Mademoiselle de Maupin

by Théophile Gautier

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MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN

VOLUME ONE

BY

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

THE REALISTS

PRINTED BY GEORGE BARRIE & SONS, PHILADELPHIA 1897

THIS EDITION OF

MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN

HAS BEEN COMPLETELY TRANSLATED

BY

I. G. BURNHAM

THE ETCHINGS ARE BY

FRANÇOIS-XAVIER LE SUEUR

AND DRAWINGS BY

ÉDOUARD TOUDOUZE

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN—VOLUME I MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN Front. THE IMAGINARY MISTRESS FIRST MEETING WITH ROSETTE EPISODE OF THE "TOILETTE DE BAL" D'ALBERT AND ROSETTE THE ARRIVAL OF THÉODORE THÉODORE AND THE PAGE ROSETTE'S MORNING AUDIENCE THE ACCIDENTAL DISCOVERY

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

This celebrated novel, the celebrity of which has not been lessened by the very

numerous editions that have been published, had a very modest beginning which in no way foreshadowed the great success which it was to obtain later.

The title: Mademoiselle de Maupin—Double Love appeared, we believe, for the first time in Renduel's catalogue in connection with The Life of Hoffman, by Lœve-Weimars, which appeared in October, 1833, announcing the new work of Théophile Gautier as being in press. Renduel had made the acquaintance of the author at Victor Hugo's; he had published in August, 1833, his first volume of prose, Young France, and now it was a question of launching a work in two volumes, a truly daring undertaking for a publisher of that day; especially in the case of the work of an author but little known and only twenty-two years old.

Mademoiselle de Maupin was not, however, destined to see the light so soon. For two years Théophile Gautier, more enamored of freedom than of work, or preferring the task of making two harmonious rhymes to all the beauties of his learned and rhythmic prose, incessantly abandoned and resumed the promised work. A tradition preserved in the family of the poet tells how his father often shut him up in his room at that time, forbidding him to leave it until he had completed a certain number of pages of the Grotesques or of Mademoiselle de Maupin. When the maternal kindness did not come to his aid, the frolicsome author, who then lived with his parents on Place Royale, often found the means of getting away by the window and so escaping a paternal task. Such escapades being frequently renewed, it may well be believed that the novel made but little progress; 1834 was drawing to a close; only the first of the two volumes was finished; the publisher complained, and the author tried to pacify him by notes similar to the following:

"I have just discovered at a bric-à-brac dealer's a charming picture of Boucher in a splendid state of preservation; it is an opportunity that I do not wish to miss, and not having money enough, I take the liberty of asking you for my balance.[1] You will confer on me a real pleasure in sending it to me.

"I am harnessed to La Maupin, and that prevents me from prowling about and calling on you.

"With cordial wishes, I am, yours,

"THÉOPHILE GAUTIER."

Finally, in 1835, the second volume was written in six weeks on Rue du Doyenné, where the poet, having left the paternal nest, had installed himself; the manuscript was delivered to Renduel and we read the following note in Le Monde Dramatique, of September 20th, concerning the biography of the strange person who really bore the name of Maupin, a biography signed by Rochefort and published in that number under the title: Mademoiselle d'Aubigny-Maupin: "One of our collaborators, Monsieur Théophile Gautier, has been busy for a long time on a romance entitled: Mademoiselle (de) Maupin."

The work was now soon to appear; it was issued in November, 1835, in two octavo volumes, printed by Madame Poussin under the title: Mademoiselle de Maupin—Double Love. The first volume bears the date 1835, the second 1836, while the preface is dated May, 1834.

The work produced no very great sensation. A few journals spoke of it, but publicity was not then systematized as it is to-day, and except by some few literary men and the small romantic group of the author's friends, Mademoiselle de Maupin was soon forgotten. Let us remark, nevertheless, that immediately the book appeared, Honoré de Balzac wrote Renduel a note, asking for a copy, this note we have seen ourselves; from this moment dates the admiration that he always professed thereafter for Théophile Gautier. We learn from Monsieur Arsène Houssaye, the old and faithful friend of the poet, that owing to the failure to sell the work, Renduel determined not to publish anything more for his author; La Comédie de la Mort, already announced upon the covers of the work (as well as Capitaine Fracasse), was, in fact, returned to the author, and only appeared in 1838, when it was published by Desessart, at that

time one of Arsène Houssaye's publishers; it was the author of La Couronne de Bleuets, who introduced his friend to him and secured a favorable consideration for his collection of verses.

