived with these people

for two years! All the prejudices of her superficial nature revolted against her surroundings. She was incapable of comprehending the grandeur of a task accomplished, of a life purchased by the fatigue of the body and the labor of the hands. To change the current of her thoughts, she took up the prospectus of which we have spoken—"Maison Paternelle." The system adopted was absolute isolation. The mother's heart swelled with anguish, and she closed the book and went to the window, where she stood with her eyes fixed on a small bit of the Loire that she saw at the foot of a street, where the water was as rough as the sea itself.

D'Argenton, in the meantime, was accomplishing his mission. He would not have relinquished the duty for any amount of money. He was fond of attitudes and scenes. He prepared in advance the terms in which he should address the criminal.

An old woman pointed out the house of the Rondics, but when he reached it he hesitated. Must he not have made a mistake? From the wide open windows came the sound of gay music, and heavy feet were heard keeping time to it. "No, this cannot be it," said D'Argenton, who naturally expected to find a desolate house.

"Come, Zénaïde, it is your turn," called some one.

"Zenaïde"—why, that was Rondic's daughter! These people certainly did not take this affair much to heart. All at once a crowd of white-capped women passed the window, singing loudly.

"Come, Brigadier! come, Jack!" said some one.

Somewhat mystified, the poet pushed open the door, and amid the dust and crowd he saw Jack, radiant with happiness, dancing with a stout girl, who smiled with her whole heart at a good-looking fellow in uniform. In a corner sat a gray-haired man, much amused by all that was going on; with him was a tall, pale, young woman, who looked very sad.

CHAPTER XVI. CLARISSE.

This was what had happened. The day after he had written to Jack's mother, the superintendent was in his office alone, when Madame Rondic entered, pale and agitated. Paying little attention to the coolness with which she was received, her conduct having for a long time habituated her to the silent contempt of all who respected themselves, she refused to sit down, and, standing erect, said slowly, attempting to conceal her emotion,—

"I have come to tell you that the apprentice is not guilty; that it is not he who has stolen my stepdaughter's dowry."

The Director started from his chair. "But, ma-dame, every proof is against him."

"What proofs? The most important is that, my husband being away, Jack was alone with us in the house. It is just this proof that I have come to destroy, for there was another man there that night."

"What man? Chariot?"

She made a sign of assent. Ah, how pale she was!

"Then he took the money?"

There was a moment's hesitation. The white lips parted, and an almost inaudible reply was whispered, "No, it was not he who took it; I gave it to him!"

"Unhappy woman!"

"Yes, most unhappy. He said that he needed it for two days only, and I bore for that time the sight of my husband's despair and of Zénaïde's tears, and the fear of seeing an innocent person condemned. Nothing came from Chariot. I wrote to him that if by the next day at eleven I heard nothing, I should denounce myself,—and here I am."

"But what am I to do?"

"Arrest the real criminals, now that you know who they are."

"But your husband—it will kill him!"

“And me, too,” she replied, with haughty bitterness. “To die is a very simple matter; to live is far more difficult.”

She spoke of death with a tone of feverish longing in her voice.

“If your death could repair your fault,” returned the Director, gravely; “if it could restore the money to the poor girl, I could understand why you should wish to die. But—”

“What shall be done, then,” she asked, plaintively; and all at once she became the Clarisse of old. Her unwonted courage and determination failed her.

“First, we must know what has become of this money; he must have some of it still.”

Clarisse shook her head. She knew too well how madly that gambler played. She knew that he had thrust her aside, almost walked over her, to procure this money, and that he would play until he had lost his last sou.

The superintendent touched his bell. A gendarme entered:

“Go at once to Saint Nazarre,” said his chief; “say to Chariot that I require his presence here at once. You will wait for him.”

“Chariot is here, sir; I just saw him come out from Madame Rondic’s; he cannot be far off.”

“That is all right. Go after him quickly. Do not tell him, however, that Madame Rondic is here.”

The man hurried away. Neither the superintendent nor Clarisse spoke. She stood leaning against the corner of the desk. The jar of the machinery, the wild whistling of the steam, made a fitting accompaniment to the tumult of her soul. The door opened.

“You sent for me,” said Chariot, in a gay voice.

The presence of Clarisse, her pallor, and the stern look of his chief, told the story. She had kept her word. For a moment his bold face lost its color, and he looked like

an animal driven into a corner.

“Not a word,” said the Director; “we know all that you wish to say. This woman has robbed her husband and her daughter for you. You promised to return her the money in two days. Where is it?”

Chariot turned beseechingly toward Clarisse. She did not look at him; she had seen him too well that terrible night.

“Where is the money?” repeated the superintendent.

“Here—I have brought it.”

What he said was true. He had kept his promise to Clarisse, but not finding her at home, had only too gladly carried it away again.

His chief took up the bills. “Is it all here?”

“All but eight hundred francs,” the other answered, with some hesitation; “but I will return them.”

“Now sit down and write at my dictation,” said the superintendent, sternly.

Clarisse looked up quickly. This letter was a matter of life and death to her.

“Write: ‘It is I who, in a moment of insane folly, took six thousand francs from the wardrobe in the Rondic house.’”

Chariot internally rebelled at these words, but he was afraid that Clarisse would establish the facts in all their naked cruelty.

The superintendent continued: “‘I return the money; it burns me. Release the poor fellows who have been suspected, and entreat my uncle to forgive me. Tell him that I am going away, and shall return only when, through labor and penitence, I shall have acquired the right to shake an honest man’s hand.’ Now sign it.”

Seeing that Chariot hesitated, the superintendent said, peremptorily, “Take care, young man! I warn you that if you do not sign this letter, and address it to me, this woman will be at once arrested.”

Chariot signed.

“Now go,” resumed the superintendent, “to Guérigny, if you will, and try to behave well. Remember, moreover, that if I hear of you in the neighborhood of Indret, you will be arrested at once.”

As Chariot left the room, he cast one glance at Clarisse. But the charm was broken; she turned her head away resolutely, and when the door closed tried to express her gratitude to the superintendent.

“Do not thank me, madame,” he said; “it is for your husband’s sake that I have acted, with the hope of sparing him the most horrible torture that can overwhelm a man.”

“It is in my husband’s name that I thank you. I am thinking of him, and of the sacrifice I must make for him.”

“What sacrifice?”

“That of living, sir, when death would be so sweet. I am so weary.”

And in fact the woman looked so ill, so prostrated, that the superintendent feared some catastrophe. He answered compassionately, “Keep up your courage, madame, and remember that your husband loves you.”

And Jack? Ah, he had his day of triumph! The superintendent ordered a placard to be put up in all the buildings, announcing the boy’s innocence. He was fêted and caressed. One thing only was lacking, and that was news of Bélisaire.

When the prison-doors were thrown open, the pedler disappeared. Jack was greatly distressed at this, but nevertheless breakfasted merrily with Zénaïde and her soldier, and had forgotten all his woes, when D’Argenton appeared, majestic and clothed in black. It was in vain that they explained the finding of the money, the innocence of Jack, and that a second letter had been sent narrating all these facts; in vain did these good people treat Jack with familiar kindness: D’Argenton’s manner did not relax;

he expressed in the choicest terms his regret that Jack had given so much trouble.

“But it is I who owe him every apology,” cried the old man.

D’Argenton did not condescend to listen: he spoke of honor and duty, and of the abyss to which such evil conduct must always lead. Jack was confused, for he remembered his journey to Nantes, and the stall in which Zénaïde’s lover could testify to having seen him; he therefore listened with downcast eyes to the ponderous eloquence of the lecturer, who fairly talked Father Rondic to sleep.

“You must be very thirsty after talking so long,” said Zénaïde, innocently, as she brought a pitcher of cider and a fresh cake. And the cake looked so nice, so fresh and crisp, that the poet—who was, as we know, something of an epicure—made a breach in it quite as large as that in the ham made by Bélisaire at Aulnettes.

Jack had discovered one thing only from all D’Argenton’s long words,—he had learned that the poet had brought the money to rescue him from disgrace, and the child began to believe that he had done the man great injustice, and that his coldness was only on the surface. The boy, therefore, had never been so respectful. This, and the cordial reception of the Rondics, put the poet into the most amiable state of mind. You should have seen him with Jack as they trod the narrow streets of Indret!

“Shall I tell him that his mother is so near?” said D’Argenton, unwilling to introduce her boy to Charlotte in the character of hero and martyr; it was more than the selfish nature of the man could support. And yet, to deprive Charlotte and her son of the joy of seeing each other once more it was necessary to be provided with some reason; and this reason Jack himself soon furnished.

The poor little fellow, deluded by such extraordinary amiability, acknowledged to M. d’Argenton that he did not like his present life; that he should not be anything of a machinist; that he was too far from his mother. He was not afraid of work, but he liked brain work better than manual labor. These words had hardly passed the boy’s lips, when he saw a change in his hearer.

“You pain me, Jack, you pain me seriously; and your mother would be very unhappy did she hear you utter such opinions. You have forgotten apparently that I have said to you a hundred times that this century was no time for Utopian dreams, for idle fancies;” and on this text he wandered on for more than an hour. And while these two walked on the side of the river, a lonely woman, tired of the solitude of her room in the inn, came down to the other bank, to watch for the boat that was to bring her the little criminal,—the boy whom she had not seen for two years, and whom she dearly loved. But D’Argenton had determined to keep them apart. It was wisest—Jack was too unsettled. Charlotte would be reasonable enough to comprehend this, and would willingly make the sacrifice for her child’s interest.

And thus it came to pass that Jack and his mother, separated only by the river, so near that they could have heard each other speak across its waters, did not meet that night, nor for many a long day afterwards.

CHAPTER XVII. IN THE ENGINE-ROOM.

How is it that days of such interminable length can be merged into such swiftly-passing years? Two have passed since Zénaïde was married, and since Jack’s terrible adventure. He has worked conscientiously, and loathes the thought of a wineshop. The house is sad and desolate since Zénaïde’s marriage; Madame Rondic rarely goes out, and occupies her accustomed seat at the window, the curtain of which, however, is never lifted, for she expects no one now. Her days and nights are all alike monotonous and dreary. Father Rondic alone preserves his former serenity.

The winter has been a cold one. The Loire has overflowed the island, part of which remained under water four months, and the air was filled with fogs and miasma. Jack has had a bad cough, and has passed some weeks in the infirmary. Occasionally a letter has come for him, tender and loving when his mother wrote in secret, didactic and severe when the poet looked over her shoulder. The only news sent by

his mother was, that her poet had had a grand reconciliation with the Moronvals, who now came on Sundays, with some of their pupils, to dine at Aulnettes.

Moronval, Mâdou, and the academy seemed far enough away to Jack, who thought of himself in those old days as of a superior being, and could see little resemblance between his coarse skin and round shoulders, and the dainty pink and white child whose face he dimly remembered.

Thus were Dr. Rivals' words justified: "It is social distinctions that create final and absolute separations."

Jack thought often of the old doctor and of Cécile, and on the first of January each year had written them a long letter. But the two last had remained unanswered.

One thought alone sustained Jack in his sad life: his mother might need him, and he must work hard for her sake.

Unfortunately wages are in proportion to the value of the work, and not to the ambition of the workman, and Jack had no talent in the direction of his career. He was seventeen, his apprenticeship over, and yet he received but three francs per day. With these three francs he must pay for his room, his food, and his dress; that is, he must replace his coarse clothing as it was worn out; and what should he do if his mother were to write and say, "I am coming to live with you "?

"Look here," said Père Rondic, "your parents made a great mistake in not listening to me. You have no business here; now how would you like to make a voyage? The chief engineer of the 'Cydnus' wants an assistant. You can have six francs per day, be fed, lodged, and warmed. Shall I write and say you will like the situation?"

The idea of the double pay, the love of travel that Mâdou's wild tales had awakened in his childish nature, combined to render Jack highly pleased at the proposed change. He left Indret one July morning, just four years after his arrival. What a superb day it was! The air became more fresh as the little steamer he was on approached the ocean. Jack had never seen the sea. The fresh salt breeze inspired

him with restless longing. Saint Nazarre lay before him,—the harbor crowded with shipping. They landed at the dock, and there learned that the Cydnus, of the Compagnie Transatlantique, would sail at three o'clock that day, and was already lying outside,—this being, in fact, the only way to have the crew all on board at the moment of departure.

Jack and his companion—for Father Rondic had insisted on seeing him on board his ship—had no time to see anything of the town, which had all the vivacity of a market-day.

The wharf was piled with vegetables, with baskets of fruit, and with fowls which, tied together, were wildly struggling for liberty. Near their merchandise stood the Breton peasants waiting quietly for purchasers. They were in no hurry, and made no appeal to the passers-by. In contrast to these, there was a number of small peddlers, selling pins, cravats, and portemonnaies, who were loudly crying their wares. Sailors were hurrying to and fro, and Rondic learned from one of them that the chief engineer of the Cydnus was in a very bad humor because he had not his full number of stokers on board.

"We must hasten," said Rondic; and they hailed a boat, and rapidly threaded their way through the harbor. The enormous transatlantic steamers lay at their wharves as if asleep; the decks of two large English ships just arrived from Calcutta were covered with sailors, all hard at work. They passed between these motionless masses, where the water was as dark as a canal running through the midst of a city under high walls; then they saw the Cydnus lying, with her steam on. A wiry little man, in his shirt-sleeves, with three stripes on his cap, hailed Jack and Rondic as their boat came alongside the steamer.

His words were inaudible through the din and tumult, but his gestures were eloquent enough. This was Blanchet, the chief engineer.

"You have come, then, have you?" he shouted. "I was afraid you meant to leave me

in the lurch."

"It was my fault," said Rondic; "I wished to accompany the lad, and I could not get away yesterday."

"On board with you, quick!" returned the engineer; "he must get into his place at once."

They descended first one ladder, then another, and another. Jack, who had never been on board a large steamer, was stupefied at the size and the depth of this one. They descended to an abyss where the eyes accustomed to the light of day could distinguish absolutely nothing. The heat was stifling, and a final ladder led to the engine-room, where the heavy atmosphere, charged with a smell of oil, was almost insupportable. Great activity reigned in this room; a general examination was being made of the machinery, which glittered with cleanliness. Jack looked on curiously at the enormous structure, knowing that it would soon be his duty to watch it day and night.

At the end of the engine-room was a long passage. "That is where the coal is kept," said the engineer, carelessly; "and on the other side the stokers sleep."

Jack shuddered. The dormitory at the academy, the garret-room at the Rondics, were palaces in comparison.

The engineer pushed open a small door. Imagine a long cave, reddened by the reflection of a dozen furnaces in full blast; men, almost naked, were stirring the fire, the sweat pouring from their faces.

"Here is your man," said Blanchet to the head workman.

"All right, sir," said the other without turning round.

"Farewell," said Rondic. "Take care of yourself, my boy!" and he was gone.

Jack was soon set to work; his task was to carry the cinders from the furnace to the deck, and there throw them into the sea. It was very hard work: the baskets were

heavy, the ladders narrow, and the change from the pure air above to the stifling atmosphere below absolutely suffocating. On the third trip Jack felt his legs giving way under him. He found it impossible to even lift his basket, and sank into a corner half fainting. One of the stokers, seeing his condition, brought him a large flask of brandy.

“Thank you; I never drink anything,” said Jack.

The other laughed. “You will drink here,” he answered.

“Never,” murmured Jack; and lifting the heavy basket, more by an effort of will than by muscular force, he ascended the ladder.

From the deck an animated spectacle was to be seen. The little steamer ran to and fro from the wharf to the ship, laden with passengers who came hurriedly on board. The passengers were representatives of all nations. Some were gay, and others were weeping, but in the faces of all was to be read an anxiety or a hope; for these displacements, these movings, are almost invariably the result of some great disturbance, and are, in general, the last quiver of the shock that throws you from one continent to the other.

This same feverish element pervaded everything, even the vessel that strained at its anchor. It animated the curious crowd on the jetty who had come, some of them, to catch a last look of some dear face. It animated the fishing-boats, whose sails were spread for a night of toil.

Jack, with his empty basket at his feet, stood looking down at the passengers,—those belonging to the cabins comfortably established, those of the steerage seated on their slender luggage. Where were they going? What wild fancy took them away? What cold and stern reality awaited them on their landing? One couple interested him especially: it was a mother and a child who recalled to him the memory of Ida and little Jack. The lady was young and in black, with a heavy wrap thrown about her, a Mexican sarape with wide stripes. She had a certain air of independence

characteristic of the wives of military or naval officers, who, from the frequent absence of their husbands, are thrown on their own resources. The child, dressed in the English fashion, looked as if he might have belonged to Lord Pembroke. When they passed Jack they both turned aside, and the long silk skirts were lifted that they might not touch his blackened garments. It was an almost imperceptible movement, but Jack understood it. A rough oath and a slap on the shoulder interrupted his sad thoughts.

“What the deuce are you up here for, sir? Go down to your post!” It was the engineer making his rounds. Jack went down without a word, humiliated at the reproof.

As he put his foot on the last ladder, a shudder was felt throughout the ship: she had started.

“Stand there!” said the head stoker.

Jack took his place before one of those gaping mouths; it was his duty to fill it, and to rake it, and to keep the fire clear. This was not such an easy matter, as, being unaccustomed to the sea, the pitching of the vessel came near throwing him into the flames. He nevertheless toiled on courageously, but at the end of an hour he was blind and deaf, stifled by the blood that rushed to his head. He did as the others did, and ran to the outer air. Ah, how good it was! Almost immediately, however, an icy blast struck him between the shoulders.

“Quick, give me the brandy!” he cried with a choked voice, to the man who had previously offered it to him.

“Here it is, comrade; I knew very well that you would want it before long.”

He swallowed an enormous draught; it was almost pure alcohol, but he was so cold that it seemed like water. After a moment a comfortable warmth spread over his whole system, and then began a burning sensation in his stomach. To extinguish this fire he drank again. Fire within, and fire without,—flame upon flame,—was this the

way that he was to live in future?

Then began a life of toil, hardship, and drunkenness that lasted three years:—three years whose seasons were all alike in that heated room down in the bowels of that big ship.

He sailed from country to country; he heard their names, Italian, French, and Spanish, but of them all he saw nothing. The fairer the climes they visited, the hotter was his chamber of torment. When he had emptied his cinders, broken his coal, and filled his furnaces, he slept the sleep of exhaustion and intoxication; for a stoker must drink if he lives. In the darkness of his life there was but one bright spot, his mother. She was like the Madonna in a chapel where all the lights are extinguished save the one that burns before her shrine. Now that he had become a man, much of the mystery of her life had become clear to him. His respect for Charlotte was changed to tender pity, and he loved her as we love those for whom we suffer. Even in his most despairing moments he remembered the end for which he toiled, and a mechanical instinct made him carefully preserve almost every sou of his wages.

Meanwhile, distance and time weakened the intercourse between mother and son. Jack's letters became more and more rare. Those of Charlotte were frequent, but they spoke of things so foreign to his new life, that he read them only to hear their music, the far off echo of a living tenderness.

Letters from Etiolles told him of D'Argenton; later, some from Paris spoke of their having again taken up their residence there, and of the poet having founded a Review, in consequence of the solicitations of friends. This would be a way of bringing his works prominently before the public, as well as to increase his income. At Havana Jack found a large package addressed to him. It was the first number of the magazine. The stoker mechanically turned its leaves, leaving on them the traces of his blackened fingers; and suddenly, as he saw the well-known names of D'Argenton, Moronval, and Hirsch on the smooth pages, he was seized with wild

rage and indignation, and he cried aloud, as he shook his fist impatiently in the air, “Wretches, wretches! what have you made of me?”

This emotion was but brief; day by day his intellect weakened, and, strangely enough, he gained in physical health; he was stronger, and better able to support the fatigues of his daily labor; he seemed hardly to recognize any difference between his days when the ship tossed and groaned, and his nights when he slept a drunken sleep, disturbed only by an occasional nightmare.

Was that frightful shock and crash of the Cydnus one of these dreams? That rushing of water, those cries of frightened women,—was all that a dream? His comrades called him, shook him. “Jack, Jack!” they cried; he staggered out, half naked. The engine-room was already half under water, the compass broken, the fires extinguished. The men ran against each other in the darkness. “What is it?” they cried.

An American ship had run them down. The men struggled up the narrow ladder; at the head stood the chief engineer with a revolver in his hand.

“The first man that attempts to pass me I will shoot! Go to your furnaces! Land is not far off; we shall reach it yet if my orders are obeyed.” Each one turned, with rage and despair in his heart. They charged the furnaces with wet coal, and volumes of gas and smoke poured out; while the water still ascending, in spite of the constant work at the pumps, was as cold as ice. The pumps refuse to work, the furnaces will not burn. The stokers are in water up to their shoulders before the voice of the chief engineer is heard: “Save yourselves, my men, if you can!”