How strange to us and unlikely, even, all this seems, when one recalls the exorbitant prices obtained for some years past for rare, stitched copies in good condition of the first edition of the work that we are now considering. Many have realized one thousand five hundred francs, that is to say, the total sums received by the author as royalty on the first issue of his work. This sum is verified by his receipts to Renduel, which are in our hands.

A curious incident occurred as to Mademoiselle de Maupin. After its appearance, all the opening of the eleventh chapter was inserted in Le Monde Dramatique of January 4, 1836, without mentioning its source, under the title of: La Comédie Romanesque. Since that time, those pages have been frequently reprinted, but not a single one of these reproductions gives any indication of their origin. It must be admitted that Théophile Gautier himself gave rise to this error in La Presse of December 17, 1838, in again quoting these lines, inserted in an unpublished commentary, as an isolated article which had come under his notice by chance. He had forgotten this extract, and believed in good faith to have found in La Monde Dramatique only a newspaper improvisation. This first mistake was the starting-point of all that succeeded, the most striking of which is the insertion in 1858 of this fragment from Mademoiselle de Maupin in the first volume of Théophile Gautier's work: Histoire de l'Art Dramatique in France. It is useless to add that no one noticed this fact.

Time, however, rolled on, and the renown of the poet continued to increase; his appearance in La Presse in 1836, and his critical work, had made a circle of new readers. Then, Fortunio, La Comédie de la Mort, Une Larme du Diable, Tra Los Montès, Les Grotesques, etc., etc., had considerably increased his literary

impedimenta. So, when Monsieur Charpentier, the father of the present publisher of Théophile Gautier's complete works, had founded the collection to which he gave his name, he soon thought of reprinting our author's principal works. Monsieur Charpentier, who succeeded in grouping in his catalogue the most select of the remarkable works of his age, was of refined literary taste and held among the publishers of his day a place similar to that then held by Monsieur Buloz in his capacity of director of La Revue des Deux Mondes: it was difficult to obtain an interview with either, and to appear in print in their collections was regarded as a kind of consecration.

It was in 1845 when four of Théophile Gautier's volumes appeared in the Charpentier catalogue; they were Poésies Complètes, Nouvelles, Voyage en Espagne, and Mademoiselle de Maupin. For this reprint, the first since the original edition[2], the author modified, but very slightly, some phrases of his work, the text of which, from that time, has never been changed.

Here ends, in reality, the history of this work. Since 1845, the number of editions has continued to increase; we will only quote two that appeared in 1878: one in two volumes, 24mo, illustrated with four designs by Eugèn Giraud, and another in a large 12mo volume, upon Holland paper, embellished with a portrait of the heroine by Théophile Gautier himself, the portrait dated 1834. Finally, in 1880, there was added to a reprint of this edition, a reproduction of the medallion of the author by David d'Anger; this reproduction is erroneously dated 1834, instead of 1835, which is the actual year of its execution.

Is it possible, as has often been asserted, that this work, whose incomparable style should have warranted the opening of the doors of the Académie Française to the author, was in part the cause of their remaining stubbornly closed against him?—We do not know; but from another tradition preserved in the poet's family, it would appear that the father himself, when he knew of the completion of the work (only the

first volume, as we have seen, was written under his eyes), could not have been without apprehension as to the part which the book would play in the life of his son, and, notwithstanding his admiration for the style of the work, he would often have expressed the fear that the second volume would at times influence the future of the author.