CHAPTER XVIII. D’ARGENTON’S MAGAZINE.

In a narrow street, quiet and orderly, in one of those houses belonging to the last century, D’Argenton had established himself as editor of the new magazine; while Jack, our friend Jack, was its proprietor. Do not smile: this was really the case; his

money had been used to establish it. Charlotte had some little scruple at first in so employing these funds, which she wished to preserve intact for the boy on his attaining his majority; but she yielded to the poet's persuasions.

"Come, my dear, listen! Figures are figures, you know. Can there be a better investment than this Review? It is far safer than any railroad, at least. Have I not placed my own funds in it?"

Within six months D'Argenton had sacrificed thirty thousand francs, and the receipts had been nothing, while the expenses were enormous. Besides the offices of the magazine, D'Argenton had hired in the same house a large apartment, from which he had a superb view. The city, the Seine, Nôtre Dame, numberless spires and domes, were all spread before his eyes. He saw the carriages pass over the bridges, and the boats glide through the arches. "Here I can live and breathe," he said to himself. "It was impossible for me to accomplish anything in that dull little hole of Aulnettes! How could one work in such a lethargic atmosphere?"

Charlotte was still young and gay; she managed the house and the kitchen, which was no small matter with the number of persons who daily assembled around her table. The poet, too, had recently acquired the habit of dictating instead of writing, and as Charlotte wrote a graceful English hand, he employed her as secretary. Every evening, when they were alone, he walked up and down the large room and dictated for an hour. In the silent old house, his solemn voice, and another sweeter and fresher, awakened singular echoes. "Our author is composing," said the concierge with respect.

Let us look in upon the D'Argenton ménage. We find them installed in a charming little room, filled with the aroma of green tea and of Havana cigars. Charlotte is preparing her writing-table, arranging her pens, and straightening the ream of thick paper. D'Argenton is in excellent vein; he is in the humor to dictate all night, and twists his moustache, where glitter many silvery hairs. He waits to be inspired.

Charlotte, however, as is often the case in a household, is very differently disposed: a cloud is on her face, which is pale and anxious; but notwithstanding her evident fatigue, she dips her pen in the inkstand.

“Let us see—we are at chapter first. Have you written that?”

“Chapter first,” repeated Charlotte, in a low, sad voice.

The poet looked at her with annoyance; then, with an evident determination not to question her, he continued,—

“In a valley among the Pyrenees, those Pyrenees so rich in legendary lore—”

He repeated these words several times, then turning to Charlotte, he said, “Have you written this?”

She made an effort to repeat the words, but stopped, her voice strangled with sobs. In vain did she try to restrain herself, her tears flowed in torrents.

“What on earth is the matter?” said D’Argenton. “Is it this news of the Cydnus? It is a mere flying report, I am sure, and I attach no importance to it. Dr. Hirsch was to call at the office of the Company to-day, and he will be here directly.”

He spoke in a satirical tone, slightly disdainful, as the weak, children, fools, and invalids are often addressed. Was she not something of all these?

“Where were we?” he continued, when she was calmer. “You have made me lose the thread. Read me all you have written.”

Charlotte wiped her tears away.

“In a valley among the Pyrenees, those Pyrenees so rich in legendary lore—”

“Go on.”

“It is all,” she answered.

The poet was very much surprised; it seemed to him that he had dictated much more. The terrible advantage thought has over expression bewildered him. All that he dreamed, all that was in embryo within his brain, he fancied was already in form and

on the page, and he was aghast at the disproportion between the dream and the reality. His delusion was like that of Don Quixote,—he believed himself in the Empyrean, and took the vapors from the kitchen for the breath of heaven, and, seated on his wooden horse, felt all the shock of an imaginary fall.. Had he been in such a state of mental exaltation merely to produce those two lines? Were these the only result of that frantic rubbing of his dishevelled hair, of that weary pacing to and fro?'

He was furious, for he felt that he was ridiculous. "It is your fault," he said to Charlotte. "How can a man work in the face of a crying woman? It is always the same thing—nothing is accomplished. Years pass away and the places are filled. Do you not know how small a thing disturbs literary composition? I ought to live in a tower a thousand feet above all the futilities of life, instead of being surrounded by caprices, disorder, and childishness." As he speaks he strikes a furious blow upon the table, and poor Charlotte, with the tears pouring from her eyes, gathers up the pens and papers that have flown about the room in wild confusion.

The arrival of Dr. Hirsch ends this deplorable scene, and after a while tranquillity is restored. The doctor is not alone; Labassandre comes with him, and both are grave and mysterious in their manner.

Charlotte turns hastily. "What news, doctor?" she asks.

"None, madame; no news whatever."

But Charlotte detected a covert glance at D'Argenton, and knew that the physician's words were false.

"And what do the officers of the Company say?" continued the mother, determined to learn the truth.

Labassandre undertook to answer, and while he spoke, the doctor contrived to convey to D'Argenton that the Cydnus had gone to the bottom,—"a collision at sea—every soul was lost."

D'Argenton's face never changed, and it would have been difficult to form any idea of his feelings.

"I have been at work," he said. "Excuse me, I need the fresh air."

"You are right," said Charlotte; "go out for a walk;" and the poor woman, who usually detained her poet in the house lest the high-born ladies of the Faubourg St. Germain should entrap him, is this evening delighted to see him leave her, that she may weep in peace—that she may yield to all the wild terror and mournful presentiments that assail her. This is why even the presence of the servant annoys her, and she sends her to her attic.

"Madame wishes to be alone! Is not madame afraid? The noise of the wind is very dismal on the balcony."

"No, I am not afraid; leave me."

At last she was alone. She could think at her ease, without the voice of her tyrant saying, "What are you thinking about?" Ever since she had read in the Journal the brief words, "There is no intelligence of the Cydnus," the image of her child had pursued her. Her nights had been sleepless, and she listened to the wind with singular terror. It seemed to blow from all quarters, rattling the windows and wailing through the chimneys. But whether it whispered or shrieked, it spoke to her, and said what it always says to the mothers and wives of sailors, who turn pale as they listen. The wind comes from afar, but it comes quickly and has met with many adventures. With one gust it has torn away the sails of a vessel, set fire to a quiet home, and carried death and destruction on its wings. This it is that gives to its voice such melancholy intonations.

This night it was dreary enough: it rattles the windows and whistles under the doors; it wishes to come in, for it bears a message to this poor mother, and it sounds like an appeal or a warning. The ticking of the clock, the distant noise of a locomotive, all take the same plaintive tone and beseeching accent. Charlotte knows only too well

what the wind wishes to tell her. It is a story of a ship rolling on the broad ocean, without sails or rudder—of a maddened crowd on the deck, of cries and shrieks, curses and prayers. Her hallucination is so strong that she even hears from the ship a beseeching cry of “Mamma!” She starts to her feet; she hears it again. To escape it, she walks about the room, opens the door and looks down the corridor. She sees nothing, but she hears a sigh, and, raising her lamp higher, discovers a dark shadow crouched in the corner.

“Who is that?” she cried, half in terror, half in hope.

“It is I, dear mother!” said a weak voice.

She ran toward him. It is her boy—a tall, rough sailor—rising as she approached him, with the aid of a pair of crutches. And this is what she has made of her child! Not a word, not an exclamation, not a caress. They look at each other, and tears fill the eyes of both.

A certain fatality attaches itself to some people, which renders them and all that they do absolutely ridiculous. When D’Argenton returned that night, he came with the determination to disclose the fatal news to Charlotte, and to have the whole affair concluded. The manner in which he turned the key in the lock announced this solemn determination. But what was his surprise to find the parlor a blaze of light! Charlotte—and on the table by the fire the remains of a meal. She came to him in a terrible state of agitation.

“Hush! Pray make no noise—he is here and asleep.”

“Who is here?”

“Jack, of course. He has been shipwrecked, and is severely injured. He has been saved as by a miracle. He has just come from Rio Janeiro, where he spent two months in a hospital.”

D’Argenton forced a smile, which Charlotte endeavored to believe was one of satisfaction. It must be acknowledged that he behaved very well, and said at once

that Jack must stay there until he was entirely recovered. In fact, he could do no less for the actual proprietor of his Review.

The first excitement over, the ordinary life of the poet and Charlotte was resumed, changed only by the presence of the poor lame fellow, whose legs were badly burned by the explosion of a boiler, and had not yet healed. He was clothed in a jacket of blue cloth. His light moustache, the color of ripe wheat, was struggling into sight through the thick coating of tan that darkened his face; his eyes were red and inflamed, for the lashes had been burned off; and in a state of apathy painful to witness, the son of Ida de Barancy dragged himself from chair to chair, to the irritation of D'Argenton and to the great shame of his mother. When some stranger entered the house and cast an astonished glance at this figure, which offered so strange a contrast to the quiet, luxurious surroundings, she hastened to say, "It is my son, he has been very ill," in the same way that the mothers of deformed children quickly mention the relationship, lest they should surprise a smile or a compassionate look. But if she was pained in seeing her darling in this state, and blushed at the vulgarity of his manners or his awkwardness at the table, she was still more mortified at the tone of contempt with which her husband's friends spoke of her son.

Jack saw little difference in the habitués of the house, save that they were older, had less hair and fewer teeth; in every other respect they were the same. They had attained no higher social position, and were still without visible means of support.

They met every day to discuss the prospects of the Review, and twice each week they all dined at D'Argenton's table. Moronval generally brought with him his two last pupils. One was a young Japanese prince of an indefinite age, and who, robbed of his floating robes, seemed very small and slender. With his little cane and hat, he looked like a figure of yellow clay fallen from an étagère upon the Parisian sidewalk. The other, with narrow slits of eyes and a black beard, recalled certain

vague remembrances to Jack, who at last recognized his old friend Said who had offered him cigar ends on their first interview.

The education of this unfortunate youth had been long since finished, but his parents had left him with Moronval to be initiated into the manners and customs of fashionable society. All these persons treated Jack with a certain air of condescension. He remained Master Jack to but one person—that was that most amiable of women, Madame Moronval, who wore the same silk dress that he had seen her in years before. He cared little whether he was called "Master Jack," or "My boy,"—his two months in the hospital, his three years of alcoholic indulgence, the atmosphere of the engine-room, and the final tempestuous conclusion, had caused him such profound exhaustion, such a desire for quiet, that he sat with his pipe between his teeth, silent and half asleep.

"He is intoxicated," said D'Argent on sometimes.

This was not the case; but the young man found his only pleasure in the society of his mother on the rare occasions when the poet was absent. Then he drew his chair close to hers, and listened to her rather than talk himself. Her voice made a delicious murmur in his ears like that of the first bees on a warm spring day.

Once, when they were alone, he said to Charlotte, very slowly, "When I was a child I went on a long voyage—did I not?"

She looked at him a little troubled. It was the first time in his life that he had asked a question in regard to his history.

"Why do you wish to know?"

"Because, three years ago, the first day that I was on board a steamer, I had a singular sensation. It seemed to me that I had seen it all before; the cabins, and the narrow ladders, impressed me as familiar; it seemed to me that I had once played on those very stairs."

She looked around to assure herself that they were entirely alone.

“It was not a dream, Jack. You were three years old when we came from Algiers. Your father died suddenly, and we came back to Tours.”

“What was my father’s name?”

She hesitated, much agitated, for she was not prepared for this sudden curiosity; and yet she could not refuse to answer these questions.

“He was called by one of the grandest names in France, my child—by a name that you and I would bear to-day if a sudden and terrible catastrophe had not prevented him from repairing his fault. Ah, we were very young when we met! I must tell you that at that time I had a perfect passion for the chase. I remember a little Arabian horse called Soliman—”

She was gone, at full speed, mounted on this horse, and Jack made no effort to interrupt her—he knew that it was useless. But when she stopped to take breath, he profited by this brief halt to return to his fixed idea.

“What was my father’s name?” he repeated.

How astonished those clear eyes looked! She had totally forgotten of whom they had been speaking. She answered quickly,—“He was called the Marquis de l’Epau.” Jack certainly had but little of his mother’s respect for high birth, its rights and its prerogatives, for he received with the greatest tranquillity the intelligence of his illustrious descent. What mattered it to him that his father was a marquis, and bore a distinguished name? This did not prevent his son from earning his bread as a stoker on the Cydnus.

“Look here, Charlotte,” said D’Argenton impatiently, one day, “something must be done! A decided step must be taken with this boy. He cannot remain here forever without doing anything. He is quite well again; he eats like an ox. He coughs a little still, to be sure, but Dr. Hirsch says that is nothing,—that he will always cough. He must decide on something. If the life in the engine-room of a steamer is too severe for him, let him try a railroad.”

Charlotte ventured to say, timidly, “If you could see how he loses his breath when he climbs the stairs, and how thin he is, you would still feel that he is far from well. Can you not employ him on some of the office work?”

“I will speak to Moronval,” was the reply.

The result of this was, that Jack for some days did everything in the office except sweep the rooms. With his usual imperturbability, Jack fulfilled these various duties, enduring the contemptuous remarks of Moronval with the same indifference that he opposed to D’Argenton’s cold contempt. Moronval had a certain fixed salary on the magazine; it was small, to be sure, but he added to it by supplementary labors, for which he was paid certain sums on account. The subscription books lay open on the desk, expenses went on, but no receipts came in. In fact, there was but one subscriber, Charlotte’s friend at Tours, and but one proprietor, and he, with a glue-pot and brush, was at work in a corner. Neither Jack nor any one else realized this; but D’Argenton knew it and felt it hourly, and soon hated more strongly than ever the youth upon whose money he was living.

At the end of a week it was announced that Jack was useless in the office.

“But, my dear,” said Charlotte, “he does all he can!”

“And what is that? He is lazy and indifferent; he knows not how to sit nor how to stand, and he falls asleep over his plate at dinner; and since this great, shambling fellow has appeared here, you have grown ten years older, my love. Besides, he drinks, I assure you that he drinks.”

Charlotte bowed her head and wept; she knew that her son drank, but whose fault was it? Had they not thrown him into the gulf?

“I have an idea, Charlotte! Suppose we send him to Etiolles for change of air. We will give him a little money, and it will be a good thing for him.”

She thanked him enthusiastically, and it was decided that she would go the next day to install her son at Aulnettes.

They arrived there on one of those soft autumnal mornings which have all the beauty of summer without its excessive heat. There was not a breath in the air; the birds sang loudly, the fallen leaves rustled gently, and a perfume of rich maturity of ripened grain and fruit filled the air. The paths through the woods were still green and fresh; Jack recognized them all, and, seeing them, regained a portion of his lost youth. Nature herself seemed to welcome him with open arms, and he was soothed and comforted. Charlotte left her son early the next morning, and the little house, with its windows thrown wide open to the soft air and sunlight, had a peaceful aspect.

CHAPTER XIX. THE CONVALESCENT.

“And to think that for five years I have been allowed to remain in the belief that my Jack was a thief!”

“But, Dr. Rivals—”

“And that if I had not happened to ask for a glass of milk at the Archambaulds, I should have continued to think so!”

It was, on feet, at the forester’s cottage that Jack and his old friend had met.

For ten days the youth had been living in solitude at Aulnettes. Each day he had become more like the Jack of his childhood. The only persons with whom he held any communication were the old forester and his wife, who had served Charlotte faithfully for so long a time. She watched over his health, purchased his provisions, and often cooked his dinner over her own fire, while he sat and smoked at the door. These people never asked a question, but when they saw his thin figure and heard his constant cough, they shook their heads.

The interview between Dr. Rivals and Jack was at first embarrassing to both, but after a little conversation, and as soon as the doctor understood the truth, the awkwardness passed away.

“And now,” said the old gentleman, gayly, “I hope we shall see you often. You have been sent out to grass, apparently, like an old horse, but you need more than that. You require great care, my boy, great care,—particularly in the coming season. Etiolles is not Nice, you understand. Our house is changed, for my poor wife died four years ago,—died of absolute grief. My granddaughter does her best to take her place; she keeps my books and makes up my prescriptions. How glad she will be to see you! Now when will you come?”

Jack hesitated, as if he read his thoughts. The doctor added,—

“Cécile knows nothing of all your troubles; so come without any feeling of restraint. It is too cold for you to be out late to-night; this fog is not good for you; but I shall expect you at breakfast to-morrow. Now in with you quickly; you must not be out after the dews begin to fall. If you do not appear I shall come for you.”

As Jack closed the door of the house, he had a singular impression. It seemed to him that he had just come home from one of those long drives with the doctor; that he should find his mother in the dining-room, while the poet was above in the tower.

He passed the evening in the chimney-corner, before a fire made of dried grape-vines, for life in the engine-room had made him very chilly. As of old, when he returned from his country excursions with the doctor, the remembrance of his kindness and affection rendered him impervious to the slights he received at home, so now did the prospect of seeing Cécile people his solitude with dear phantoms and happy visions, that remained with him even while he slept.

The next day he knocked at the Rivals’ door.

“The doctor has not come in. Mademoiselle is in the office,” was the reply of the little servant who had replaced the faithful old woman he had known. Jack turned to the office; he knocked hurriedly, impatient to behold his former companion.

“Come in, Jack,” said a sweet voice.

Instead of obeying, he was seized with a strange emotion of fear.

The door opened suddenly, and Jack asked himself if the charming apparition on the threshold, in her blue dress and clustering blonde hair, was not the sun itself. How intimidated he would have been had not the little hand slipped into his own recalled so many sweet recollections of their common child-hood!

“Life has been very hard for you, my grandfather tells me,” she said. “I have had much sorrow, too. Dear grandmamma is dead; she loved you, and often spoke of you.”

He sat opposite to her, looking at her. She was tall and graceful; as she stood leaning against the corner of an old bookcase, she bent her head slightly to talk to her friend, and reminded him of a bird.

Jack remembered that his mother was beautiful also; but in Cécile there was something indefinable—an aroma of some divine spring-time, something fresh and pure, to which Charlotte’s mannerisms and graces bore little resemblance.

Suddenly, while he sat in this ecstasy before her, he caught sight of his own hand. It seemed enormous to him; it was black and hardened, and the nails were broken and deformed,—irretrievably injured by contact with fire and iron. He was ashamed, but could not conceal them even by putting them in his pocket. But he saw himself now with the eyes of others, dressed in shabby clothes and an old vest of D’Argenton’s, that was too small for him and too short in the sleeves. In addition to this physical awkwardness, poor Jack was overwhelmed by the memory of all the disgraceful scenes through which he had passed. The drunken orgies, the hours of beastly intoxication, all returned to his recollection, and it seemed to him that Cécile knew them, too. The slight cloud that hung on her fair young brow, the compassion he read in her eyes, all told him that she understood his shame and humiliation. He wished to run away and shut himself into a room at Aulnettes, and never leave it again.

Fortunately, some one came into the office, and Cécile, busy at her scales, writing

the labels as her grandmother had done, gave Jack time to recover his equanimity.

How good and patient she was! These poor peasant women were very stupid and wearisome with their long explanations. She encouraged them with her sympathy, cheered them with her words of counsel, and reproved them gently for their mistakes.

She was busy at this moment with an old acquaintance of Jack's,—the very woman who had taken so much pleasure in terrifying him when he was little. Bowed, as nearly all the peasantry are by their daily labor, burned by the sun, and powdered by the dust, old Salé yet retained a little life in her sharp eyes. She spoke of her good man, who had been sick for months,—who could not work, and yet had to eat. She said two or three things calculated to disconcert a young girl, and looked Cécile directly in the face with malicious delight. Two or three times Jack felt a strong inclination to put the wretch out of the door; but he restrained himself when he saw the cold dignity with which Cécile listened.

The old woman finally finished her discourse, and, as she passed Jack going out, recognized him.

"What!" she exclaimed, "the little Aulnettes boy come to life again? Ah, Mademoiselle Cécile, your uncle won't want you to marry him now, I fancy, though there was a time when everybody thought that was what the doctor desired;" and, chuckling, she left the room.

Jack turned pale. The old woman had finally struck the blow that, so many years ago, she had threatened him with. But Jack was not the only one who was disturbed. A fair face, bent low over a big book, was scarlet with annoyance.

"Come, Catherine, bring the soup." It was the doctor who spoke. "And you two, have you not found a word to say to each other after seven years' absence?"

At the table Jack was no more at his ease. He was afraid that some of his bad habits would show themselves; and his hands—what could he do with them? With one he

must hold his fork, but with the other? The whiteness of the linen made it look appallingly black. Cécile saw his discomfort, and understanding that her watchfulness increased it, hardly glanced again in his direction.

Catherine took away the dessert, and put before the young girl hot water, sugar, and a bottle of old brandy. It was she who since her grandmother's death had mixed the doctor's grog. And the good man had not gained by the change; for she, as the doctor observed in a melancholy tone, "diminished daily the quantity of alcohol."

When she had served her grandfather, Cécile turned toward their guest.

"Do you drink brandy?" she asked.

"Does he drink brandy?" said the doctor, with a laugh, "and he in an engine-room for three years? Don't you know—ignorant little puss that you are—that that is the only way the poor fellows can live? On board a vessel where I was, one fellow drank a bottle of pure spirit at a draught. Make Jack's strong, my dear."

She looked at her old friend sadly and seriously.

"Will you have some?"

"No, mademoiselle," he answered, in a low, ashamed voice; and he withdrew his glass,—for which effort of self-denial he was rewarded by one of those eloquent looks of gratitude which some women can give, and which are only understood by those whom they address.

"Upon my word, a conversion!" said the doctor, laughing. But Jack was converted only after the fashion of savages, who consent to believe in God only to please the missionaries. The peasants of Etiolles, at work in the fields, who saw Jack on his way home that night, might have had every reason to suppose that he was crazy or intoxicated. He was talking to himself, and gesticulating wildly. "Yes," he exclaimed, "M. d'Argenton was right: I am a mere artisan and must live and die with my equals; it is useless for me to try and rise above them." It was a very long time since the young man had felt any such energy. New thoughts and ideas

crowded into his mind; among them was Cécile's image. What a marvel of grace and purity she was! He sighed as he thought that had he been differently educated, he might have ventured to ask her to become his wife. At this moment, as he turned a sharp angle in the road, he found himself face to face with Mother Salé, who was dragging a fagot of wood. The old woman looked at him with a wicked smile, that in his present mood exasperated him to such a degree that his look of anger so terrified the old creature that she dropped her fagot and ran into the wood.

That evening he spent in darkness, and lighted neither fire nor lamp. Seated in a corner of the dining-room, with his eyes fixed on the glass doors that led to the garden, through which the soft mist of a superb autumnal night was visible, he thought of his childhood, and of the last years of his life.

No, Cécile would not marry him. In the first place, he was a mechanic; secondly, his birth was illegitimate. It was the first time in his life that this thought had weighed upon him, for Jack had not lived among very scrupulous people. He had never heard his father's name mentioned, and therefore rarely thought of him, being as unable to measure the extent of his loss as a deaf mute is unable to realize the blessing of the senses he lacks.

But now the question of his birth occupied him to the exclusion of all others.

He had listened calmly to the name of his father when Charlotte told it; but now he would like to learn from her every detail. Was he really a marquis? Was he certainly dead? Had not his mother said this merely to avoid the disclosure of a mortifying desertion? And if this father were still alive, would he not be willing to give his name to his son? The poor fellow was ignorant of the fact that a true woman's heart is more moved by compassion than by all the vain distinctions of the world.

"I will write to my mother," he thought. But the questions he wished to ask were so delicate and complicated, that he resolved to see her at once, and have one of those earnest conversations where eyes do the work of words, and where silence is as

eloquent as speech. Unfortunately he had no money for his railroad fare. “Pshaw!” he said, “I can go on foot. I did it when I was eleven, and I can surely try it again.” And he did try it the next day; and if it seemed to him less long and less lonely than it did before, it was far more sad.

Jack saw the spot where he had slept, the little gate at Villeneuve Saint-George’s, where he had been dropped by the kind couple from their carriage, the pile of stones where the recumbent form of a man had so terrified him, and he sighed to think that if the Jack of his youth could suddenly rise from the dust of the highway, he would be more afraid of the Jack of to-day than of any other dismal wanderer.

He reached Paris in the afternoon. A settled, cold rain was falling; and pursuing the comparison that he had made of his souvenirs with the present time, he recalled the glow of the sunset on that May evening when his mother appeared to him, like the archangel Michael, wrapped in glory, and chasing away the shades of night.

Instead of the little house at Aulnettes where Ida sang amid her roses, Jack saw D’Argenton just issuing from the door, followed by Moronval, who was carrying a bundle of proofs.

“Here is Jack!” said Moronval.

The poet started and looked up. To see these two men, one dressed with so much care, brushed, perfumed, and gloved; the other in a velvet coat, much too short for him, shiny from wear and weather, no one would have supposed that any tie could exist between them.

Jack extended his hand to D’Argenton, who gave one finger in return, and asked if the house at Aulnettes was rented.

“Rented?” said the other, not understanding.

“To be sure. Seeing you here, I supposed that of course the house was occupied, and you were compelled to leave it.”

“No,” said Jack, somewhat disconcerted; “no one has even called to look at the place.”

“What are you here for?”

“To see my mother.”

“Filial affection is a most excellent thing. Unfortunately, however, there are travelling expenses to be thought of.”

“I came on foot,” said Jack, with simple dignity.

“Indeed!” drawled D’Argenton, and then added, “I am glad to see that your legs are in better order than your arms.”

And pleased at this mot, the poet bowed coldly, and went on.

A week before, and these words would have scarcely been noticed by Jack, but since the previous night he had not been the same person. His pride was now so wounded that he would have returned to Aulnettes without seeing his mother, had he not wished to speak to her most seriously. He entered the salon; it was in disorder: chairs and benches were being brought in, for a great fête was in progress of arrangement, which was the reason that D’Argenton was so out of temper on seeing Jack. Charlotte did not appear pleased, but stopped in some of her preparations.

“Is it you, my dear Jack. You come for money, too, I fancy. I forgot it utterly,—that is, I begged Dr. Hirsch to hand it to you. He is going to Aulnettes in two or three days to make some very curious experiments with perfumes. He has made an extraordinary discovery.”

They were talking in the centre of the room; a half dozen workmen were going to and fro, driving nails, and moving the furniture.

“I wish to speak seriously,” said Jack.

“What! now? You know that serious conversation is not my forte; and to-day all is in confusion. We have sent out five hundred invitations, it will be superb! Come

here, then, if it is absolutely necessary. I have arranged a veranda for smoking. Come and see if it is not convenient?"

She went with him into a veranda covered with striped cotton, furnished with a sofa and jardinière, but rather dismal-looking with the rain pattering on the zinc roof.

Jack said to himself, "I had better have written," and did not know what to say first.

"Well?" said Charlotte, leaning her chin on her hand in that graceful attitude that some women adopt when they listen. He hesitated a moment, as one hesitates in placing a heavy load upon an étagère of trifles, for that which he had to say seemed too much for that pretty little head that leaned toward him.

"I should like—I should like to talk to you of my father," he said, with some hesitation.

On the end of her tongue she had the words, "What folly!" If she did not utter them, the expression of her face, in which were to be read amazement and fear, spoke for her.

"It is too sad for us, my child, to discuss. But still, painful as it is to me, I understand your feelings, and am ready to gratify you. Besides," she added, solemnly, "I have always intended, when you were twenty, to reveal to you the secret of your birth."

It was time now for him to look astonished. Had she forgotten that three months previous she had made this disclosure. Nevertheless, he uttered no protest, he wished to compare her story of to-day with an older narration. How well he knew her!

"Is it true that my father was noble?" he asked, suddenly.

"Indeed he was, my child."

"A marquis?"

"No, only a baron."

"But I supposed—in fact, you told me—"

“No, no—it was the elder branch of the Bulac family that was noble.”

“He was connected then with the Bulac family?”

“Most assuredly. He was the head of the younger branch.”

“And his name was—”

“The Baron de Bulac—a lieutenant in the navy.”

Jack felt dizzy, and had only strength to ask, “How long since he died?”

“O, years and years!” said Charlotte, hurriedly.

That his father was dead he was sure; but had his mother told him a falsehood now, or on the previous occasion? Was he a De Bulac or a L’Epau?

“You are looking ill, child,” said Charlotte, interrupting herself in the midst of a long romance she was telling, “your hands are like ice.”

“Never mind, I shall get warm with exercise,” answered Jack, with difficulty.

“Are you going so soon? Well, it is best that you should get back before it is late.” She kissed him tenderly, tied a handkerchief around his throat, and slipped some money into his pocket. She fancied that his silence and sadness came from seeing all the preparations for a fête in which he was to have no share, and when her maid summoned her for the waiting coiffeur, she said good-bye hurriedly.

“You see I must leave you; write often, and take good care of yourself.”

He went slowly down the steps, with his face turned toward his mother all the time. He was sad at heart, but not by reason of this fête from which he was excluded, but at the thought of all the happiness in life from which he had been always shut out. He thought of the children who could love and respect their parents, who had a name, a fireside, and a family. He remembered, too, that his unhappy fate would prevent him from asking any woman to share his life. He was wretched without realizing that to regret these joys was in fact to be worthy of them, and that it was only the fall perception of the sad truths of his destiny that would impart the strength

to cope with them.

Wrapped in these dismal meditations, he had reached the Lyons station, a spot where the mud seems deeper, and the fog thicker, than elsewhere. It was just the hour that the manufactories closed. A tired crowd, overwhelmed by discouragement and distress, hurried through the streets, going at once to the wine-shops, some of which had as a sign the one word Consolation, as if drunkenness and forgetfulness were the sole refuge for the wretched. Jack, feeling that darkness had settled down on his life as absolutely as it had on this cold autumnal night, uttered an exclamation of despair.

“They are right; what is there left to do but to drink?” and entering one of those miserable drinking-shops, Jack called for a double measure of brandy. Just as he lifted his glass, amid the din of coarse voices, and through the thick smoke, he heard a flute-like voice,—

“Do you drink brandy, Jack?”

No, he did not drink it, nor would he ever touch it again. He left the shop abruptly, leaving his glass untouched and the money on the counter.

How Jack had a sharp illness of some weeks’ duration after this long walk; how Dr. Hirsch experimented upon him until routed by Dr. Rivals, who carried the youth to his own house and nursed him again to health, is too long a story. We prefer also to introduce our readers to Jack seated in a comfortable arm-chair, reading at the window of the doctor’s office. It was peaceful about him, a peace that came from the sunny sky, the silent house, and the gentle footfall of Cécile.

He was so happy that he rarely spoke, and contented himself with watching the movements of the dear presence that pervaded the simple home. She sewed and kept her grandfather’s accounts.

“I am sure,” she said, looking up from her book, “that the dear man forgets half his visits. Did you notice what he said yesterday, Jack?”

“Mademoiselle!” he answered, with a start.

He had not heard one word, although he had been watching her with all his eyes. If Cécile said, “My friend,” it seemed to Jack that no other person had ever so called him; and when she said farewell, or good-night, his heart contracted as if he were never to see her again. Her slightest words were full of meaning, and her simple, unaffected ways were a delight to the youth. In his state of convalescence he was more susceptible to these influences than he would ordinarily have been.

O, the delicious days he spent in that blessed home! The office, a large, deserted room, with white curtains at the windows opening on a village street, communicated to him its healthful calm. The room was filled with the odors of plants culled in the splendor of their flowering, and he drank it in with delight.

In the scent of the balsam he heard the rushing of the clear brooks in the forest, and the woods were green and shady, when he caught the odor of the herbs gathered from the foot of the tall oaks.

With returning strength Jack tried to read; he turned over the old volumes, and found those in which he had studied so long before, and which he could now far better comprehend. The doctor was out nearly all day, and the two young people remained alone. This would have horrified many a prudent mother, and, of course, had Madame Rivals been living, it would not have been permitted; but the doctor was a child himself, and then, who knows? he may have had his own plans.

Meanwhile D’Argenton, informed of Jack’s removal to the Rivals, saw fit to take great offence. “It is not at all proper,” wrote Charlotte, “that you should remain there. People will think us unwilling to give you the care you need? You place us in a false position.”

This letter failing to produce any effect, the poet wrote himself:—“I sent Hirsch to cure you, but you preferred a country idiot to the science of our friend! As you call yourself better, I give you now two days to return to Aulnettes. If you are not there

at the expiration of that time, I shall consider that you have been guilty of flagrant disobedience, and from that moment all is over between us."

As Jack did not move, Charlotte appeared on the scene. She came with much dignity, and with a crowd of phrases that she had learned by heart from her poet. M. Rivals received her at the door, and, not in the least intimidated by her coldness, said at once, "I ought to tell you, madame, that it is my fault alone that your son did not obey you. He has passed through a great crisis. Fortunately he is at an age when constitutions can be reformed, and I trust that his will resist the rough trials to which it has been exposed. Hirsch would have killed him with his musk and his other perfumes. I took him away from the poisonous atmosphere, and now I hope the boy is out of danger. Leave him to me a while longer, and you shall have him back more healthy than ever, and capable of renewing the battle of life; but if you let that impostor Hirsch get hold of him again, I shall think that you wish to get rid of him forever."

"Ah! M. Rivals, what a thing to say! What have I done to deserve such an insult?" and Charlotte burst into tears. The doctor soothed her with a few kind words, and then let her go alone into the office to see her son. She found him changed and improved much, as if he had thrown off some outer husk, but exhausted and weakened by the transformation. He turned pale when he saw her.

"You have come to take me away," he exclaimed.

"Not at all," she answered, hastily. "The doctor wishes you to remain, and where would you be so well as with the doctor who loves you so tenderly?"

For the first time in his life Jack had been happy away from his mother, and a departure from the roof under which he was would have certainly caused him a relapse. Charlotte was evidently uncomfortable; she looked tired and troubled.

"We have a large entertainment every month, and every fortnight a reading, and all the confusion gives me a headache. Then the Japanese prince at the Moronval

Academy has written a poem, M. D'Argenton has translated it into French, and we are both of us learning the Japanese tongue. I find it very difficult, and have come to the conclusion that literature is not my forte. The Review does not bring in a single cent, and has not now one subscriber. By the way, our good friend at Tours is dead. Do you remember him?"

At this moment Cécile came in and was received by Charlotte with the most flattering exclamations and much warmth of manner. She talked of D'Argenton and of their friend at Tours, which annoyed Jack intensely, for he would have wished neither person to have been mentioned in Cécile's pure presence, and over and over again he stopped the careless babble of his mother who had no such scruples. They urged Madame D'Argenton to remain to dinner, but she had already lingered too long, and was uneasily occupied in inventing a series of excuses for her delay, which should be in readiness when she encountered her poet's frowning face.

"Above all, Jack, if you write to me, be sure that you put on your letter 'to be called for,' for M. D'Argenton is much vexed with you just now. So do not be astonished if I scold you a little in my next letter, for he is always there when I write. He even dictates my sentences sometimes; but don't mind, dear, you will understand."

She acknowledged her slavery with naïveté, and Jack was consoled for the tyranny by which she was oppressed by seeing her go away in excellent spirits, and with her shawl wrapped so gracefully around her, and her travelling-bag carried as lightly as she carried all the burdens of life.

Have you ever seen those water-lilies, whose long stems arise from the depths of the river, finding their way through all obstacles until they expand on the surface, opening their magnificent white cups, and filling the air with their delicate perfume? Thus grew and flowered the love of these two young hearts. With Cécile, the divine flower had grown in a limpid soul, where the most careless eyes could have discerned it. With Jack, its roots had been tangled and deformed, but when the stems

reached the regions of air and light, they straightened themselves, and needed but little more to burst into flower.

“If you wish,” said M. Rivals, one evening, “we will go to-morrow to the vintage at Coudray; the farmer will send his wagon; you two can go in that in the morning, and I will join you at dinner.”

They accepted the proposition with delight. They started on a bright morning at the end of October. A soft haze hung over the landscape, retreating before them, as it seemed; upon the mown fields and on the bundles of golden grain, upon the slender plants, the last remains of the summer’s brightness, long silken threads floated like particles of gray fog. The river ran on one side of the highway, bordered by huge trees. The freshness of the air heightened the spirits of the two young travellers, who sat on the rough seat with their feet in the straw, and holding on with both hands to the side of the wagon. One of the farmer’s daughters drove a young ass, who, harassed by the wasps, which are very numerous at the time when the air is full of the aroma of ripening fruits, impatiently shook his long ears.

They went on and on until they reached a hill-side, where they saw a crowd at work. Jack and Cécile each snatched a wicker basket and joined the others. What a pretty sight it was! The rustic landscape seen between the vine-draped arches, the narrow stream, winding and picturesque, full of green islands, a little cascade and its white foam, and above all, the fog showing through a golden mist, and a fresh breeze that suggested long evenings and bright fires.

This charming day was very short, at least so Jack found it. He did not leave Cécile’s side for a minute. She wore a broad-brimmed hat and a skirt of flowered cambric. He filled her basket with the finest of the grapes, exquisite in their purple bloom, delicate as the dust on the wings of a butterfly. They examined the fruit together; and when Jack raised his eyes, he admired on the cheeks of the young girl the same faint, powdery bloom. Her hair, blown in the wind in a soft halo above her

brow, added to this effect. He had never seen a face so changed and brightened as hers. Exercise and the excitement of her pretty toil, the gayety of the vineyard, the laughs and shouts of the laborers, had absolutely transformed M. Rivals' quiet housekeeper. She became a child once more, ran down the slopes, lifted her basket on her shoulder, watched her burden carefully, and walked with that rhythmical step which Jack remembered to have seen in the Breton women as they bore on their heads their full water-jugs. There came a time in the day when these two young persons, overwhelmed by fatigue, took their seats at the entrance of a little grove where the dry leaves rustled under their feet.

And then? Ah, well, they said nothing. They let the night descend softly on the most beautiful dream of their lives; and when the swift autumnal twilight brought out in the darkness the bright windows of the simple homes scattered about, the wind freshened, and Cécile insisted on fastening around Jack's throat the scarf she had brought, the warmth and softness of the fabric, the consciousness of being cared for, was like a caress to the lover.

He took her hand, and her fingers lingered in his for a moment; that was all. When they returned to the farm the doctor had just arrived; they heard his cheery voice in the courtyard. The chill of the early autumnal evenings has a charm that both Cécile and Jack felt as they entered the large room filled with the light from the fire. At supper innumerable dusty bottles were produced, but Jack manifested profound indifference to their charms. The doctor, on the contrary, fully appreciated them, so fully that his granddaughter quietly left her seat, ordered the carriage to be harnessed, and wrapped herself in her cloak. Dr. Rivals seeing her in readiness, rose without remonstrance, leaving on the table his half-filled glass.

The three drove home, as in the olden days, through the quiet country roads; the cabriolet, which had increased in size as had its occupants, groaned a little on its well-used springs. This noise took nothing from the charm of the drive, which the

stars, so numberless in autumn, seemed to follow with a golden shower.

“Are you cold, Jack?” said the doctor, suddenly.

How could he be cold? The fringe of Cécile’s great shawl just touched him.

Alas! why must there be a to-morrow to such delicious days? Jack knew now that he loved Cécile, but he realized also that this love would be to him only an additional cause of sorrow. She was too far above him, and although he had changed much since he had been so near her, although he had thrown aside much of the roughness of his habits and appearance, he still felt himself unworthy of the lovely fairy who had transformed him.

The mere idea that the girl should know that he adored her was distasteful to him. Besides, as his bodily health returned, he began to grow ashamed of his hours of inaction in “the office.” What would she think of him should he continue to remain there? Cost what it would, he must go.

One morning he entered M. Rivals’ house to thank him for all his kindness, and to inform him of his decision.

“You are right,” said the old man; “you are well now bodily and mentally, and you can soon find some employment.”

There was a long silence, and Jack was disturbed by the singular attention with which M. Rivals regarded him. “You have something to say to me,” said the doctor, abruptly.

Jack colored and hesitated.

“I thought,” continued the doctor, “that when a youth was in love with a girl who had no other relation than an old grandfather, the proper thing was to speak to him frankly.”

Jack, without answering, hid his face in his hands.

“Why are you so troubled, my boy?” continued his old friend.

“I did not dare to speak to you,” answered Jack; “I am poor and without any position.”

“You can remedy all this.”

“But there is something else: you do not know that I am illegitimate!”

“Yes, I know—and so is she,” said the doctor, calmly. “Now listen to a long story.”

They were in the doctor’s library. Through the open window they saw a superb autumnal landscape, long country roads bordered with leafless trees; and beyond, the old country cemetery, its yew-trees prostrated, and its crosses upheaved.

“You have never been there,” said M. Rivals, pointing out to Jack this melancholy spot. “Nearly in the centre is a large white stone, on which is the one word Madeleine.

“There lies my daughter, Cécile’s mother. She wished to be placed apart from us all, and desired that only her Christian name should be put upon her tomb, saying that she was not worthy to bear the name of her father and mother. Dear child, she was so proud! She had done nothing to merit this exile after death, and if any should have been punished, it was I, an old fool, whose obstinacy brought all our misfortunes upon us.