In any case, the renown of Théophile Gautier, like that of his illustrious friend, Honoré de Balzac, who, likewise, was never a member of the Académie, has only increased since his death, and the names of these two rare talents are in truth missed among those of the members of that illustrious body. For Théophile Gautier at least, the Académie itself expressed one day, by the mouth of one of its members, its regret at not having received him. On October 25, 1872, at its public session and at the very hour of the obsequies of the great writer, Monsieur Camille Doucet pronounced the following words which do honor to their author, and we are happy to reproduce them here: "Permit me to digress a moment. When I speak of the fraternity of Letters, I should fail, messieurs, if I appeared longer to forget that at this very hour, upon the threshold of a tomb, which I have left only with regret to come here to fulfil another duty, Letters mourning, weep for a true poet dear to all, a brilliant writer whose wit was thoroughly French and whose heart was still more French. Very many votes have proved to him that his place was indicated among us, and so we deplore the more the sudden stroke to which Théophile Gautier succumbs."

We will add nothing to these touching lines and will close this notice by saying a few words as to the present edition of Mademoiselle de Maupin. It is the first reprint, absolutely conforming to the original text. The work appears in two volumes, divided like those of 1835, and the publishers have exerted every effort to satisfy bibliophiles desirous of possessing as perfect an edition as possible, both as regards the exactness of the text and the technical execution of the work.

Finally, let us say that the designs of E. Toudouze, made especially for this work, will render this edition still more complete. It will rank, we hope, among the most treasured editions of the book.

CHARLES DE LOVENJOUL.

[1] Of his royalties as author of Young France.

[2] Figaro, of May 26, 1837, and some other journals, announced the sale, at Renduel's, of a second edition of this book. It was only the first edition that the publisher was trying to get rid of by this means.

PREFACE

One of the most burlesque incidents of the glorious epoch in which we have the good fortune to live side by side with Deutz and General Bugeaud, is, beyond question, the rehabilitation of virtue undertaken by all the newspapers, of whatever color they may be, red, green, or tri-colored.

Virtue is most assuredly a very respectable thing, and we have no wish to fail in our devotion to the excellent, worthy creature—God forbid!—We consider that her eyes shine with sufficient brilliancy through her spectacles, that her stockings are reasonably well put on, that she takes snuff from her gold snuff-box with all imaginable grace, that her little dog courtesies like a dancing-master.—We agree to all that.—We are even willing to admit that her figure is not bad for her age, and that she carries her years as well as any one could. She is a very agreeable grandmother, but she is a grandmother. It seems to me to be natural to prefer to her, especially when one is twenty years old, some little immorality, very pert, very coquettish, very wanton, with the hair a little out of curl, the skirt rather short than long, the foot and eye alluring, the cheek slightly flushed, a smile on the lips and the heart in the hand.—The most horribly virtuous journalists can hardly be of a different opinion; and, if they say the contrary, it is very probable that they do not think it. To think one thing and write another is something that happens every day, especially among

virtuous folk.

I remember the epigrams uttered before the Revolution—I refer to the Revolution of July—against the ill-fated and virginal Vicomte Sosthène de la Rochefoucauld, who lengthened the skirts of the dancers at the Opéra and applied with his own patrician hands a chaste plaster around the middle of all the statues.—Monsieur le Vicomte Sosthène de la Rochefoucauld is far surpassed.—Modesty has been greatly perfected since his day, and we go into refinements that he would never have imagined.

I, who am not accustomed to look at statues in certain places, considered, as others did, the vine-leaf cut by the scissors of Monsieur le Chargé des Beaux-Arts, the most absurd thing in the world. It seems that I was wrong, and that the vine-leaf is one of the most meritorious of institutions.

I have been told, but I refused to believe it, it seemed to me so extraordinary, that there were people who, when looking at Michael Angelo's fresco of the Last Judgment, had seen nothing therein but the episode of the lewd priests, and had veiled their faces, crying out at the abomination of desolation!

Such people know nothing of the romance of Rodrigue except the couplet of the snake.—If there is any nudity in a book or a picture, they go straight to it as the swine to the mire, and pay no attention to the blooming flowers or the golden fruit that hang within reach on all sides.

I confess that I am not virtuous enough for that. Dorine, the brazen-faced soubrette, may display before me her swelling bosom, I certainly will not draw my handkerchief to cover it so that it cannot be seen.—I will look at her bosom as at her face, and if it is fair and well-shaped I will take pleasure in it.—But I will not touch Elmire's dress to see if it is soft, nor will I push her reverently upon the table as that poor devil of a Tartuffe did.