“One day, eighteen years ago this very month, I was sent for in a hurry on account of an accident that had happened at a hunt in the Forêt de Sénart. A gentleman had been shot in the leg. I found the wounded man on the state-bed at the Archambaulds. He was a handsome fellow, with light hair and eyes, those northern eyes that have something of the cold glitter of ice. He bore with admirable courage the extraction of the balls, and, the operation over, thanked me in excellent French, though with a foreign accent. As he could not be moved without danger, I continued to attend him at the forester’s; I learned that he was a Russian of high rank,—‘the Comte Nadine,’ his companions called him.

“Although the wound was dangerous, Nadine, thanks to his youth and good

constitution, as well as to the care of Mother Archambauld, was soon able to leave his bed, but as he could not walk at all, I took compassion on his loneliness, and often carried him in my cabriolet home to my own house to dine. Sometimes, when the weather was bad, he spent the night with us. I must acknowledge to you that I adored the man. He had great stores of information, had been everywhere, and seen everything. To my wife he gave the pharmaceutic recipes of his own land, to my daughter he taught the melodies of the Ukraine. We were positively enchanted with him all of us, and when I turned my face homeward on a rainy evening, I thought with pleasure that I should find so congenial a person at my fireside. My wife resisted somewhat the general enthusiasm, but as it was rather her habit to cultivate a certain distrust as a balance to my recklessness, I paid little attention. Meanwhile our invalid was quite well enough to return to Paris, but he did not go, and I did not ask either myself or him why he lingered.

"One day my wife said, 'M. Nadine must explain why he comes so often to the house; people are beginning to gossip about Madeleine and himself.'

"'What nonsense!' I exclaimed. I had the absurd notion that the count lingered at Etiolles on my account; I thought he liked our long talks, idiot that I was. Had I looked at my daughter when he entered the room, I should have seen her change color and bend assiduously over her embroidery all the while he was there. But there are no eyes so blind as those which will not see; and I chose to be blind. Finally, when Madeleine acknowledged to her mother that they loved each other, I went to find the comte to force an explanation.

"He loved my daughter, he said, and asked me for her hand, although he wished me to understand the obstacles that would be thrown in the way by his family. He said, however, that he was of an age to act for himself, and that he had some small income, which, added to the amount that I could give Madeleine, would secure their comfort.

“A great disproportion of fortune would have terrified me, while the very moderation of his resources attracted me. And then his air of lordly decision, his promptness in arranging everything, was singularly attractive. In short, he was installed in the house as my future son-in-law, without my asking too curiously by what door he entered. I realized that there was something a little irregular in the affair, but my daughter was very happy; and when her mother said, ‘We must know more before we give up our daughter,’ I laughed at her, I was so certain that all was right. One day I spoke of him to M. Viéville, one of the huntsmen.

“‘Indeed, I know nothing of the Comte Nadine,’ he said; ‘he strikes me as an excellent fellow. I know that he bears a celebrated name, and that he is well educated. But if I had a daughter involved, I should wish to know more than this. I should write, if I were you, to the Russian embassy; they can tell you everything there.’

“You suppose, of course, that I went to the embassy. That is just what I did not do; I was too careless, too blindly confident, too busy. I have never been able in my whole life to do what I wished, for I have never had any time; my whole existence has been too short for the half of what I have wished to do. Tormented by my wife on the subject of this additional information, I finished by lying, ‘Yes, yes, I went there; everything is satisfactory.’ Since then I remember the singular air of the comte each time he thought I was going to Paris; but at that time I saw nothing; I was absorbed in the plans that my children were making for their future happiness. They were to live with us three months in the year, and to spend the rest of the time in St. Petersburg, where Nadine was offered a government situation. My poor wife ended in sharing my joy and satisfaction.

“The end of the winter passed in correspondence. The count’s papers were long in coming, his parents utterly refused their consent. At last the papers came—a package of hieroglyphics impossible to decipher,—certificates of birth, baptism, &c.

That which particularly amused us was a sheet filled with the titles of my future son-in-law, Ivanovitch Nicolaevitch Stephanovitch.

"'Have you really as many names as that?' said my poor child, laughing; 'and I am only Madeleine Rivals.'

"There was at first some talk of the marriage taking place in Paris with great pomp, but Nadine reflected that it was not wise to brave the paternal authority on this point, so the ceremony took place at Etiolles, in the little church where to this very day are to be seen the records of an irreparable falsehood. How happy I was that morning as I entered the church with my daughter trembling on my arm, feeling that she owed all her happiness to me!

"Then, after mass, breakfast at the house, and the departure of the bridal couple in a post-chaise—I can see them now as they drove away.

"The ones who go are generally happy; those who stay are sad enough. When we took our seats at the table that night, the empty chair at our side was dreary enough. I had business which took me out-of-doors; but the poor mother was alone the greater part of the time, and her heart was devoured by her regrets. Such is the destiny of women; all their sorrows and their griefs come from within, and are interwoven with their daily lives and employments.

"The letters that we soon began to receive from Pisa, and Florence, were radiant with happiness. I began to build a little house by the side of our own; we chose the furniture and the wall papers. 'They are here—they are there,' we said; and at last we expected the final letters we should receive before they returned.

"One evening I came in late; my wife had gone to her room; I supped alone; when suddenly I heard a step in the garden. The door opened, my daughter appeared; but she was no longer the fair young girl whom I had parted with a month before. She looked thin and ill, was poorly dressed, and carried in her hand a little travelling-bag.

"'It is I,' she whispered hoarsely; 'I have come.'

"'Good heavens! what has happened? Where is Nadine?'

"She did not answer; her eyes closed, and she trembled violently from head to foot. You may imagine my suspense.

"'Speak to me, my child. What has happened? Where is your husband?'

"'I have none—I have never had one;' and suddenly, without looking at me, she began to tell me, in a low voice, her horrible history.

"He was not a count, his name was not Nadine. He was a Russian Jew by the name of Roesh, a miserable adventurer. He was married at Riga, married at St. Petersburg. All his papers were false, manufactured by himself. His resources he owed to his skill in counterfeiting bills on the Russian bank. At Turin he had been arrested on an order of extradition. Think of my little girl alone in this foreign town, separated violently from her husband, learning abruptly that he was a forger and a bigamist,—for he made a full confession of his crimes. She had but one thought, that of seeking refuge with us. Her brain was so bewildered, that, as she told us afterwards, when she was asked where she was going, she simply answered 'To mamma.' She left Turin hastily, without her luggage, and at last she was safe with us, and weeping for the first time since the catastrophe.

"I said, 'Restrain yourself, my love, you will awaken your mother!' but my tears fell as fast as her own. The next day my wife learned all; she did not reproach me. 'I knew,' she said, 'from the beginning that there was some misfortune in this marriage.' And, in fact, she had certain presentiments of evil from the hour that the man came under our roof. What is the diagnosis of a physician compared to the warning and confidences whispered by destiny into the ear of certain women? In the neighborhood the arrival of my child was quickly known. 'Your travellers have returned,' they said. They asked few questions, for they readily saw that I was unhappy. They noticed that the count was not with us, that Madeleine and her

mother never went out; and very soon I found myself met with compassionate glances that were harder to bear than anything else. My daughter had not confided to me that a child would be born from this disastrous union, but sat sewing day after day, ornamenting the dainty garments, which are the joy and pride of mothers, with ribbons and lace; I fancied, however, that she looked at them with feelings of shame, for the least allusion to the man who had deceived her made her turn pale. But my wife, who saw things with clearer vision than my own, said, 'You are mistaken: she loves him still.'

"Yes, she loved, and strong as was her contempt and distrust, her love was stronger still. It was this that killed her, for she died soon after Cécile's birth. We found under her pillow a letter, worn in all its folds, the only one she had ever received from Nadine, written before their marriage. She had read it often, but she died without once pronouncing the name that I am sure trembled all the time on her lips.

"You are astonished that in a tranquil village like this a complicated drama could have been enacted, such as would seem possible only in the crowded cities of London and Paris. When fate thus attacks, by chance as it were, a little corner so sheltered by hedges and trees, I am reminded of those spent balls which during a battle kill a laborer at work in the fields, or a child returning from school. I think if we had not had little Cécile, my wife would have died with her daughter. Her life from that hour was one long silence, full of regrets and self-reproach.

"But it was necessary to bring up this child, and to keep her in ignorance of the circumstances of her birth. This was a matter of difficulty; it is true that we were relieved of her father, who died a few months after his condemnation. Unfortunately, several persons knew the whole story; and we wished to preserve Cécile from all the gossip she would hear if she associated with other children. You saw how solitary her life was. Thanks to this precaution, she to-day knows nothing of the tempest that surrounded her birth; for not one of the kind people about us

would utter one word which would give her reason to suspect that there was any mystery. My wife, however, was always in dread of some childish questions from Cécile. But I had other fears: who could be certain that the child of my child did not inherit from her father some of his vices? I acknowledge to you, Jack, that for years I dreaded seeing her father's characteristics in Cécile; I dreaded the discovery of deceit and falsehood; but what joy it has been to me to find that the child is the perfected image of her mother! She has the same tender and half-sad smile, the same candid eyes, and lips that can say No.

"Meanwhile the future alarmed me: my granddaughter must some day learn the truth, and that truth must be divulged if she should ever marry.

"'She must never love any one,' said her grandmother.

"If this were possible, would it be wise to pass through life without a protector? Her destiny must be united with a fate as exceptional as her own. Such a one could hardly be found in our village, and in Paris we knew no one. It was about the time when these anxieties occupied our minds that your mother came to this place. She was supposed to be the wife of D'Argenton, but the forester's wife told me the real circumstances. I said to myself instantly, 'This boy ought to be Cécile's husband;' and from that time I attended to your education.

"I looked forward to the time that you, a man grown, would come to me and ask her hand. This was the reason, of course, that I was so indignant when D'Argenton sent you to Indret. I said to myself, however, Jack may emerge from this trial in triumph. If he studies, if he works with his head as well as his hands, he may still be worthy of the wife I wish to give him. The letters that we received from you were all that they should be, and I ventured to indulge the hope I have named. Suddenly came the intelligence of the robbery. Ah, my friend, how terrified I was! how I bemoaned the weakness of your mother, and the tyranny of the monster who had driven you to evil courses! I respected, nevertheless, the tender affection that existed toward you in the

heart of my little girl, I had not the courage to undeceive her. We talked of you constantly until the day when I told her that I had seen you at the forester's. If you could have seen the light in her eyes, and how busy she was all day! a sign with her always of some excitement, as if her heart beating too quickly needed something, either a pen or a needle, to regulate its movements.

"Now, Jack, you love my child. I have watched you for two months, and I am satisfied that the future is in your own hands. I wish you to study medicine and take my place at Etiolles. I first thought of keeping you here, but I concluded that it would take four years to complete your studies, and that your residence with us for that length of time would not be advisable. In Paris you can study in the evening, and work all day, and come to us on Sundays. I will examine your week's work and advise you, and Cécile will encourage you. Velpeau and others have done this, and you can do the same. Will you try? Cécile is the reward."

Jack was utterly overwhelmed, and could only heartily shake the hand of the old man. But perhaps Cécile's affection was only that of a sister: and four years was a long time: would she consent to wait?

"Ah, my boy, I cannot answer these questions," said M. Rivals, gayly; "but I authorize you to ask them at headquarters. Cécile is up-stairs; go and speak to her."

That was rather a difficult matter, with a heart going like a trip-hammer, and a voice choked with emotion. Cécile was writing in the office.

"Cécile," he said, as he entered the room, "I am going away." She rose from her seat, very pale. "I am going to work," he continued. "Your grandfather has given me permission to tell you that I love you, and that I hope to win you as my wife."

He spoke in so low a voice that any other person than Cécile would have failed to understand him. But she understood him very well. And in this room, lighted by the level rays of the setting sun, the young girl stood listening to this declaration of love as to an echo of her own thoughts. She was perfectly unabashed and undisturbed, a

tender smile on her lips, and her eyes full of tears. She understood perfectly that their life would be no holiday, that they would be racked by separations and long years of waiting.

“Jack,” she said, after he had explained all his plans, “I will wait for you, not only four years, but forever.”

Jack went to Paris in search of employment, found it in the house of Eyssendeck, at six francs a day; then tried to procure lodgings not too far removed from the manufactory. He was happy, full of hope and courage, impatient to begin his double work as mechanic and student. The crowd pushed against him, and he did not feel them; nor was he conscious of the cold of this December night; nor did he hear the young apprentice girls, as they passed him, say to each other, “What a handsome man!” The great Faubourg was alive and seemed to encourage him with its gayety.

“What a pleasure it is to live!” said Jack; “and how hard I mean to work!” Suddenly he stumbled against a great square basket filled with fur hats and caps; this basket stood at the door of a shoemaker’s stall. Jack looked in and saw Bélisaire, as ugly as ever, but cleaner and better clothed. Jack was delighted to see him, and entered at once; but Bélisaire was too deeply absorbed in the examination of a pair of shoes that the cobbler was showing him, to look up. These shoes were not for himself, but for a tiny child of four or five years of age, pale and thin, with a head much too large for his body. Bélisaire was talking to the child.

“And they are nice and thick, my dear, and will keep those poor little feet warm.”

Jack’s appearance did not seem to surprise him.

“Where did you come from?” he asked, as calmly as if he had seen him the night before.

“How are you, Bélisaire? Is this your child?”

“O, no; it belongs to Madame Weber,” said the pedler, with a sigh; and when he had ascertained that the little thing was well fitted, Bélisaire drew from his pocket a long

purse of red wool, and took out some silver pieces that he placed in the cobbler's hand with that air of importance assumed by working people when they pay away money.

"Where are you going, comrade?" said the pedler to Jack, as they stood on the pavement, in a tone so expressive that it seemed to say, If you take this side, I shall go the other.

Jack, who felt this without being able to understand it, said, "I hardly know where I am going. I am a journeyman at Eyssendeck's, and I want to find a room not too far away."

"At Eyssendeck's?" said the pedler. "It is not easy to get in there; one must bring the best of recommendations."

The expression of his eyes enlightened Jack. Bélisaire believed him guilty of the robbery,—so true it is that accusations, however unfounded and however explained away, yet leave spots and tarnishes. When Bélisaire saw the letters of the superintendent at Indret, and heard the whole story, his whole face lighted up with his old smile. "Listen, Jack, it is too late to seek a lodging to-night; come with me, for I have a room where you can sleep tonight, and perhaps can suggest something that will suit you. But we will talk about that as we sup. Come now."

Behold the three—Jack, the pedler, and Madame Weber's little one, whose new shoes clattered on the sidewalk famously—were soon hurrying along the streets. Bélisaire informed Jack that his sister was now a widow, and that he had gone into business with her. Occasionally, in the full tide of his history, he stopped to shout his old cry of "Hats! hats! Hats to sell!" But before he reached his home, he was obliged to lift into his arms Madame Weber's little boy, who had begun to weep despairingly.

"Poor little fellow!" said Bélisaire, "he is not in the habit of walking. He rarely goes out, and it is merely that I may take him out with me sometimes that I have had him

measured for these new shoes. His mother is away from home at work all day; she is a good, hard-working woman, and has to leave her child to the care of a neighbor. Here we are!"

They entered one of those large houses whose numerous windows are like narrow slits in the walls. The doors open on the long corridors, which serve as ante-rooms, where the poor people place their stoves and their boxes. At this hour they were at dinner. Jack, as he passed, looked in at the doors, which stood wide open.

"Good evening," said the pedler.

"Good evening," said the friendly voices from within.

In some rooms it was different: there was no fire, no light—a woman and children watching for the father, who was at the wine-shop round the corner.

The pedler's room was at the top of the house, and he seemed very proud of it. "I am going to show you how well I am established, but you must wait until I have taken this child to its mother." He looked under the door of a room opposite his own, pulled out a key and unlocked it, went directly to the stove where had simmered all day the soup for the evening meal. He lighted a candle and fastened the child into a high chair at the table, gave it a spoon and a saucepan to play with, and then said, "Come away quickly; Madame Weber will be here in a minute, and I wish to hear what she will say when she sees the child's new shoes." He smiled as he opened his room—a long attic divided in two. A pile of hats told his business, and the bare walls his poverty.

Bélisaire lighted his lamp and arranged his dinner, which consisted of a fine salad of potatoes and salt herring. He took from a closet two plates, bread and wine, and placed them on a little table. "Now," he said, with an air of triumph, "all is ready, though it is not much like that famous ham you gave me in the country." The potato salad was excellent, however, and Jack did justice to it. Bélisaire was delighted with the appetite of his guest, and did his duty as host with great delight, rising every two

or three minutes to see if the water was boiling for the coffee.

“You have a taste for housekeeping, Bélisaire,” said Jack, “and have things nicely arranged.”

“Not yet,” answered the pedler; “I need very many articles,—in fact, these are only lent to me by Madame Weber while we are waiting.”

“Waiting for what?” asked Jack.

“Until we can be married!” answered the pedler, boldly, indifferent to Jack’s gay laugh. “Madame Weber is a good woman, and you will see her soon. We are not rich enough to start alone in housekeeping, but if we could find some one to share the expenses, we would lodge and feed him, do his washing and all, and it would not be a bad thing for him, any more than for us. Where there is enough for two there is always enough for three, you know! The difficulty is to find some one who is orderly and sober, and won’t make too much trouble in the house.”

“How should I do, Bélisaire?”

“Would you like it, Jack? I have been thinking about it for an hour, but did not dare speak of it. Perhaps our table would be too simple for you.”

“No, Bélisaire, nothing would be too simple. I wish to be very economical, for I, too, am thinking of marrying.”

“Really! But in that case we can’t make our arrangements.”

Jack laughed, and explained that his marriage was an affair of four years later.

“Well, then, it is all settled. What a happy chance it was that we met. Hark! I hear Madame Weber.”

A heavy step mounted the stairs; the child heard it too, for it began a melancholy wail. “I am coming,” cried the woman from the end of the corridor, to console the little one.

“Listen,” said Bélisaire. The door opened; an exclamation, followed by a laugh, was

heard, and presently Madame Weber, with her child on her arm, entered Bélisaire's room. She was a tall, good-looking woman, of about thirty, and she laughed as she showed him the little one's feet, but there was a tear in her eye as she said, "You are the person who has done this."

"Now," said Bélisaire, with simplicity, "how could she guess so well?"

Madame Weber took a seat at the table, and a cup of coffee, and Jack was presented to her as their future associate. I must acknowledge that she received him with a certain reserve, but when she had examined the aspirant for this distinction, and learned that the two men had known each other for ten years, and that she had before her the hero of the story of the ham that she had heard so many times, her face lost its expression of distrust, and she held out her hand to Jack.

"This time Bélisaire is right. He has brought me a half dozen of his comrades who were not worth the cord to hang them with. He is very innocent, because he is so good."

Then came a discussion as to arrangements. It was decided that until the marriage he should share Bélisaire's room and buy himself a bed; they would share the expenses, and Jack would pay his proportion every Saturday. After the marriage, they would establish themselves more commodiously, and nearer the Eyssendeck Works. This establishment recalled to him Indret on a smaller scale. Owing to lack of space, there were in the same room three rows, one above the other, of machines. Jack was on the upper floor, where all the noise and dust of the place ascended. When he leaned over the railing of the gallery, he beheld a constant whirl of human arms, and a regular and monotonous beat of machinery.

The heat was intense, worse than at Indret, because there was less ventilation; but Jack bore up bravely under it, for his inner life supported him through all the trials of the day. His companions saw intuitively that he lived apart from them, indifferent to their petty quarrels and rivalries. Jack shared neither their pleasures nor their

hatreds. He never listened to their sullen complaints, nor the muttered thunder of this great Faubourg, concealed like a Ghetto in this magnificent city. He paid no attention to the socialistic theories, the natural growth in the minds of those who live poor and suffering so near the wealthier classes.

I am not disposed to assert that Jack's companions liked him especially, but they respected him at all events. As to the workwomen, they looked upon him much as a Prince Rodolphe,—for they had all read "The Mysteries of Paris,"—and admired his tall, slender figure and his careful dress. But the poor girls threw away their smiles, for he passed their corner of the establishment with scarcely a glance. This corner was never without its excitement and drama, for most of the workwomen had a lover among the men, and this led to all sorts of jealousies and scenes.

Jack went to and fro from the manufactory alone. He was in haste to reach his lodgings, to throw aside his workman's blouse, and to bury himself in his books. Surrounded with these, many of them those he had used at school, he commenced the labors of the evening, and was astonished to find with what facility he regained all that he thought he had forever lost. Sometimes, however, he encountered an unexpected difficulty, and it was touching to see the young man, whose hands were distorted and clumsy from handling heavy weights, sometimes throw aside his pen in despair. At his side Bélisaire sat sewing the straw of his summer hats, in respectful silence, the stupefaction of a savage assistant at a magician's incantations. He frowned when Jack frowned, grew impatient, and when his comrade came to the end of some difficult passage, nodded his head with an air of triumph. The noise of the pedler's big needle passing through the stiff straw, the student's pen scratching upon the paper, the gigantic dictionaries hastily taken up and thrown down, filled the attic with a quiet and healthy atmosphere; and when Jack raised his eyes he saw from the windows the light of other lamps, and other shadows courageously prolonging their labors into the middle of the night.