This great affectation of morality that reigns to-day would be very laughable if it were not very tiresome.—Every feuilleton becomes a pulpit; every journalist a

preacher; only the tonsure and the little neckband are wanting. The weather is rainy and homiletic; one can defend one's self against both by going out only in a carriage and reading Pantagruel between one's bottle and one's pipe.

Blessed Jesus! what an outcry! what a frenzy!—Who bit you? who pricked you? what the devil's the matter with you that you cry so loud, and what has poor vice done to you that you should bear him such a grudge, he is such a good fellow, so easy to live with, and asks nothing except to be allowed to amuse himself and not bore others, if such a thing can be? Act with vice like Serre with the gendarme: embrace and have done with it all.—Believe me, you will be the better for it.—Eh! Mon Dieu! my worthy preachers, what would you do without vice? You would be reduced to beggary to-morrow, if the world should become virtuous to-day.

The theatres would be closed to-night.—What would you take for the subject of your feuilleton?—No more Opéra balls to fill your columns,—no more novels to dissect; for balls, novels, plays, are the real pomps of Satan, if we are to believe our holy Mother Church.—The actress would dismiss her protector and could no longer pay you for puffing her.—Nobody would subscribe to your newspapers; people would read Saint Augustine, they would go to church, they would tell their beads. That would be very praiseworthy, perhaps, but you would gain nothing by it. If people were virtuous, what would you do with your articles on the immorality of the age? You see plainly that vice is good for something.

But it is the fashion nowadays to be virtuous and Christ-like, it is an attitude people affect; they pose as Saint Jeromes just as they used to pose as Don Juans; they are pale and wasted, they wear their hair as the apostles did, they walk with folded hands and eyes glued to the ground, they assume an expression sugared to perfection; they have an open Bible on the mantel, a crucifix and consecrated box-wood above their beds; they never swear, they smoke but little, and they chew almost not at all.—With that they become Christians, they talk about the sanctity of

art, the lofty mission of the artist, the poesy of Catholicism, about Monsieur de La Mennais, about the painters of the angelic school, about the Council of Trent, about progressive humanity, and about a thousand other fine things.—Some infuse a little republicanism into their religion, they are not the least interesting. They couple Robespierre and Jesus Christ in the most cheerful way and amalgamate with praiseworthy gravity the Acts of the Apostles and the decrees of the Holy Convention—that is the sacramental title; others add, for a final ingredient, some Saint-Simonian ideas.—These latter are complete, they rest upon a square foundation; after them we can look for nothing better. Human absurdity can go no farther,—has ultra metas—etc. They are the Hercules Pillars of Burlesque.

Christianity is so in vogue by reason of the prevailing hypocrisy, that even Neo-Christianity enjoys a certain amount of favor. They say that it can boast thus far one recruit, Monsieur Drouineau included.

An extremely interesting variety of the moral journalist, properly so-called, is the journalist with a female family.

He carries his modest sensitiveness to the point of anthropophagy, or very nearly that.

His mode of procedure, although it seems at the first glance simple and easy, is none the less clownish and superlatively entertaining, and in my opinion it deserves to be handed down to posterity—to our last nephews, as the old fogies of the so-called Grand Siècle used to say.

In the first place, to pose as a journalist of this variety, you need some few preliminary utensils—such as two or three legitimate wives, a few mothers, as many sisters as possible, a full assortment of daughters, and cousins innumerable.—The second requisite is a play or novel of some sort, a pen, ink, paper, and a printer. Perhaps it would be as well to have an idea or two and several subscribers; but you can do without them, if you have a large stock of philosophy and the shareholders'

money.

When you have all these things you can set up as a moral journalist. The two following recipes, varied to suit the occasion, will suffice for the editorial part.

Models of Virtuous Articles Concerning a First Performance.