After her child was asleep, Madame Weber, to economize coal and oil, brought her work to the room of her friend; she sowed in silence. It had been decided that they should not marry until spring, the winter to the poor being always a season of anxiety and privation. Jack, as he wrote, thought, “How happy they are.” His own happiness came on Sundays. Never did any coquette take such pains with her toilette as did Jack on those days, for he was determined that nothing about him should remind Cécile of his daily toil; well might he have been taken for Prince Rodolphe had he been seen as he started off.

Delicious day! without hours or minutes—a day of uninterrupted felicity. The whole house greeted him warmly, a bright fire burned in the salon, flowers bloomed at the windows, and Cécile and the doctor made him feel how dear he was to them both. After they had dined, M. Rivals examined the work of the week, corrected everything, and explained all that had puzzled the youth.

Then came a walk through the woods, if the day was fair, and they often passed the chalet where Dr. Hirsch still came to pursue certain experiments. So black was the smoke that poured from the chimneys, that one would have fancied that the man was burning all the drugs in the world. “Don’t you smell the poison?” said M. Rivals, indignantly. But the young people passed the house in silence; they instinctively felt that there were no kindly sentiments within those walls toward them, and, in fact, feared that the fanatic Dr. Hirsch was sent there as a spy. But what had they to fear, after all? Was not all intercourse between D’Argenton and Charlotte’s son forever ended? For three months they had not met. Since Jack had been engaged to Cécile, and understood the dignity and purity of love, he had hated D’Argenton, making him responsible for the fault of his weak mother, whose chains were riveted more closely by the violence and tyranny under which a nobler nature would have revolted. Charlotte, who feared scenes and explanations, had relinquished all hope of reconciliation between these two men. She never mentioned her son to D’Argenton, and saw him only in secret.

She had even visited the machine-shop in a fiacre and closely veiled, and Jack's fellow-workmen had seen him talking earnestly with a woman elegant in appearance and still young. They circulated all sorts of gossip in regard to the mysterious visitor, which finally reached Jack's ears, who begged his mother not to expose herself to such remarks. They then saw each other in the gardens, or in some of the churches; for, like many other women of similar characteristics, she had become dévote as she grew old, as much from an overflow of idle sentimentality as from a passion for honors and ceremonies. In these rare and brief interviews Charlotte talked all the time, as was her habit, but with a worn, sad air. She said, however, that she was happy and at peace, and that she had every confidence in M. d'Argenton's brilliant future. But one day, as mother and son were leaving the church-door, she said to him, with some embarrassment, "Jack, can you let me have a little money for a few days? I have made some mistake in my accounts, and have not money enough to carry me to the end of the month, and I dare not ask D'Argenton for a penny."

He did not let her finish; he had just been paid off, and he placed the whole amount in his mother's hand. Then, in the bright sunshine he saw what the obscurity of the church had concealed: traces of tears and a look of despair on the face that was generally so smiling and fresh. Intense compassion filled his heart. "You are unhappy," he said; "come to me, I shall-be so glad to have you."

She started. "No, it is impossible," she said, in a low voice; "he has so many trials just now;" and she hurried away as if to escape some temptation.

CHAPTER XX. THE WEDDING-PARTY.

It was a summer morning. The pedler and his comrade were up before daybreak. One was sweeping and dusting, with as little noise as possible, careful not to disturb his companion, who was established at the open window. The sky was the cloudless one of June, pale blue with a faint tinge of rose still lingering in the east, that could

be seen between the chimneys. In front of Jack was a zinc roof, which, when the sun was in mid-heaven, became a terrible mirror. At this moment it reflected faintly the tints of the sky, so that the tall chimneys looked like the masts of a vessel floating on a glittering sea. Below was heard the noise from the poultry owned by the various inhabitants of the Faubourg. Suddenly a cry was heard: “Madame Jacob! Madame Mathieu! Here is your bread.”

It was four o’clock. The labors of the day had begun. The woman whose daily business it was to supply that quarter with bread from the baker’s had begun her rounds. Her basket was filled with loaves of all sizes, sweet-smelling and warm. She carries them all through the corridors, placing them at the corners of the various doors; her shrill voice aroused the sleepers; doors opened and shut; childish voices uttered cries of joy, and little bare feet pattered to meet the good woman, and returned hugging a loaf as big as themselves, with that peculiar gesture that you see in the poor people who come out of the bake-shops, and which shows the thoughtful observer what that hard-earned bread signifies to them.

All the world is now astir; windows are thrown open, even those where the lamps have burned the greater part of the night. At one sits a sad-faced woman, at a sewing-machine, aided by a little girl, who hands her the several pieces of her work. At another a young girl, with hair already neatly braided, is carefully cutting a slice of bread for her slender breakfast, watching that no crumb shall fall on the floor she swept at daybreak. Further on is a window shaded by a large red curtain to keep off the reflection from the zinc roof. All these rooms open on the other side into a dark and ugly house of enormous size. But the student heeds nothing but his work. One sound only depresses him at times, and that is the voice of an old woman, who says every morning, before the noises of the street have begun, “How happy people ought to be who can go to the country on a day like this!” To whom does the poor woman utter these words, day after day? To the whole world, to herself, or only to the canary, whose cage, covered with fresh leaves, she hangs on the shutters? Perhaps

she is talking to her flowers. Jack never knew, but he is much of her opinion, and would gladly echo her words; for his first waking thoughts turn toward a tranquil village street, toward a little green door, Jack has just reached this point in his reverie when a rustle of silk is heard, and the handle of his door rattles.

“Turn to the right,” said Bélisaire, who was making the coffee.

The handle is still aimlessly rattled. Bélisaire, with the coffee-pot in his hand, impatiently throws it open, and Charlotte rushes in. Bélisaire, stupefied at this inundation of flounces, feathers, and laces, bows again and again, while Jack’s mother, who does not recognize him, excuses herself, and retreats toward the door.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” she said; “I made a mistake.”

At the sound of her voice Jack rises from his chair in astonishment

“Mother!” he cried.

She ran to him and took refuge in his arms.

“Save me, my child, save me! That man, for whom I have sacrificed everything,—my life and that of my child,—has beaten me cruelly. This morning, when he came in after two days’ absence, I ventured to make some observation; I thought I had a right to speak. He flew into a frightful passion, and—”

The end of her sentence was lost in a torrent of tears and in convulsive sobs. Bélisaire had retired at her first words, and discreetly closed the door after him. Jack looks at his mother, full of terror and pity. How pale and how changed she is! In the clear light of the young day the marks of time are clearly visible on her face, and the gray hairs, that she has not taken the trouble to conceal, shine like silver on her blue-veined temples. Without any attempt at controlling her emotion, she speaks without restraint, pouring forth all her wrongs.

“How I have suffered, Jack! He passes his life now at the cafés and in dissipation. Did you know that, when he went to Indret with that money, I was there in the

village, and crazy to see you? He reproaches me with the bread you ate under his roof, and yet—yes, I will tell you what I never meant you to know—I had ten thousand francs of yours that were given to me for you exclusively. Well, D'Argenton put them into his Review; I know that he meant to pay you large interest, but the ten thousand francs have been swallowed up with all the others, and when I asked him if he did not intend to account to you for them, do you know what he did? He drew up a long bill of all that he has paid for you. Your board at Etiolles, that amounts to fifteen thousand francs. But he does not ask you to pay the difference; is not that very generous?" and Charlotte laughed sarcastically. "I tell you I have borne everything," she continued,—"the rages he has fallen into on your account, and the mean way in which he has talked with his friends of the affair at Indret; as if your innocence had never been fully established!

"And then to leave me in ignorance of his where-abouts, to spend his time with some countess in the Faubourg St. Germaine,—for those women are all crazy about him,—and then to receive my reproaches with such disdain, and finally to strike me! Me, Ida de Barancy! This was too much. I dressed, and put on my hat, and then I went to him. I said, 'Look at me, M. d'Argenton; look at me well; it is the last time that you will see me; I am going to my child.' And then I came away."

Jack had listened in silence to these revelations, growing paler and paler, and so filled with shame for the woman who narrated them that he could not look at her. When she had finished, he took her hand gently, and with much sweetness, but also with much solemnity, he said,—

"I thank you for having come to me, dear mother. Only one thing was lacking to complete my happiness, and that was your presence. Now take care! I shall never allow you to leave me."

"Leave you! No, Jack; we will always live together—we two. You know I told you that the day would come when I should need you. It has come now."

Under her son's caresses she became tranquillized. There came an occasional sob, like a child who has wept for a long time.

"You see," she said, "how happy we may be. I owe you much care and tenderness. I feel now that I can breathe freely. Your room is bare and small, but it seems to me like Paradise itself."

This brief summary of the apartment regarded by Bélisaire as so magnificent, disturbed Jack somewhat as to the future; but he had no time now for discussions; he had but half an hour before he must leave, and he must decide at once on something definite. He must consult Bélisaire, whom he heard patiently pacing the corridor, and who would have waited until nightfall without once knocking to see if the interview was over.

"Bélisaire, my mother has come to live with me; how shall we manage?"

Bélisaire started as he thought, "And now the marriage must be postponed, for Jack will not be one of our little ménage!"

But he concealed his disappointment, and exerted himself to suggest some plan that would relieve his friend of present embarrassment. It was decided finally that he should relinquish the room to Jack and his mother and find for himself a closet to sleep in, depositing his stock of hats and his furniture with Madame Weber.

Jack presented his friend to Bélisaire, who remembered very well the fair lady at Aulnettes, and at once placed himself for the day at the service of Ida de Barancy; for "Charlotte" was no more heard of. A bed must be purchased, a couple of chairs, and a dressing-bureau. Jack took from the drawer where he kept his savings three or four gold pieces which he gave his mother.

"You know," he said, "that if marketing is disagreeable to you, good Madame Weber will attend to the dinners."

"Not at all; Bélisaire will simply tell me where to go. I intend to do everything for you; you will see the nice little dinner I shall have ready for you when you come

back to-night.”

She had laid aside her shawl, rolled up her sleeves, and was all ready to begin her work. Jack, delighted to see her so energetic, embraced her with his whole heart, and left his room in a very joyous frame of mind. With what courage he toiled all day! The present unfortunate career and hopeless future of his mother had troubled him for some time, and marred his joys and his hopes. To what depth of degradation would D’Argenton compel her to sink! To what end was she destined! Now all was changed. Ida, tenderly protected by his filial love, would become worthy of her whom she would some day call “my daughter.”

It seemed to Jack, moreover, that this event in some way diminished the distance between Cécile and himself, and he smiled to himself as he thought of it. But after his work, as he drew near his home, he was seized by a panic. Should he find his mother there? He knew with what promptitude Ida gave wings to her fancies and caprices, and he feared lest she had felt the temptation to re-tie the knot so hastily broken. But on the staircase this dread vanished. Above all the noises of the house he heard a fresh, clear voice singing like a lark. Jack stood on the threshold in mute amazement. Thoroughly freshened and cleaned, with Bélisaire’s goods gone, and with the addition of a pretty bed and dainty dressing-bureau, the room looked like a different place. There were flowers on the chimney, and the table was spread with a white cloth, on which stood a tempting-looking pie and a bottle of wine. Ida, in an embroidered skirt and loose sack, a little cap mounted on the top of her puffs, hardly looked like herself.

“Well!” she said, running to meet him; “and what do you think of it!”

“It is altogether charming. And how quick you have been!”

“Yes; Bélisaire helped me, and his nice widow also. I have invited them to dine with us.”

“But what will you do for dishes?”

“You will see. I have bought a few, and our neighbors on the other side have lent me some. They are very obliging also.”

Jack, who had never thought these people particularly complaisant, opened his eyes wide.

“But this is not all. I went to buy this pie at a place where they sell them fifteen cents less than anywhere else. It was so far, however, that I had to take a carriage to return.”

This was thoroughly characteristic. A carriage at two francs to save fifteen cents! She evidently knew where the best things were to be found.

The bread came from the Vienna bakery, and the coffee and dessert from the Palais Royale. Jack listened with a sinking heart. She saw that something was wrong.

“Have I spent too much?” she asked.

“No, I think not,—for one occasion,” he answered, with same hesitation.

“But I have not been extravagant. Look here,” she said, and she showed him a long green book; “in this I mean to keep my accounts. I will show my entries to you after dinner.”

Bélisaire and Madame Weber with her child now entered the room. It was truly delicious to see the airs of condescension with which Ida received them; but her manner was withal so kind that they were soon entirely at their ease.

Bélisaire was somewhat out of spirits, for he saw that his marriage must be indefinitely postponed, as he had lost his “comrade.” Ah, one may well compare the events of this world to the see-saws arranged by children, which lifts one of the players, while the other at the same time feels all the hardness of the earth below. Jack mounted toward the light, while his companion descended toward the implacable reality. To begin with, the person called Bélisaire—who should in reality have been named Resignation, Devotion, or Patience—was now obliged to

relinquish his pleasant room and sleep in a closet, the only place on that floor; not for worlds would he have gone farther from Madame Weber.

Their guests gone, and Jack and his mother alone, she was astonished to see him bring out a pile of books.

“What are you going to do?” she asked.

“I am going to study.” And he then told her of the double life he led; of his hopes, and the reward that was held out to him at the end. Until then he had never confided them to her, fearing that she would inform D’Argenton, whom he utterly distrusted, and he feared that in some way his happiness would be compromised. But now that his mother belonged to him alone, he could speak to her of Cécile and of his supreme joy. Jack talked with enthusiasm of his love, but soon saw that his mother did not understand him. She had a certain amount of sentiment, but love had not the same signification for her that it had for him. She listened to him with the same interest that she would have felt in the third act at the Gymnase, when the Ingenue in a white dress, with rose-colored ribbons, listened to the declaration of a lover with frizzed hair. She was pleased with the spectacle as presented by her son, and said two or three times, “How nice! how very nice! It makes me think of Paul and Virginia!”

Fortunately, lovers, when speaking of their passion, listen to the echoes of their words in their own hearts, and Jack, thus absorbed, heard none of the commonplace comments of his mother.

Jack had been living a week in this way when, one evening, Bélisaire came to meet him with a radiant face. “We are to be married at once! Madame Weber has found a ‘comrade.’”

Jack, who had been the unintentional cause of his friend’s disappointment, was equally well pleased. This pleasure, however, did not last; for, on seeing “the comrade,” he received a most unpleasant impression. The man was tall and

powerfully built, but the expression of his face was far from agreeable.

The great day arrived at last. Among the middle classes, a day is generally given to the civil marriage, another to the wedding at the church; but the people to whom time is money cannot afford this. So they generally take Saturday for the two ceremonies.

Bélisaire's wedding, therefore, occurred on that day, and was really one of the most imposing of the many processions they met on their way to the municipality. Although the white dress of the bride was missing, Madame Weber, in her quality of widow, wore a dress of brilliant blue of that bright indigo shade so dear to persons who like solid colors; a many-hued shawl was carefully folded on her arm, and a superb cap, ornamented with ribbons and flowers, displayed her beaming peasant face. She walked by the side of Bélisaire's father, a little dried-up old man, with a hooked nose and abrupt movements, and a perpetual cough that his new daughter-in-law endeavored to soothe by rubbing his back with considerable violence. These repeated frictions somewhat disturbed the dignity of the wedding procession.

Bélisaire came next, giving his arm to his sister, whose nose was as hooked as her father's. Bélisaire himself looked almost handsome; he led by one hand Madame Weber's little child. Then came a crowd of relatives and friends, and finally Jack, Madame de Barancy being unwilling to do more than honor the wedding-dinner with her presence. This repast was to take place at Vincennes.

When the train that brought the party reached the restaurant, the room engaged by Bélisaire was still occupied. This gave them time to look at the lake and to amuse themselves with examining the crowd of merrymakers. They were dancing and singing, playing blind-man's-buff and innumerable other games; under the trees a girl was mending the flounces of a bride's dress. O, those white dresses! With what joy those girls let them drag over the lawn, imagining themselves for that one

occasion women of fashion. It is precisely this illusion that the people seek in their hours of amusement: a pretence of riches, a momentary semblance of the envied and happy of this earth.

Bélisaire's party were too hungry to be gay, and they hailed with joy the announcement that dinner was ready at last. The table was laid in one of those large rooms whose walls were frescoed in faded colors, and whose size was apparently increased by innumerable mirrors. At each end of the table was a huge bouquet of artificial orange blossoms, a centrepiece of pink and white sugar, and ornaments of the same, which had officiated at many a wedding-dinner in the previous six months. They took their seats in solemn silence, though Madame de Barancy had not yet arrived.

The guests were somewhat intimidated by the black-coated waiters, who disdainfully looked at these poor people who were dining at a dollar per head, a sum which each one of the guests thought of with respect, and envied Belisaire who could afford such an extravagant entertainment. The waiters were, however, filled with profound contempt, which they expressed by winks at each other, invisible however to the guests.

Belisaire had just at his side one of these gentlemen, who filled him with holy horror; another, opposite behind his wife's chair, watched him so disagreeably that the good man scarcely dared lift his eyes from the carte,—on which, among familiar words like ducks, chickens, and beans, appeared the well-known names of generals, towns, and battles—Marengo, Richelieu, and so on. Bélisaire, like the others, was stupefied, the more so when two plates of soup were presented with the question, "Bisque, or Purée de Crécy?" Or two bottles: "Xeres, or Pacaset, sir?"

They answered at hazard as one does in some of those society games where you are requested to select one of two flowers. In fact, the answer was of little consequence since both plates contained the same tasteless mixture. There was so much ceremony

that the dinner threatened to be very dull, and interminable as well, from the indecision of the guests as to the dishes they should accept. It was Madame Weber's clear head and decided hand that cut this Gordian knot. She turned to her child. "Eat everything," she said, "it costs us enough."

These words of wisdom had their effect on the whole assembly, and after a little the table was gay enough. Suddenly the door was thrown open, and Ida de Barancy entered, smiling and charming.

"A thousand pardons, my friends, but I had a carriage that crept."

She wore her most beautiful dress, for she rarely had an opportunity nowadays of making a toilette, and produced a most extraordinary effect. The way in which she took her seat by Belisaire, and put her gloves in a wineglass, the manner in which she signed to one of the waiters to bring her the carte, overwhelmed the assembly with admiration. It was delightful to see her order about those imposing waiters. One of them she had recognized, the one who terrified Bélisaire so much. "You are here then, now!" she said carelessly; and shook her bracelets, and kissed her hand to her son, asked for a footstool, some ice, and eau-de-Seltz, and soon knew the resources of the establishment.

"But, good heavens, you are not very gay here!" she cried suddenly. She rose, took her plate in one hand, her glass in the other. "I ask permission to change places with Madame Bélisaire; I am quite sure that her husband will not complain."

This was done with much grace and consideration. The little Weber uttered a shout of indignation on seeing his mother rise from her chair, and all this noise and confusion soon changed the previous stiffness and restraint into laughs and gayety. The waiters went round and round the table executing marvellous feats, serving twenty persons from one duck so adroitly carved and served that each one had as much as he wanted. And the peas fell like hail on the plates; and the beans—prepared at one end of the table with salt, pepper, and butter; and such

butter!—were mixed by a waiter who smiled maliciously as he stirred the fell combination.

At last the champagne came. With the exception of Ida, not one person there knew anything more of this wine than the name; and champagne signified to them riches, gay dinners, and gorgeous festivals. They talked about it in a low voice, waited and watched for it. Finally, at dessert, a waiter appeared with a silver-capped bottle that he proceeded to open. Ida, who never lost an opportunity of making a sensation and assuming an attitude, put her pretty hands over her ears, but the cork came out like any other cork; the waiter, holding the bottle high, went around the table very quickly. The bottle was inexhaustible; each person had some froth and a few drops at the bottom of the glass, which he drank with respect, and even believed that there was still more in the bottle. It did not matter: the magic of the word champagne had produced its effect, and there is so much French gayety in the least particle of its froth that an astonishing animation at once pervaded the assembly. A dance was proposed; but music costs so much!

“Ah! if we only had a piano,” said Ida de Barancy, with a sigh, at the same time moving her fingers on the table as if she knew how to play. Bélisaire disappeared for a few moments, but soon returned with a village musician, who was ready to play until morning. Jack and his mother at first felt out of their element in the noisy romp that ensued, but Ida finally organized a cotillon, and the rustling of her silk skirts and the jangling of her bracelets filled the souls of the younger women with admiration and jealousy. Meanwhile the night wore on, the little Weber was asleep wrapped in a shawl on a sofa in the corner. Jack had made many signs to Ida, who pretended not to understand, carried away as she was by the pleasure and happiness about her. Jack was like an old father who is anxious to take his daughter home from a ball.