"After the literature of blood, the literature of mud; after the morgue and the galleys, the alcove and the brothel; after the rags stained by murder, the rags stained by debauchery; after," etc. (according to the necessity of the occasion and the available space, you can continue in this vein from six lines to fifty or more),—"this is as it should be.—This is where neglect of sacred doctrines and romantic licentiousness lead: the stage has become a school of prostitution where one dares not venture, save with fear and trembling, with a woman one respects. You come upon the faith of an illustrious name, and you are obliged to retire at the third act with your young daughter all confused and abashed. Your wife hides her blushes behind her fan; your sister, your cousin," etc. (The degrees of relationship may be diversified at pleasure; it is enough that they be all females.)

NOTE.—There is one man who has carried morality so far as to say: "I will not go to see that play with my mistress."—That man I admire and love; I carry him in my heart, as Louis XVIII. carried all France in his; for he has conceived the most triumphant, the most monumental, the most insane, the most extravagant idea that has passed through the brain of man in this blessed nineteenth century, which has seen the birth of so many and such amusing ideas.

The method of dealing with a book is very expeditious and within the range of every intellect:

"If you choose to read this book, lock yourself securely into your own room; do not leave it lying on the table. If your wife and your daughter should open it, they would be lost.—This is a dangerous book, it advises vicious habits. It would have made a great success, perhaps, in the time of Crébillon, in the houses of kept mistresses, at a

duchess's select supper-parties; but now that morals are purified, now that the hand of the people has razed the rotten edifice of aristocracy, and that,—etc., etc.—there must be in every work an idea—an idea—yes, a moral and religious idea which—an exalted and profound aim, answering to the needs of humanity; for it is a deplorable thing that young writers should sacrifice the most sacred things to success, and should expend their talent—a notable talent by the way—in lewd descriptions that would make a captain of dragoons blush."—(The virginity of the captain of dragoons is, after the discovery of America, the most delightful discovery that has been made for a long while.)—"The novel we are considering recalls Justine, the philosophic Thérèse, Félicia, Compère Matthieu, the Contes de Grécourt, the Priapées of the Marquis de Sade." The virtuous journalist is immensely erudite in the matter of filthy novels;—I am very curious to know why.

It may be obtained at Eugène Renduel's, Rue des Grands-Augustins, No. 22. A handsome volume in 8vo. with vignette. Price 7 francs 50 centimes.

Eccò,—ecce,—see it.

It is frightful to think that, through the fault of the newspapers, there are many honest manufacturers who have only these two recipes to live upon, they and the numerous families they employ.

Apparently I am the most monumentally immoral personage to be found in Europe or elsewhere; for I can see nothing more licentious in the novels and plays of the present day than in the novels and plays of an earlier time, and I find it difficult to understand why the ears of the gentlemen of the journals have suddenly become so Jansenically ticklish.

I do not believe that the most innocent newspaper man will dare to say that Pigault-Lebrun, Crébillon Fils, Louvet, Voisenon, Marmontel, and all other writers of novels and tales do not surpass in immorality, since there is such a thing as immorality, the most dissolute and licentious productions of Messieurs Such-an-one

and So-and-so, whom I do not name out of regard for their modesty.

One must be most notoriously false to his convictions not to agree to that.

Let not the objection be made that I have cited names little known or unfavorably known. If I have not mentioned the brilliant, imperishable names, it is not because they will not support my assertion with the weight of their great authority.

The novels and tales of Voltaire, aside from the question of merit, are most assuredly no more suitable to be given as prizes to little slips of boarding-school misses than are the immoral tales of our friend the lycanthropist, or even the moral tales of the insipid Marmontel.

What do we find in the comedies of the great Molière? the sacred institution of marriage—as the catechism and the newspapers call it—scoffed at and ridiculed in every scene.

The husband is old, ugly, and peevish; he wears his wig awry; his coat is out of fashion; he has a bill-headed cane, a nose smeared with snuff, short legs, and a paunch as fat as a budget.—He stammers, says nothing but foolish things, and does as many as he says; he sees nothing, he hears nothing; his wife is kissed before his face, and he has no idea what is going on; that state of things lasts until he is well and duly proved a cuckold in his own eyes and in the eyes of the whole audience, who are mightily edified and applaud in a way to bring the walls down.

They who applaud the loudest are they who are the most married.

In Molière, marriage is named George Dandin or Sganarelle.