“It is late,” he said.

“Wait, dear,” was her answer. At length, however, he seized her cloak, and wrapping it around her, drew her away. There was no train at that hour, and indeed no omnibus; fortunately a fiacre was passing, which they hailed. But the newly married pair decided to return on foot through the Bois de Vincennes. The fresh morning air was delicious after the heat of the restaurant; the child slept sweetly on Bélisaire’s shoulder, and did not even awake when he was placed in his bed. Madame Bélisaire threw aside her wedding-dress, assumed a plainer one, and at once entered on the duties of the day.

CHAPTER XXI. EFFECTS OF POETRY.

The first visit of Madame de Barancy at Etoilles gave Jack great pleasure and also great anxiety. He was proud of his mother, but he knew her, nevertheless, to be weak and rash. He feared Cécile’s calm judgment and intuitive perceptions, keen and quick as they sometimes are in the young. The first few moments tranquillized him a little. The emphatic tone in which Ida addressed Cécile as “my daughter” was all well enough, but when under the influence of a good breakfast Madame de Barancy dropped her serious air and began some of her extravagant stories, Jack felt all his apprehensions revive. She kept her auditors on the qui vive. Some one spoke of relatives that M. Rivals had in the Pyrenees.

“Ah, yes, the Pyrenees!” she sighed. “Gavarni, the Mer de Glace, and all that. I made that journey fifteen years ago with a friend of my family, the Duc de Casares, a Spaniard. I made his acquaintance at Biarritz in a most amusing way!”

Cécile having said how fond she was of the sea, Ida again began,—

“Ah, my love, had you seen it as I have seen it in a tempest off Palma! I was in the saloon with the captain, a coarse sort of man, who insisted on my drinking punch. I refused. Then the wretch got very angry, and opened the window, took me just at the waist, and held me above the water in the lightning and rain.”

Jack tried to cut in two these dangerous recitals, but they came to life again, like those reptiles which, however mutilated, still retain life and animation.

The climax of his uneasiness was reached, however, when, just as his lessons were to begin, he heard his mother propose to Cécile to go down into the garden. What would she say when he was not there? He watched them from the window; Cécile's slender figure and quiet movements were those of a well-born, well-bred woman, while Ida, still handsome, but loud in her style and costume, affected the manners of a young girl. For the first time Jack felt his lessons to be very long, and only breathed freely again when they were all together walking in the woods. But on this day his mother's presence disturbed the harmony. She had no comprehension of love, and saw it only as something utterly ridiculous. But the worst of all was the sudden respect she entertained for les convenances. She recalled the young people, bade them "not to wander away so far, but to keep in sight," and then she looked at the doctor in a significant way. Jack saw more than once that his mother grated on the old doctor's nerves; but the forest was so lovely, Cécile so affectionate, and the few words they exchanged were so mingled with the sweet clatter of birds and the humming of bees, that by degrees the poor boy forgot his terrible companion. But Ida wished to make a sensation, so they stopped at the forester's. Mère Archambauld was delighted to see her old mistress, paid her many compliments, but asked not a question in regard to D'Argenton, her keen personal sense telling her that she had best not. But the sight of this good creature, for a long time so intimately connected with their life at Aulnettes, was too much for Ida. Without waiting for the lunch so carefully prepared by Mother Archambauld, she rose suddenly from her chair, as suddenly as if in answer to a summons unheard by the others, and went swiftly through the forest paths to her old home at Aulnettes.

The tower was more enshrouded than ever in its green foliage, and the blinds were closely drawn. Ida stood in lonely silence, listening to the tale told with silent eloquence by these gray stones. Then she broke a branch from the clematis that

threw its sprays over the wall, and inhaled the breath of its starry white blossoms.

“What is it, dear mother?” said Jack, who had hastened to follow her.

“Ah!” she said, with rapidly falling tears, “you know I have so much buried here!”

Indeed the house, in its melancholy silence and with the Latin inscription over the door, resembled a tomb. She dried her eyes, but for that evening her gayety was gone. In vain did Cécile, who had been told that Madame D’Argenton was separated from her husband, try with minor cares to efface the painful impression of the day; in vain did Jack seek to interest her in all his projects for the future.

“You see, my child,” she said, on her way home, “that it is not best for me to come here with you. I have suffered too much, and the wound is too recent.”

Her voice trembled, and it was easy to see that, after all the humiliations to which she had been subjected by this man, she yet loved him.

For many Sundays after, Jack came alone to Etiolles, and relinquished what to him was the greatest happiness of the day, the twilight walk, and the quiet talk with Cécile, that he might return to Paris in time to dine with his mother. He took the afternoon train, and passed from the tranquillity of the country to the animation of a Sunday in the Faubourg. The sidewalks were covered by little tables, where families sat drinking their coffee, and crowds were standing, with their noses in the air, watching an enormous yellow balloon that had just been released from its moorings.

In remoter streets, people sat on the steps of the doors, and in the courtyard of the large, silent house the concierge was chatting with his neighbors, who had taken chairs out to breathe air a little fresher than they could obtain in their confined quarters within.

Sometimes, in Jack’s absence, Ida, tired of her loneliness, went to a little reading-room kept by a certain Madame Lévèque. The shop was filled with mouldy books, was literally obstructed by magazines and illustrated papers, which she let for a sou a day.

Here lived a dirty, pretentious old woman, who spent her time in making a certain kind of antiquated trimming of narrow, colored ribbons.

It seems that Madame Lévèque had known better days, and that under the first empire her father was a man of considerable importance. “I am the godchild of the Duc de Dantzic,” she said to Ida, with emphasis. She was one of the relics of past days, such as one finds occasionally in the secluded corners of old Paris. Like the dusty contents of her shop, her gilt-edged books torn and incomplete, her conversation glittered with stories of past splendors. That enchanting reign, of which she had seen but the conclusion, had dazzled her eyes, and the mere tone in which she pronounced the titles of that time evoked the memory of epaulettes and gold lace. And her anecdotes of Josephine, and of the ladies of the court! One especial tale Madame Lévèque was never tired of telling: it was of the fire at the Austrian embassy, the night of the famous ball given by the Princess of Schwartzenberg. All her subsequent years had been lighted by those flames, and by that light she saw a procession of gorgeous marshals, tall ladies in very low dresses, with heads dressed à la Titus or à la Grecque, and the emperor, in his green coat and white trousers, carrying in his arms across the garden the fainting Madame de Schwartzenberg.

Ida, with her passion for rank, delighted in the society of this half-crazed old creature, and while the two women sat in the dark shop, with the names of dukes and marquises gliding lightly from their tongues, a workman would come in to buy a paper for a sou, or some woman, impatient for the conclusion of some serial romance, would come in to ask if the magazine had not yet arrived, and cheerfully pay the two cents that would deprive her, if she were old, of her snuff, and, if she were young, of her radishes for breakfast.

Occasionally Madame Lévèque passed a Sunday with friends, and then Ida had no other amusement than that which she derived from turning over a pile of books taken at hazard from Madame Lévèque’s shelves. These books were soiled and

tumbled, with spots of grease and crumbs of bread upon them, showing that they had been read while eating. She sat reading by the window,—reading until her head swam. She read to escape thinking. Singularly out of place in this house, the incessant toil that she saw going on about her depressed her, instead of, as with her son, exciting her to more strenuous exertions.

The pale, sad woman who sat at her machine day after day, the other with her sing-song repetition of the words, “How happy people ought to be who can go to the country in such weather!” exasperated her almost beyond endurance. The transparent blue of the sky, the soft summer air, made all these miseries seem blacker and less endurable; in the same way that the repose of Sunday, disturbed only by church-bells and the twitter of the sparrows on the roofs, weighed painfully on her spirits. She thought of her early life, of her drives and walks, of the gay parties in the country, and above all of the more recent years at Etiolles. She thought of D’Argenton reciting one of his poems on the porch in the moonlight. Where was he? What was he doing? Three months had passed since she left him, and he had not written one word. Then the book fell from her hands, and she sat buried in thought until the arrival of her son, whom she endeavored to welcome with a smile. But he read the whole story in the disorder of the room and in the careless toilet. Nothing was in readiness for dinner.

“I have done nothing,” she said, sadly. “The weather is so warm, and I am discouraged.”

“Why discouraged, dear mother? Are you not with me? You want some little amusement, I fancy. Let us dine out to-day,” he continued, with a tender, pitying smile. But Ida wished to make a toilet; to take out from her wardrobe some one of her pretty costumes of other days, too coquettish, too conspicuous for her present circumstances. To dress as modestly as possible, and walk through these poor streets, afforded her no amusement. In spite of her care to avoid anything noticeable

in her costume, Jack always detected some eccentricity,—in the length of her skirts, which required a carriage, or in the cut of her corsage, or the trimming of her hat. Jack and his mother then went to dine at Bagnolet or Romainville, and dined drearily enough. They attempted some little conversation, but they found it almost impossible. Their lives had been so different that they really now had little in common. While Ida was disgusted with the coarse table-cloth spotted by wine, and polished, with a disgusted face, her plate and glass with her napkin, Jack hardly perceived this negligence of service, but was astonished at his mother's ignorance and indifference upon many other points.

She had certain phrases caught from D'Argenton, a peremptory tone in discussion, a didactic "I think so; I believe; I know." She generally began and finished her arguments with some disdainful gesture that signified, "I am very good to take the trouble to talk to you." Thanks to that miracle of assimilation by which, at the end of some years, husband and wife resemble each other, Jack was terrified to see an occasional look of D'Argenton on his mother's face. On her lips was often to be detected the sarcastic smile that had been the bugbear of his boy-hood, and which he always dreaded to see in D'Argenton. Never had a sculptor found in his clay more docile material than the pretentious poet had discovered in this poor woman.

After dinner, one of their favorite walks on these long summer evenings was the Square des Buttes-Chaumont, a melancholy-looking spot on the old heights of Montfauçon. The grottos and bridges, the precipices and pine groves, seemed to add to the general dreariness. But there was something artificial and romantic in the place that pleased Ida by its resemblance to a park. She allowed her dress to trail over the sand of the alleys, admired the exotics, and would have liked to write her name on the ruined wall, with the scores of others that were already there. When they were tired with walking, they took their seats at the summit of the hill, to enjoy the superb view that was spread out before them. Paris, softened and veiled by dust and smoke, lay at their feet. The heights around the faubourgs looked in the mist like

an immense circle, connected by Pere la Chaise on one side, and Montmartre on the other, with Montfauçon; nearer them they could witness the enjoyment of the people. In the winding alleys and under the groups of trees young people were singing and dancing, while on the hillside, sitting amid the yellowed grass, and on the dried red earth, families were gathered together like flocks of sheep.

Ida saw all this with weary, contemptuous eyes, and her very attitude said, “How inexpressibly tiresome it is!” Jack felt helpless before this persistent melancholy. He thought he might make the acquaintance of some one of these honest, simple families, and perhaps in their society his mother might be cheered. Once he thought he had found what he wanted. It was one Sunday. Before them walked an old man, rustic in appearance, leading two little children, over whom he was bending with that wonderful patience which only grandfathers are possessed of.

“I certainly know that man,” said Jack to his mother; “it is—it must be M. Rondic.”

Rondic it was, but so aged and grown so thin, that it was a wonder that his former apprentice had recognized him. The girl with him was a miniature of Zénaïde, while the boy looked like Maugin.

The good old man showed great pleasure in meeting Jack, but his smile was sad, and then Jack saw that he wore crape on his hat. The youth dared not ask a question until, as they turned a corner, Zénaïde bore down upon them like a ship under full sail. She had changed her plaited skirt and ruffled cap for a Parisian dress and bonnet, and looked larger than ever. She had the arm of her husband, who was now attached to one of the custom-houses, and who was in uniform. Zénaïde adored M. Maugin and was absurdly proud of him, while he looked very happy in being so worshipped.

Jack presented his mother to all these good people; then, as they divided into two groups, he said in a low voice to Zenaïde, “What has happened? Is it possible that Madame Clarisse—”

“Yes, she is dead; she was drowned in the Loire accidentally.”

Then she added, “We say ‘accidentally’ on father’s account; but you, who knew her so well, may be quite sure that it was by no accident that she perished. She died because she could never see Chariot again. Ah, what wicked men there are in this world!”

Jack glanced at his mother, and was quite ready to agree with his companion.

“Poor father! we thought that he could not survive the shock,” resumed Zénaïde; “but then he never suspected the truth. When M. Maugin got his position in Paris, we made him come with us, and we live all together in the Rue des Silas at Charonne. You will come and see him, won’t you, Jack? You know he always loved you; and now only the children amuse him. Perhaps you can make him talk. But let us join him; he is looking at us, and thinks we are speaking of him, and he does not like that.”

Ida, who was deep in conversation with M. Maugin, stopped short as Jack approached her. He suspected that she had been talking of D’Argenton, as indeed she had, praising his genius and recounting his successes, which, had she confined herself to the truth, would not have taken long. They separated, promising to meet again soon; and Jack, not long afterward, called upon them with his mother.

He found the old ornaments on the chimney that he had learned to know so well at Indret, the sponges and corals; he recognized the big wardrobe as an old friend. The rooms were exquisitely clean, and presented a perfect picture of a Breton interior transplanted to Paris. But he soon saw that his mother was bored by Zénaïde, who was too energetic and positive to suit her, and that there, as everywhere else, she was haunted by the same melancholy and the same disgust which she expressed in the brief phrase, “It smells of the work-shop.”

The house, the room she lived in, the bread she ate, all seemed impregnated with one smell, one especial flavor. If she opened the window, she perceived it even more

strongly; if she went out, each breath of wind brought it to her. The people she saw—even her own Jack, when he returned at night with his blouse spotted with oil—exhaled the same baleful odor, which she fancied clung even to herself—the odor of toil—and filled her with immense sadness.

One evening, Jack found his mother in a state of extraordinary excitement; her eyes were bright and complexion animated. “D’Argenton has written to me!” she cried, as he entered the room; “yes, my dear, he has actually dared to write to me. For four months he did not vouchsafe a syllable. He writes me now that he is about to return to Paris, and that, if I need him, he is at my disposal.”

“You do not need him, I think,” said Jack, quietly, though he was in reality as much moved as his mother herself.

“Of course I do not,” she answered, hurriedly.

“And what shall you say?”

“Say! To a wretch who has dared to lift his hand to me? You do not yet know me. I have, thank Heaven, more pride than that. I have just finished his letter, and have torn it into a thousand bits. I am curious to see his house, though, now that I am not there to keep all in order. He is evidently out of spirits, and perhaps he is not well, as he has been for two months at—what is the name of the place?” and she calmly drew from her pocket the letter which she said she had destroyed. “Ah, yes, it is at the springs of Royat that he has been. What nonsense! Those mineral springs have always been bad for him.”

Jack colored at her falsehood, but said not one word. All the evening she was busy, and seemed to have regained the courage and animation of her first days with her son. While at work she talked to herself. Suddenly she crossed the room to Jack.

“You are full of courage, my boy,” she said, kissing him.

He was occupied in watching all that was going on within his mother’s mind. “It is not I whom she kisses,” he said, shrewdly; and his suspicions were confirmed by a

trifle that proved how completely the past had taken possession of the poor woman's mind. She never ceased humming the words of a little song of D'Argenton's, which the poet was in the habit of singing himself at the piano in the twilight. Over and over again she sang the refrain, and the words revived in Jack's mind only sad and shameful memories. Ah, if he had dared, what words he would have said to the woman before him! But she was his mother; he loved her, and wished by his own respect to teach her to respect herself. He therefore kept strict guard over his lips. This first warning of coming danger, however, awoke in him all the jealous foreboding of a man who was about to be betrayed. He studied her way of saying good-bye to him when he left in the morning, and he analyzed her smile of greeting on his return. He could not watch her himself, nor could he confide to any other person the distrust with which she inspired him. He knew how often a woman surrounds the man whom she deceives in an atmosphere of tender attentions,—the manifestations of hidden remorse. Once, on his way home, he thought he saw Hirsch and Labassandre turning a distant corner.

"Has any one been here?" he said to the concierge; and by the way he was answered he saw that some plot was already organized against him. The Sunday after on his return from Etiolles he found his mother so completely absorbed in her book that she did not even hear him come in. He would not have noticed this, knowing her mania for romances, had not Ida made an attempt to conceal the book.

"You startled me," she said, half pouting.

"What are you reading?" he asked.

"Nothing,—some nonsense. And how are our friends?" But as she spoke, a blush covered her face and glowed under her fine transparent skin. It was one of the peculiarities of this childish nature that she was at once prompt and unskilful in falsehood. Annoyed by his earnest gaze, she rose from her chair. "You wish to know what I am reading! Look, then." He saw once more the glossy cover of the Review

that he had read for the first time in the engine-room of the Cydnus; only it was thinner and smaller. Jack would not have opened it if the following title on the outer page had not met his eyes:—

THE PARTING. A POEM. By the Vicomte Amacry d'Abgenton.

And commenced thus:—

"TO ONE WHO HAS GONE. "What! with out one word of farewell, Without a turn of the head..."

Two hundred lines followed these. That there might be no mistake, the name of Charlotte occurred several times. Jack flung down the magazine with a shrug of the shoulders. "And he dared to send you this?"

"Yes; two or three days ago."

Ida was dying to pick up the book from the floor, but dared not. After a while she stooped, carelessly.

"You do not intend to keep those verses, do you? They are simply absurd."

"But I do not think them so."

"He simply beats his wings and crows, mother dear; his words touch no human heart."

"Be more just, Jack,"—her voice trembled,—"heaven knows that I know M. D'Argenton better than any one, his faults and the defects of his nature, because I have suffered from them. The man I give up to you; as to the poet, it is a different thing. In the opinion of every one, the peculiarity of M. D'Argenton's genius is the sympathetic quality of his verses. Musset had its irksome degree; and I think that the beginning of this poem, 'The Parting,' is very touching: the young woman who goes away in the morning fog in her ball-dress without one word of farewell."

Jack could not restrain himself. "But the woman is yourself," he cried, "and you know under what circumstances you left."

She answered, coldly,—

“Is it kind in you, my son, to recall such humiliations? Had M. D’Argenton treated me a thousand times worse than he has, I should be able, I hope, to recognize the fact that he stands at the head of the poets of France. More than one person who speaks of him with contempt to-day, will yet be proud of having known him and of having sat at his table!” And as she finished she left the room with great dignity. Jack took his seat at his desk, but his heart was not in his work. He felt that “the enemy,” as in his childish days he had called the vicomte, was gradually making his approaches. In fact Amaury d’Argenton was as unhappy apart from Charlotte as she was herself. Victim and executioner, indispensable to each other, he felt profoundly the emptiness of divided lives. From the first hour of their separation the poet had adopted a dramatic and Byronic tone as of a broken heart. He was seen in the restaurants at night, surrounded by a group of flatterers who talked of her; he wished to have every one know his misery and its details; he wished to have people think that he was drowning his sorrows in dissipation. When he said, “Waiter! bring me some pure absinthe,” it was that some one at the next table might whisper, “He is killing himself by inches—all for a woman!”

D’Argenton succeeded simply in disordering his stomach and injuring his constitution. His “attacks” were more frequent, and Charlotte’s absence was extremely inconvenient. What other woman would ever have endured his perpetual complaints? Who would administer his powders and tisanes. He was afraid, too, to be alone, and made some one, Hirsch or another, sleep on a sofa in his room. The evenings were dreary because he was environed by disorder and dust, which all women, even that foolish Ida, contrive to get rid of in some way. Neither the fire nor the lamp would burn, and currents of air whistled under all the doors; and in the depths of his selfish nature D’Argenton sincerely regretted his companion, and became seriously unhappy. Then he decided to take a journey, but that did him no good, to judge from the melancholy tone of his letters to his friends.

One idea tormented him, that the woman whom he so regretted was happy away from him, and in the society of her son. Moronval said, “Write a poem about it,” and D’Argenton went to work. Unfortunately, instead of being calmed by this composition, he was more excited than ever, and the separation became more and more intolerable. As soon as the Review appeared, Hirsch and Labassandre were bidden to carry a copy at once to the Rue des Panoyeaux.