Adultery is Damis or Clitandre; there is no name sweet and charming enough for it.

The adulterer is always young, handsome, well-made, and a marquis at the very least. He enters from the wings humming the very latest waltz; he takes one or two steps on the stage with the most deliberate, all-conquering air imaginable; he scratches his ear with the pink nail of his deftly spread little finger; he combs his

lovely fair hair with his tortoise-shell comb, and arranges his ruffles, which are of great volume. His doublet and his hose are almost covered with bows and knots of ribbon; his neckband is from the best maker; his gloves smell sweeter than balsam and civet; his plumes cost a louis apiece.

How his eye sparkles and his cheek glows! how smiling his mouth! how white his teeth! how soft and well cared for his hand!

He speaks, naught issues from his lips save poesy, perfumed gallantries in the most refined style and with the most charming manner; he has read the latest novels and knows all about poetry, he is brave, and quick to draw his sword, he scatters gold with lavish hand.—And so Angélique, Agnès, Isabelle, can hardly refrain from leaping on his neck, well-bred and great ladies though they be; and so the husband is regularly betrayed in the fifth act, and is very lucky that he was not in the first.

That is how marriage is treated by Molière, one of the loftiest and most serious geniuses who ever lived.—Do you think there is anything stronger in the suits of Indiana and of Valentine?

Paternity is even less respected, if that be possible. Witness Orgon, Géronte, and all the rest of them.

How they are robbed by their sons, cheated by their valets! How their avarice, their obstinacy, their idiocy are laid bare, without mercy for their age!—What practical jokes! what mystifications.—How they are taken by the shoulder and pushed out of life, poor old fellows, who take a long time to die and refuse to give up their money! how much is said about the immortality of parents! what arguments against heredity, and how much more convincing they are than all this Saint-Simonian declamation!

A father is an ogre, an Argus, a jailer, a tyrant, something that at the best is good for nothing but to delay a marriage for three acts until the final reconciliation.—A father is the ridiculous husband perfected.—A son is never ridiculous in Molière; for Molière, like all authors at all possible epochs, paid his court to the young

generation at the expense of the old.

And what of the Scapins, with their striped cloaks à la Napolitaine, their caps tilted over their ears, their plumes sweeping the layers of air,—are not they very pious, very chaste individuals, most worthy of canonization?—The galleys are filled with honest folk who have not done the fourth part of what they do. The knavery of Trialph is paltry knavery compared with theirs. And the Lisettes, the Martons, tudieu! what hussies!—The girls of the street are far from being as sharp, as quick at prurient retort as they. How well they understand how to deliver a note! what good watch they keep during assignations!—On my word, they are invaluable girls, serviceable and shrewd advisers.

It is a charming company that walks and fidgets through those comedies and imbroglios.—Duped guardians, cuckold husbands, lewd maids, keen-witted valets, young ladies mad with love, dissolute sons, adulterous wives; are not these quite as bad as the melancholy young beaux and poor, weak women, oppressed and impassioned, of the dramas and novels of the writers in vogue to-day?

And yet the denouements, minus the final blow of the dagger, minus the regulation cup of poison, are as happy as the time-honored ending of a fairy tale, and everybody, even the husband, is perfectly satisfied. In Molière, virtue is always in disgrace, always being pummelled; it is virtue that wears horns and turns her back to Mascarille; morality barely shows its face once at the end of the play, in the somewhat commonplace person of the gendarme Loyal.

All this that we have said is not intended to knock a chip off Molière's pedestal; we are not mad enough to attempt to shake that bronze colossus with our weak arms; we desired simply to show the pious feuilletonistes, who are terrified by recent works and by those of the romantic school, that the old classics, whom they urge us every day to read and imitate, far surpass them in looseness and immorality.

To Molière we might easily add Marivaux and La Fontaine, those two

strongly-contrasted exponents of the French mind, and Regnier and Rabelais and Marot, and many others. But it is not our purpose in this place to prepare, from the standpoint of morality, a course in literature for the benefit of the virgin minds of the feuilleton.