This done, D’Argenton decided that it was time to make a grand coup. He dressed with great care, took a fiacre, and presented himself at Charlotte’s door at an hour that he knew Jack must be away. D’Argenton was very pale, and the beating of his heart choked him. One of the greatest mysteries in human nature is that such persons have a heart, and that that heart is capable of beating. It was not love that moved him, but he saw a certain romance in the affair, the carriage stationed at the corner as for an elopement, and above all the hope of gratifying his hatred of Jack. He pictured to himself the disappointment of the youth on his return to find that the bird had flown. He meant to appear suddenly before Charlotte, to throw himself at her feet, and, giving her no time to think, to carry her away with him at once. She must be very much changed since he last saw her if she could resist him. He entered her room without knocking, saying in a low voice, “It is I.”

There was no Charlotte; but instead, Jack stood before him. Jack, on account of the occurrence of his mother’s birthday, had a holiday, and was at work with his books. Ida was asleep on her bed in the alcove. The two men looked at each other in silence. This time the poet had not the advantage. In the first place, he was not at home; next, how could he treat as an inferior this tall, proud-looking fellow, in whose intelligent face appeared, as if still more to exasperate the lover, something of his mother’s beauty.

“Why do you come here?” asked Jack.

The other stammered and colored. “I was told that your mother was here.”

“So she is; but I am with her, and you shall not see her.”

This was said rapidly and in a low voice; then Jack took D’Argenton by the shoulder and wheeled him back into the corridor. The poet with some difficulty preserved his footing.

“Jack,” he said, endeavoring to be dignified,—“there has been a misunderstanding for some time between us, but now that you are a man, all this should cease. I offer you my hand, my child.”

Jack shrugged his shoulders. “Of what use are these theatricals between us, sir? You detest me, and I return the compliment!”

“And since when have we been such enemies, Jack?”

“Ever since we knew each other! My earliest recollection is of absolute hatred toward you. Besides, why should we not hate each other like the bitterest of foes? By what other name should I call you? Who and what are you? Believe me that if ever in my life I have thought of you without anger, it has never been without a blush of shame.”

“It is true, Jack, that our position toward each other has been entirely false. But, my dear friend, life is not a romance.”

But Jack cut short this discourse.

“You are right, sir, life is not a romance: it is, on the contrary, a very serious and positive matter. In proof of which, permit me to say that every instant of my time is occupied, and that I cannot lose one of them in useless discussions. For ten years my mother has been your slave. All that I suffered in this time my pride will never let you know. My mother now belongs to me, and I mean to keep her. What do you want of her? Her hair is gray, and your treatment of her has made great wrinkles on her forehead. She is no longer a pretty woman, but she is my mother!”

They looked each other straight in the face as they stood in that narrow, squalid

corridor. It was a fitting frame for a scene so humiliating.

“You strangely mistake the sense of my words,” said the poet, deadly pale. “I know that your resources must be very moderate; I come, as an old friend, to see if I can serve you in any way.”

“We need nothing. The work of my hands supplies us with all we require.”

“You are very proud, my dear Jack; you were not so always.”

“That is very true, sir, and also that your presence, that I once was forced to endure, has now become odious to me.”

The attitude of the young man was so determined and so insulting, his looks so thoroughly carried out his words, that the poet dared not add one word, and descended the stairs, where his careful costume was strangely out of place. When Jack heard his last footfall, he returned to his room: on the threshold stood Ida, strangely white, her eyes swollen with tears and sleep.

“I was there,” she said in a low voice; “I heard everything, even that I was old and had wrinkles.”

He approached her, took her hands, and looked into the depths of her eyes.

“He is not far away. Shall I call him?”

She disengaged her hands, threw her arms around his neck, and with one of those sudden impulses that prevented her from being utterly unworthy, exclaimed, “You are right, Jack; I am your mother, and only your mother!”

Some days after this scene, Jack wrote the following letter to M. Rivals:—

“My Dear Friend: She has left me, and gone back to him. It all happened in such an unexpected manner that I have not yet recovered from the blow. Alas! she of whom I must complain is my mother. It would be more dignified to keep silence, but I cannot. I knew in my childhood a negro lad who said, ‘If the world could not sigh, the world would stifle!’ I never fully understood this until to-day, for it seems to me

that if I do not write you this letter, that I could not live. I could not wait until Sunday because I could not speak before Cécile. I told you of the explanation that man and I had, did I not? Well, from that time my mother was so very sad, and seemed so worn out by the scene she had gone through, that I resolved to change our residence. I understood that a battle was being fought, and that, if I wished her to be victorious, if I wished to keep my mother with me, that I must employ all means and devices. Our street and house displeased her. I wanted something gayer and more airy. I hired then at Charonne Rue de Silas three rooms newly papered. I furnished these rooms with great care. All the money I had saved—pardon me these details—I devoted to this purpose. Bélisaire aided me in moving, while Zénaïde was in the same street, and I counted on her in many ways. All these arrangements were made secretly, and I hoped a great surprise and pleasure was in store for my mother. The place was as quiet as a village street, the trees were well grown and green, and I fancied that she would, when established there, have less to regret in the country-life she had so much enjoyed.

"Yesterday evening everything was in readiness. Belisaire was to tell her that I was waiting for her at the Rondics, and then he was to take her to our new home. I was there waiting; white curtains hung at all the windows, and great bunches of roses were on the chimney. I had made a little fire, for the evening was cool, and it gave a home look to the room. In the midst of my contentment I had a sudden presentiment. It was like an electric spark. 'She will not come.' In vain did I call myself an idiot, in vain did I arrange and rearrange her chair and her footstool. I knew that she would never come. More than once in my life I have had these intuitions. One might believe that Fate, before striking her heaviest blows, had a moment of compassion, and gave me a warning.

"She did not come, but Bélisaire brought a note from her. It was very brief, merely stating that M. D'Argenton was very ill, and that she regarded it as her duty to watch at his side. As soon as he was well she would return. Ill! I had not thought of that. I

might call myself ill, too, and keep her at my bedside. How well he understood her, the wretch! How thoroughly he had studied that weak but kindly nature! You remember those ‘attacks’ he talked of at Etiolles, and which so soon disappeared after a good dinner. It is one of those which he now has. But my mother was only too glad of an excuse, and allowed herself to be deceived. But to return to my story. Behold me alone in this little home, amid all the wasted efforts, time and money! Was it not cruel? I could not remain there; I returned to my old room. The house seemed to me as sad as a funeral-chamber. I permitted the fire to die out, and the roses wither and fall on the marble hearth below with a gentle rustle. I took the rooms for two years, and I shall keep them with something of the same superstition with which one preserves for a long time the cage from which some favorite bird has flown. If my mother returns we will go there together. But if she does not I shall never inhabit the place. I have now told you all, but do not let Cécile see this letter. Ah, my friend, will she too desert me? The treachery of those we love is terrible indeed. But of what am I thinking; I have her word and her promise, and Cécile always tells the truth.”

CHAPTER XXII. CÉCILE UNHAPPY RESOLVE.

For a long time Jack had faith that his mother would return. In the morning, in the evening, in the silence of midday, he fancied that he heard the rustling of her dress, her light step on the threshold. When he went to the Rondics he glanced at the little house, hoping to see the windows opened and Ida installed in the refuge, the address of which, with the key, he had sent to her: “The house is ready. Come when you will.” Not a word in reply. The desertion was final and absolute.

Jack was in great grief. When our mothers do us harm, it wounds and grieves us, and seems like a direct cruelty from the hand of God. But Cécile was the magician to cure him; she knew just the words to use, and her delicate tenderness defied the

rough trials of destiny. A great resource to him at this time was hard work, which is one's best defence against sorrow and regrets. While his mother had been with him, she, without knowing it, had often prevented him from working. Her indecision had been at times very harassing. She sometimes was all ready to go out, with hat and shawl on, when she would suddenly decide to remain at home. Now that she was gone, he took rapid strides and regained his lost time. Each Sunday he went to Etiolles; he was at once more in love, and wiser. The doctor was delighted with the progress of his pupil; before a year was over, he said, if he went on in this way, he could take his degree.

These words thrilled Jack with joy, and when he repeated them to Bélisaire, the little attic positively glowed and palpitated with happiness. Madame Bélisaire was suddenly filled with a desire to learn, and her husband must teach her to read. But while M. Rivals was pleased at Jack's progress with his books, he was discontented with the state of his health; the old cough had come back, his eyes were feverish and his hands hot.

"I do not like this," said the good man; "you work too hard; you must stop; you have plenty of time: Cécile does not mean to run away."

Never had the girl been more loving and tender; she seemed to feel that she must take his mother's place as well as her own; and it was precisely this sweetness that induced Jack to make greater exertions each day. His bodily frame was in the same condition as that of the Fakirs of India—urged to such a point of feverish excitement that pain becomes a pleasure. He was grateful to the cold of his little attic, and to the hard dry cough that kept him from sleeping. Sometimes at his writing-table he suddenly felt lightness throughout all his being—a strange clearness of perception and an extraordinary excitement of all his intellectual faculties; but this was accompanied with great physical exhaustion.

His work went like lightning, and all the difficulties of his task disappeared. He

would have gone on thus to the end of his labor, had he not received a painful shock. A telegram arrived:

“Do not come to-morrow; we are going away for a week. Rivals.”

Jack received that despatch just as Madame Bélisaire had ironed his fine linen for the next day. The suddenness of this departure, the brevity of the despatch, and even the printed characters instead of his friend’s well-known writing, affected him most painfully. He expected a letter from Cécile or the doctor to explain the mystery, but nothing came, and for a week he was a prey to suspense and anxiety. The truth was: neither Cécile nor the doctor had left home, but that M. Rivals wished for time to prepare the youth for an unexpected blow—for a decision of Cécile’s so extraordinary that he hoped his granddaughter would be induced to reconsider it. One evening, on coming into the house, he had found Cécile in a state of singular agitation; her lips were pale but firmly closed. He tried to make her smile at the dinner-table, but in vain; and suddenly, in reply to some remark of his in regard to Jack’s coming, she said, “I do not wish him to come.”

He looked at her in amazement. She was as pale as death, but in a firm voice she repeated, “I do not wish him to come on Sunday, or ever again.”

“What is the matter, my child?”

“Nothing, dear grandfather, save that I can never marry Jack.”

“You frighten me, Cécile! Tell me what you mean.”

“I am simply beginning to understand myself. I do not love him; I was mistaken.”

“Good heavens, child, are you quite mad? You have had some childish misunderstanding.”

“No, grandpapa, I assure you that I have for Jack a sister’s friendship, nothing more. I cannot be his wife.”

The doctor was startled. “Cécile,” he said, gravely, “do you love any other person?”

She colored. “No; but I do not wish to marry;” and to all that M. Rivals said she would make no other reply.

He asked her what would be said, what would be thought by their little world. “Remember,” he said, “that to Jack this will be a frightful blow; his whole future will be sacrificed.”

Cécile’s pale features quivered nervously. Her grandfather took her hand.

“My child,” he said, “think well before you decide a question of such importance.”

“No,” she answered; “the sooner he knows my decision the better for us both. I know that I am going to pain him deeply, but the longer we delay the worse it will be, and I cannot see him again until he knows the truth; I am incapable of such treachery.”

“Then you mean to give the boy his dismissal,” said the doctor, in a rage. “Good heavens! what strange creatures women are!”

She looked at him with such an expression of despair that he stopped short.

“No, no, little girl, I am not angry with you. It is my fault more than yours. You were too young to know your own mind. I am an old fool, and shall always be one until the bitter end.”

Then came the painful duty of writing to Jack. He began a dozen letters, destroyed them all, and finally sent the telegram, hoping that Cécile would have come to her senses before the week was over.

The next Saturday, when Dr. Rivals said to his granddaughter, “He will come to-morrow; is your decision irrevocable?”

“Irrevocable,” she said, slowly.

Jack arrived early on Sunday. When he reached the door the servant said, “My master is waiting for you in the garden.”

Jack felt chilled to the heart, and the doctor’s face increased his fears, for he, though

for forty years accustomed to the sight of human suffering, was as troubled as Jack.

“Cécile is here—is she not?” were the youth’s first words.

“No, my friend, I left her—at—where we have been, you know; and she will remain some time.”

“Dr. Rivals, tell me what is wrong. She does not wish to see me again? Is that it?”

The doctor could not answer. Jack seated himself for fear he should fall. They were at the foot of the garden. It was a fresh, bright November morning; hoar-frost lay on the lawn, a faint haze hung over the distant hills and reminded him of that day at Coudray, the vintage, and their first whisper of love. The doctor laid a paternal hand on his shoulder. “Jack,” he whispered, “do not be unhappy. She is very young and will perhaps change her mind. It is a mere caprice.”

“No, doctor, Cécile never has caprices. That would be horrible—to drive a knife into a man’s heart merely from caprice! I am sure she has reflected for a long time before she came to this decision. She knew that her love was my life, and that in tearing it up my life would also perish. If she has done this, then it is because she knew well that it was her duty so to do. I ought to have expected it; I should have known that so great a happiness could not be for me.”

He staggered to his feet. His friend took his hand. “Forgive me, my brave boy; I hoped to make you both happy.”

“Do not reproach yourself. Tell her that I accept her decision. Last year,” he continued, “I began the only happy season of my life. I was born on that day, and to-day I die. But these few happy months I owe to you and to Cécile;” and the youth hurried away.

“But you will breakfast with me,” said the doctor.

“No; I should be too sad a guest.”

He crossed the garden with a firm step, and went away without once looking back.

Had he turned he would have seen, half hidden by the curtain of a window in the second story, a face as pale and agitated as his own. The girl extended her slender arms, and tears rained down her cheeks. The following days were sad enough. The little house that had for months been bright and gay, resumed its ancient mournful aspect. The doctor, much troubled, noticed that his granddaughter spent much of her time in her mother's former room. Where Madeleine had formerly wept, her child now shed in turn her tears. "Would she die as did her mother?"

The doctor asked himself, day after day, If she did not love Jack, why was she so sad? If she did love him, why had she refused him? The old man was sure that there was some mystery, something that he ought to know; but at the least question, Cécile ran away as if in fear.

One night the bell rang a summons from a dying man. It was the husband of old Salé, who had met with an accident. These people lived near Aulnettes, in a miserable little hole, and on a straw bed in the corner lay the sick man. When Dr. Rivals entered the place he was nearly suffocated by the odor of burning herbs.

"What have you been doing here, Mother Salé?" he said. The old woman hesitated, and wished to tell a falsehood; he gave her no time, however. "So Hirsch is here again, is he?" he continued. "Open the doors and windows, you will be suffocated."

While M. Rivals bent over the sick man, he half opened his eyes. "Tell him, wife, tell him," he muttered.

The old woman paid no attention, and the man began again: "Tell him, I say, tell him."

The doctor looked at Mother Salé, who turned a deep scarlet. "I am sure I am very sorry if I said anything to hurt the feelings of such a good young lady," she muttered.

"What young lady? Of whom do you speak?" asked the doctor, turning hastily around.

“Well, sir, I will tell you the truth. The mad doctor gave me twenty francs to tell Mamselle Cécile the story of her father and mother.”

M. Rivals seized the old peasant woman and shook her violently.

“And you dared to do that?” he cried, in a furious rage.

“It was for twenty francs. I could never have opened my lips but for the twenty francs, sir. In the first place, I knew nothing about it until he told me, so that I could repeat it.”

“The wretch! But who could have told him?”

A groan from the sick-bed recalled the physician to his duty. All the long night he watched there, and when all was over he returned in haste to Etiolles and went directly in search of Cécile. Her room was empty, and the bed had not been slept in. His heart stood still. He ran to the office, still he found no one. But the door of Madeleine’s old room stood open, and there among the relics of the dear dead, prostrate on the Prie-Dieu, was Cécile asleep, in an attitude that told of a night of prayer and tears. She opened her eyes as her grandfather touched her.

“And the wretches told you the secret that we have taken so much pains to hide from you! And strangers and enemies told you, my poor little darling, the sad tale we concealed.”

She hid her face on his shoulder. “I am so ashamed,” she whispered.

“And this is the reason that you did not wish to marry? Tell me why?”

“Because I did not wish to acknowledge my mother’s dishonor, and my conscience compelled me to have no secrets from my husband. There was but one thing to do, and I did it.”

“But you love him?”

“With my whole heart; and I believe he loves me so well that he would marry me in spite of my shameful history; but I would never consent to such a sacrifice. A man

does not marry a girl who has no father—who has no name, or, if she had one, it would be that of a robber and forger."

"But you are mistaken, my child; Jack was proud and happy to marry you with a thorough knowledge of your history. I told it all to him, and if you had had more confidence in me, you would have avoided this trial to us all."

"And he was willing to marry me!"

"Child! he loves you. Besides, your destinies are similar. He has no father, and his mother has never been married. The only difference between you is that your mother was a saint, and his is a sinner."

Then the doctor, who had told Jack Cécile's history, now related to her the long martyrdom of the youth she loved. He told her of his exile from his mother's arms—of all that he had endured. "I understand it all now," he cried; "it is she who has told Hirsch of your mother's marriage."

While the doctor was talking, Cécile was overwhelmed with despair to think that she had caused Jack, already so unhappy, so much needless sorrow. "O, how he has suffered!" she sobbed. "Have you heard anything from him?"

"No; but he can come and tell you himself all that you wish to know," answered her grandfather, with a smile.

"But he may not wish to come."

"Well, then, we will go to him. It is Sunday; let us find him and bring him home with us."

An hour or two later, M. Rivals and his granddaughter were on their way to Paris. Just after they left, a man stopped before the house. He looked at the little door. "This is the place," he said, and he rang. The servant opened the door, but seeing before her one of those dangerous pedlers that wander through the country, she attempted to close it again.

“What do you want?”

“The gentleman of the house.”

“He is not at home.”

“And the young lady?”

“She is not at home, either.”

“When will they be back?”

“I have no idea!” And she closed the door.

“Good heavens!” said Bélisaire, in a choked voice; “and must he be permitted to die without any help?”

CHAPTER XXIII. A MELANCHOLY SPECTACLE.

That evening there was a great literary entertainment at the editors of the Review; a fête had been arranged to celebrate Charlotte’s return, at which it was proposed that D’Argenton should read his new poem.

But was there not something rather ridiculous in deploring the absence of a person who was then present? And how could he describe the sufferings of a deserted lover, he who was supposed at the moment to be at the summit of bliss, by reason of the return of the beloved object? Never had the apartments been so luxuriously arranged; flowers were there in profusion. The toilet of Charlotte was in exquisite taste, white with clusters of violets, and all the surroundings breathed an atmosphere of riches. Yet nothing could have been more deceptive. The Review was in a dying condition; the numbers appearing at longer intervals, and growing small by degrees and beautifully less. D’Argenton had swallowed up in it the half of his fortune, and now wished to sell it. It was this unfortunate situation, added to an attack skilfully managed, that had induced the foolish Charlotte to return to him. He had only to assume before her the air of a great man crushed by unmerited misfortune, for her to

reply that she would serve him always.

D'Argenton was foolish and conceited, but he understood the nature of this woman in a most wonderful degree. She thought him handsomer and more fascinating than he was twelve years before, when she saw him for the first time, under the chandeliers of the Moronval salon. Many of the same persons were there also: Labassandre in bottle-green velvet, with the high boots of Faust; and Dr. Hirsch with his coat-sleeves spotted by various chemicals; and Moronval in a black coat very white in the seams, and a white cravat very black in the folds; several "children of the sun,"—the everlasting Japanese prince, and the Egyptian from the banks of the Nile. What a strange set of people they were! They might have been a band of pilgrims on the march toward some unknown Mecca, whose golden lamps retreat before them. During the twelve years that we have known them, many have fallen from the ranks, but others have risen to take their places; nothing discourages them, neither cold nor heat, nor even hunger. They hurry on, but they never arrive. Among them D'Argenton, better clothed and better fed, resembled a rich Hadji with his harem, his pipes, and his riches; on this evening he was especially radiant, for he had triumphed.

During the reading of the poem Charlotte sat in an attitude of feigned indifference, blushing occasionally at veiled allusions to herself. Near her was Madame Moronval, who, small as she was, seemed quite tall because of the extraordinary height of her forehead and the length of her chin. The poem went on and on, the fire crackled on the hearth, and the wind rattled against the glass doors of the balcony, as it did on a certain night of which Charlotte apparently had but little remembrance. Suddenly, during a most pathetic passage, the door opened suddenly; the servant appeared, and with a terrified air summoned her mistress.

"Madame, madame!" she cried.

Charlotte went to her. "What is it?" she asked.

“A man insists on seeing you. I told him that it was impossible; but he said he would wait for you, and he seated himself on the stairs.”

“I will see him,” said Charlotte, much moved; for she guessed at the purport of the message.

But D’Argenton objected, and turning toward Labassandre, he said, “Will you have the goodness to see who this intruder is?” and the poet turned back to the table to resume his reading. But the door opened again wide enough to admit the head and arm of Labassandre, who beckoned earnestly.

“What is it?” said D’Argenton, impatiently, when he reached the ante-room.

“Jack is very ill,” said the tenor.

“I don’t believe it,” answered the poet.

“This man swears that it is so.”

D’Argenton looked at the man, whose face was not absolutely unknown to him.

“Did you come from the gentleman,—that is to say, did he send you?”

“No; he is too sick to send any one. It is three weeks since he has been in his bed, and very, very ill.”

“What is his disease?”

“Something on the lungs, and the doctors say that he cannot live; so I thought I had better come and tell his mother.”

“What is your name?”

“Bélisaire, sir; but the lady knows me.”

“Very well, then,” said the poet, “you will say to the one who sent you, that the game is a good one, though rather old, and he had better try something else.”

“Sir?” said the pedler, interrogatively, for he did not comprehend these sarcastic words.

But D'Argenton had left the room, and Bélisaire stood in silent amazement, having caught a glimpse of the lighted salon and its crowd of people.

"It is nothing, only a mistake," said the poet on his entrance; and while he majestically resumed his reading, the pedler hurried home through the dark streets, through the sharp hail and fierce wind, eager to reach Jack, who lay in a high fever, on the narrow iron bed in the attic-room.

He had been taken ill on his return from Etiolles; he lay there, almost without speaking, a victim to fever and a severe cold, so serious, that the physicians warned his friends that they had everything to fear. Bélisaire wished to summon M. Rivals, but to this Jack refused to consent. This was the only energy he had shown since his illness, and the only time he had spoken voluntarily, save when he told his friend to take his watch, and a ring he owned, and sell them.

All Jack's savings had been absorbed in furnishing the rooms at Charonne, and the Bélisaire household was equally impoverished through their recent marriage. But it mattered very little; the pedler and his wife were capable of every sacrifice for their friend; they carried to the Mont de Piété the greater part of their furniture, piece by piece—for medicines were so dear. They were advised to send Jack to the hospital. "He would be better off; and, besides, he would then cost you nothing," was the argument employed. The good people were now at the end of their resources, and decided to inform Charlotte of her son's danger.

"Bring her back with you," said Madame Bélisaire to her husband. "To see his mother would be such a comfort to the lad. He never speaks of her because he is so proud."

But Bélisaire did not bring her. He returned in a very unhappy frame of mind, from the reception he had received. His wife, with her child asleep on her lap, talked in a low voice to a neighbor, in front of a poor little fire—such a one as is called a widow's fire by the people. The two women listened to Jack's painful breathing, and

to the horrible cough that choked him. One would never have recognized this unfurnished, dismal room as the bright attic where cheerful voices had resounded such a short time before. There was no sign of books or studies. A pot of tisane was simmering on the hearth, filling the air with that peculiar odor which tells of a sickroom. Bélisaire came in.

“Alone?” said his wife.

He told in a low voice that he had not been permitted to see Jack’s mother.

“But had you no blood in your veins? You should have entered by force and called aloud, ‘Madame, your son is dying!’ Ah, my poor Bélisaire, you will never be anything but a weak chicken!”

“But, had I undertaken such a thing, I should simply have been arrested,” said the poor man, in a distressed tone.

“But what are we going to do?” resumed Madame Bélisaire. “This poor boy must have better care than we can give him.”

A neighbor spoke. “He must go to the hospital, as the physician said.”

“Hush, hush! not so loud!” said Bélisaire, pointing to the bed; “I’m afraid he heard you.”

“What of that? He is not your brother, nor your son; and it would be better for you in every respect.”

“But he is my friend,” answered Bélisaire, proudly; and in his tone was so much honest devotion that his wife’s eyes filled with tears.

The neighbors shrugged their shoulders and went away. After their departure, the room looked less cold and less bare.

Jack had heard all that was said. In spite of his weakness he slept little, and lay with his face turned to the wall, with eyes wide open. If that blank surface, wrinkled and tarnished like the face of a very old woman, could have spoken, it would have said

that in those pitiful eyes but one expression could have been seen, that of utter and overwhelming despair. He never complained, however; he even tried, at times, to smile at his stout nurse, when she brought him his tisanes. The long and solitary days passed away in this inaction and helplessness. Why was he not strong in health and body like the people about him, and yet for whom did he wish to labor? His mother had left him, Cécile had deserted him. The faces of these two women haunted him day and night. When Charlotte's gay and indifferent smile faded away, the delicate features of Cécile appeared before him, veiled in the mystery of her strange refusal; and the youth lay there incapable of a word or a gesture, while his pulses beat with accelerated force, and his hollow cough shook him from head to foot.

The day after this conversation at Jack's bedside, Madame Bélisaire was much startled, on entering the room, to find him, tall and gaunt, sitting in front of the fire. "Why are you out of your bed?" she asked with severity.

"I am going to the hospital, my kind friend; it is impossible for me to stay here any longer. Do not attempt to detain me, for go I will."

"But, Mr. Jack, you cannot walk there, weak as you are."

"Yes, I can, if your husband will give me the help of his arm."

It was useless to resist such determination, and Jack said farewell to Madame Bélisaire, and descended the stairs with one sad look of farewell at the humble home which had been illuminated by so many fair dreams and hopes. How long the walk was! They stopped occasionally, but dared not linger long, for the air was sharp. Under the lowering December skies the sick youth looked worse even than when he lay in his bed. His hair was wet with perspiration, the hurrying crowds made him dizzy and faint. Paris is like a huge battlefield where mere existence demands a struggle; and Jack seemed like a wounded soldier borne from the field by a comrade.

It was still early when they reached the hospital. Early as it was, however, they

found the huge waiting-room filled with persons. An enormous stove made the air of the room almost intolerable, with its smell of hot iron. When Jack entered, assisted by Bélisaire/all eyes were turned upon him. They were awaiting the arrival of the physician, who would give, or refuse, a card of admittance. Each one was describing his symptoms to some indifferent hearer, and endeavoring to show that he was more ill than any one else. Jack listened to these dismal conversations, seated between a stout man who coughed violently, and a slender young girl whose thin shawl was so tightly drawn over her head that only her wild and affrighted eyes were to be seen. Then the door opened, and a small, wiry man appeared; it was the physician. A profound silence followed all along the benches. The doctor warmed his hands at the stove, while he cast a scrutinizing glance about the room. Then he began his rounds, followed by a boy carrying the cards of admission to the different hospitals. What joy for the poor wretches when they were pronounced sick enough to receive a ticket. What disappointment, what entreaties from those who were told that they must struggle on yet a little longer! The examination was brief, and if it seemed somewhat brutal at times, it must be remembered that the number of applicants was very large, and that the poor creatures loved to linger over the recital of their woes.

Finally the physician reached the stout man next to Jack. “And what is the matter with you, sir?” he asked.

“My chest burns like fire,” was the answer.

“Ah, your chest burns like fire, does it! Do you not sometimes drink too much brandy?”

“Never, sir,” answered the patient indignantly.

“Well, then, if you do not drink brandy, how about wine?”

“I drink what I want of that, of course.”

“Ah, yes, I understand! You drink with your friends.”

“On pay-days I do, certainly.”

“That is, you get drunk once in the week. Let me see your tongue.”

When the physician reached Jack, he examined him attentively, asked his age and how long he had been ill. Jack answered with much difficulty, and while he spoke, Bélisaire stood behind him with a face full of anxiety.

“Stand up, my man,” and the doctor applied his ear to the damp clothing of the invalid. “Did you walk here?”

“Yes, sir.”

“It is most extraordinary that you were able to do so, in the state in which you are; but you must not try it again;” and he handed him a ticket and passed on to continue his inspection.

Of all the thousand rapid and confused impressions that one receives in the streets of Paris, do you remember any one more painful than the sight of one of those litters, sheltered from the sun’s rays by a striped cover, and borne by two men, one behind and the other in front,—the form of a human being vaguely defined under the linen sheets? Women cross themselves when these litters pass them, as they do when a crow flies over their heads.

Sometimes, a mother, a daughter, or a sister, walks at the side of the sick man, their eyes swimming in tears at this last indignity to which the poor are subjected. Jack thus lay, consoled by the sound of the familiar tread of his faithful Bélisaire, who occasionally took his hand to prove to him that he was not completely deserted.

The sick man at last reached the hospital to which he had been ordered. It was a dreary structure, looking out on one side upon a damp garden, on the other on a dark court. Twenty beds, two arm-chairs, and a stove, were the furniture of the large room to which Jack was carried. Five or six phantoms in cotton nightcaps looked up from a game of dominos to inspect him, and two or three more started from the stove as if frightened.

The corner of the room was brightened by an altar to the Virgin, decorated with

flowers, candles, and lace; and near by was the desk of the matron, who came forward, and in a soft voice, the tones of which seemed half lost among the folds of her veil, said:

“Poor fellow, how sick he looks! he must go to bed at once. We have no bed yet, but the one at the end there will soon be empty. While we are waiting, we will put him on a couch.”

This couch was placed close to the bed “that would soon be empty,” from whence were heard long sighs, dreary enough in themselves, but made a thousand times more melancholy by the utter indifference with which they were heard by the others in the room. The man was dying, but Jack was himself too ill to notice this. He hardly heard Bélisaire’s “au revoir” nor the rattling of dishes as the soup was distributed, nor a whispering at his side; he was not asleep, but exhausted by fatigue. Suddenly a woman’s voice, calm and clear, said, “Let us pray.”

He saw the dim outline of a woman kneeling near the altar, but in vain did he attempt to follow the words that fell rapidly from her lips. The concluding sentence reached him, however.

“Protect, O God, my friends and my enemies, all prisoners and travellers, the sick and the dying.”

Jack slept a feverish sleep, and his dreams were a confused mixture of prisoners rattling their chains, and of travellers wandering over endless roads. He was one of these travellers: he was on a highway, like that of Etiolles; Cécile and his mother were before him refusing to wait until he could reach them; this he was prevented from doing by a row of enormous machines, the pistons of which were moving with dizzy haste, and from whose chimneys were pouring out dark volumes of smoke. Jack determined to pass between them; he is seized by their iron arms, torn and mangled, and scalded with the hot steam; but he got through and took refuge in the Foret de Sénart, amid the freshness of which Jack became once more a child and

was on his way to the forester's; but there at the cross-road stood mother Salé; he turned to run, and ran for miles, with the old woman close behind him; he heard her nearer and nearer, he felt her hot breath on his shoulder; she seized him at last, and with all her weight crushed in his chest. Jack awoke with a start; he recognized the large room, the beds in a line, and heard the sighs and coughs. He dreamed no more, and yet he still felt the same weight across his body, something so cold and heavy that he called aloud in terror. The nurses ran, and lifted something, placed it in the next bed, and drew the curtains round it closely.

CHAPTER XXIV. DEATH IN THE HOSPITAL.

"Come, wake up! Visitors are here."

Jack opened his eyes, and the first thing that struck him was the curtains of the next bed,—they hung in such straight and motionless folds to the very ground.

"Well, my boy, you had a pretty bad time last night. The poor fellow in the next bed had convulsions and fell over on you. I suppose you were terribly frightened. Now raise yourself a little that we may see you. But you are very weak."

The man who spoke was about forty years of age, wearing a velvet coat and a white apron. His beard was fair and his eyes bright. He feels the sick man's pulse and asks him some questions.

"What is your trade?"

"A machinist."

"Do you drink?"

"Not now; I did at one time."

Then a long silence.

"What sort of a life have you led, my poor boy?"

Jack saw in the physician's face the same sympathetic interest that he had perceived

the previous day. The students surrounded the bed, and the doctor explained to them various symptoms that he observed. They were at once interesting and alarming, he said; and Jack listened with some curiosity to the words “inspiration,” “expiration,” “phthisis,” &c., and at last understood that his was looked upon as a most critical case,—so critical that, after the physician had left the room, the good sister approached, and with gentle discretion asked if his family were in Paris, and if he could send to them.

His family! Who were they? A man and a woman who were already there at the foot of the bed. They belonged to the lower classes; but he had no other friends than these, no other relatives.

“And how are we to-day?” said Bélisaire, cheerily, though he kept his tears back with difficulty. Madame Bélisaire lays on the table two fine oranges she has brought, and then, after a kind remark or two, sits in silence.

Jack does not speak; his eyes are wide open and fixed. Of what is he thinking?

“Jack,” said the good woman, suddenly, “I am going to find your mother;” and she smiled encouragingly.

Yes, that is what he wants; now that he knows that he must die, he forgets all the wrongs his mother has been guilty of toward him.

But Bélisaire does not wish his wife to go. He knows that she holds in utter contempt “the fine lady,” as she calls Jack’s mother, that she detests the man with the moustache, and that she will make a scene, and perhaps—who knows but the police may be called in?

“No,” she said, “that is all nonsense;” but finally yielded to the persuasions of her husband, and allowed him to go in her stead.

“I will bring her this time, never fear!” he said, with an air of confidence.

“Where are you going?” asked the concierge, stopping him at the foot of the

staircase.

“To M. D’Argenton’s.”

“Are you the man who was here last night?”

“Precisely,” answered Bélisaire, innocently.

“Then you need not go up, for there is no one there; they have gone to the country, and will not return for some time.”

In the country, in all this cold and snow! It seemed impossible. In vain did he insist, in vain did he say that the lady’s son was very ill—dying in the hospital. The concierge held to his statement, and would not permit Bélisaire to go one step further.

The poor man retreated to the street again. Suddenly a brilliant idea struck him. Jack had never told him any of the particulars of what had taken place between the Rivals and himself; he had merely stated the fact that the marriage was broken off. But at Indret and in Paris he had often spoken of the goodness and charity of the kind doctor. If he could only be induced to come to Jack’s bedside, so that the poor boy could have some familiar face about him! Without further hesitation he started for Etiolles. Alas, we saw him at the end of this long walk!

During all this time, his wife sat at their friend’s side, and knew not what to think of this prolonged absence, nor how to calm the agitation into which the sick youth was thrown by the expectation of seeing his mother. His excitement was unfortunately increased by the crowd that always appeared on Sundays at the hospital. Each moment some one of the doors was thrown open, and each time Jack expected to see his mother. The visitors were clean and neatly dressed who gathered about the patients they had come to see, telling them family news and encouraging them. Sometimes the voices were choked with tears, though the eyes were dry, Jack heard a constant murmur of voices, and the perfume of oranges filled the room. But what a disappointment it was, after being lifted by the aid of a little stick hung by cords,

when he saw that his mother had not come! He fell back more exhausted, more despairing than ever.

With him, as with all others who are on the threshold of death, the slender thread of life that remained to him was too fragile to attach itself to the robust years of his manhood, and took him beyond them into the far away days when he was little Jack, the velvet-clad darling of Ida de Barancy.

The crowd still came, women and little children, who stood in displeased surprise at their father's emaciation and at his nightcap, and uttered exclamations of delight at the sight of the beautifully dressed altar. But Jack's mother did not appear. Madame Bélisaire knows not what to say. She has hinted that M. D'Argenton may be ill, or that his mother is driving in the Bois, and now she spreads a colored handkerchief on her knees and pares an orange.

"She will not come!" said Jack. These very words he had spoken in that little home at Charonne which he had prepared with so much tender care. But his voice was now weaker, and had even a little anger in its accents. "She will not come!" he repeated; and the poor boy closed his eyes, but not in sleep. He thought of Cécile. The sister heard his sighs, and said to Madame Bélisaire, whose large face was shining with tears,—

"What is the matter with him? I am afraid he is suffering more."

"It is on account of his mother, whom he expects, and he is troubled that she does not come."

"But she must be sent for."

"My husband went long ago. But she is a fine lady; she won't come to a hospital and run the risk of soiling her silk skirts."

Suddenly the woman rose in a fit of anger.

"Don't cry, dear," said she to Jack, as she would have spoken to her little child; "I

am going for your mother."

Jack understood what she said, understood that she had gone, but still continued to repeat, in a harsh voice, the words, "She will not come! she will not come!"

The sister tried to soothe him. "Calm yourself, my child."

Then Jack rose in a sort of delirium. "I tell you she will not come. You do not know her, she is a heartless mother; all the misery of my miserable life has come from her! My heart is one huge wound, from the gashes she has cut in it. When he pretended to be ill, she went to him on wings, and would never again leave him; and I am dying, and she refuses to come to me. What a cruel mother! it is she who has killed me, and she does not wish to see me die!"

Exhausted by this effort, Jack let his head fall back on the pillow, and the sister bent over him in gentle pity, while the brief winter's day ended in a yellow twilight and occasional gusts of snow.

Charlotte and D'Argenton descended from their carriage. They had just returned from a fashionable concert, and were carefully dressed in velvet and furs, light gloves and laces. She was in the best of spirits. Remember that she had just shown herself in public with her poet, and had shown herself, too, to be as pretty as she was ten years before. The complexion was heightened by the sharp wintry air, and the soft wraps in which she was enveloped added to her beauty as does the satin and quilted lining of a casket enhance the brilliancy of the gems within. Â woman of the people stood on the sidewalk, and rushed forward on seeing her.

"Madame, madame! come at once!"

"Madame Bélisaire!" cried Charlotte, turning pale.

"Your child is very ill; he asks for you!"

"But this is a persecution," said D'Argenton. "Let us pass. If the gentleman is ill, we will send him a physician."

“He has physicians, and more than he wants, for he is at the hospital.”

“At the hospital!”

“Yes, he is there just now, but not for very long. I warn you, if you wish to see him you must hurry.”

“Come on, Charlotte, come on! It is a frightful lie. It is some trap laid ready for you;” and the poet drew Charlotte to the stairs.

“Madame, your son is dying! Ah, God, is it possible that a mother can have a heart like this!”

Charlotte turned toward her. “Show me where he is,” she said; and the two women hurried through the streets, leaving D’Argenton in a state of rage, convinced that it was a mere device of his enemies.

Just as Madame Bélisaire left the hospital, two persons hurried in,—a young girl and an old man.

A divine face bent over Jack. “It is I, my love, it is Cécile.”

It was indeed she. It was her fair pale face, paler than usual by reason of her tears and her watchings; and the hand that held his was the slender one that had already brought the youth such happiness, and yet did its part in bringing him where we now see him; for fate is often cruel enough to strike you through your dearest and best. The sick youth opens his weary eyes to see that he is not dreaming. Cécile is really there; she implores his pardon, and explains why she gave him such pain. Ah, if she had but known that their destinies were so similar!

As she spoke, a great calm came to Jack, following all the bitterness and anger of the past weeks.

“Then you love me?” he whispered.

“Yes, Jack; I have always loved you.”

Whispered in this alcove, that had heard so many dying groans, this word love had a

most extraordinary sweetness, as if some wandering bird had taken refuge there.

“How good you are to come, Cécile! Now I shall not utter another murmur. I am ready to die, with you at my side.”

“Die! Who is talking of dying?” said the old doctor in his heartiest voice. “Have no fear, my boy, we will pull you through. You do not look like the same person you were when we came.”

This was true enough. He was transfigured with happiness. He pressed Cécile’s hand to his cheek, and whispered an occasional word of tenderness.

“All that was lacking to me in life, you have given me, dear. You have been friend and sister, wife and mother.”

But his excitement soon gave place to exhaustion, his feverish color to frightful pallor. The ravages made by disease were only too plainly visible. Cécile looked at her grandfather in fright; the room was full of shadows, and it seemed to her that she recognized a Presence more sombre, more mysterious than Night.

Suddenly Jack half lifted himself: “I hear her,” he whispered; “she is coming!”

But the watchers at his side heard only the wintry wind in the corridors, the steps of the retreating crowd in the court below, and the distant noises in the street. He listened a moment, said a few unintelligible words, then his head fell back and his eyes closed. But he was right. Two women were running up the stairs. They had been allowed to enter, though the hour for the admittance of visitors had long since passed. But it was one of those occasions where rules may be broken and set aside.

When they arrived at the outer door, Charlotte stopped. “I cannot go on,” she said, “I am frightened.”

“Come on,” the other answered, roughly; “you must. Ah, to such women as you, God should never give children!”

And she pushed Charlotte toward the staircase. The large room, the shaded lamps,

the kneeling forms, the mother saw at one glance; and farther on, at the end of the apartment, were two men bending over a bed, and Cécile Rivals, pale as death, supporting a head on her breast.

“Jack, my child!”

M. Rivals turned. “Hush,” he said, sternly.

Then came a sigh—a long, shivering sigh.

Charlotte crept nearer, with failing limbs and sinking heart. It was Jack indeed, with arms stiffly falling at his side, and eyes fixed on vacancy.

The doctor bent over him. “Jack, my friend; it is your mother, she is here!”

And she, unhappy woman, stretched out her arms toward him. “Jack, it is I! I am here!”

Not a movement.

The mother cried in a tone of horror, “Dead?”

“No,” said old Rivals; “no,—Delivered.”

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JACK ***

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