It seems to me that we should not raise such a hubbub for so small a matter. Luckily we are not living in the days of the fair Eve, and we cannot, in good conscience, be as primitive and patriarchal as people were in the days of the ark. We are not little girls preparing for our first communion; and when we play crambo, we do not answer cream-pie. We are passably knowing in our innocence, and our virginity has been on the town for a long while; those are things that one does not have twice, and, whatever we may do, we cannot recover them, for there is nothing in the world that runs faster than a fleeing virginity and a vanishing illusion.

After all, perhaps there is no great harm in that, and knowledge of everything is preferable to ignorance of everything. That is a question that I leave for those who know more than I, to discuss. The fact remains that the world has passed the age when one can feign modesty and chastity, and I consider it too old a greybeard to play the child and the virgin without making itself ridiculous.

Since its marriage to civilization, society has lost the right to be artless and bashful. There are certain blushes that are all right for the bridal bed, but can serve no further purpose the next day; for the young wife thinks no more of the maiden, it may be, or if she does think of her, it is a most improper thing and gravely endangers her husband's reputation.

When I chance to read one of the fine sermons that have taken the place of literary criticism in the public sheets, I sometimes feel great remorse and dire apprehension, having on my conscience some paltry equivocal stories, a little too highly spiced, such as a young man of spirit and animation may have to reproach himself for.

Beside these Bossuets of the Café de Paris, these Bourdaloues of the balcony at the

Opéra, these Catos at so much a line, who berate the present age in such fine fashion, I esteem myself the most infamous villain that ever marred the face of the earth; and yet, God knows, the list of my sins, capital as well as venial, with the usual blank spaces and leads, would barely, even in the hands of the most skilful publisher, make one or two octavo volumes a day, which is a small matter for one who does not claim to be bound for paradise in the other world and to win the Monthyon prize or be rose-maiden in this.

And then, when I think that I have met under the table, and elsewhere, too, a considerable number of these dragons of virtue, I return to a better opinion of myself, and I consider that, whatever faults I may have, they have another which is, in my eyes, the greatest and worst of all:—I refer to hypocrisy.

By looking carefully one might perhaps find another little vice to add; but this is so hideous that I really hardly dare to name it. Come nearer and I will breathe its name into your ear:—it is envy.

Envy, and nothing else.

It is envy that crawls and wriggles through all these paternal homilies; however careful it may be to hide itself, you can see its flat little viper's head from time to time gleaming above the metaphors and rhetorical figures; you surprise it licking with its forked tongue its lips blue with venom, you hear it hissing softly in the shadow of an insidious epithet.

I am well aware that it is insufferably conceited to say that any one envies you, and that a dandy who boasts of a conquest is almost as nauseating.—I am not so boastful as to believe that I have enemies or envious detractors; that is a piece of good fortune that is not given to everybody, and I probably shall not enjoy it for a long time; so I will speak freely and without reservation as one who is perfectly disinterested in the matter.

An unquestionable fact, and easy of demonstration to those who may doubt it, is the

natural antipathy of the critic to the poet—of him who does nothing to him who does something—of the drone to the bee—of the gelding to the stallion.

You do not become a critic until the fact is established to your own satisfaction that you cannot be a poet. Before descending to the pitiful rôle of watching cloaks and counting strokes like a billiard-marker or a tennis-court attendant, you have long courted the Muse, you have tried to seduce her; but you have not sufficient vigor for that; your breath has failed you and you have fallen back, pale and broken-winded, to the foot of the sacred mountain.

I can conceive that antipathy. It is painful to see another take his seat at the banquet to which you are not invited and lie with the woman who would have none of you. I pity with all my heart the poor eunuch who is compelled to assist at the delights of the Great Turk.

He is admitted to the most secret recesses of the Oda; he escorts the sultanas to the bath; he sees their lovely bodies gleaming in the silvery water of the great reservoirs, shedding streams of pearls and smoother than agate; the most hidden charms are disclosed to him unveiled. No one is embarrassed by his presence.—He is a eunuch.—The sultan caresses his favorite before him and kisses her on her pomegranate mouth.—In very truth his is a terribly false position and he must be sadly embarrassed to keep himself in countenance.

It is the same with the critic who sees the poet walking in the garden of poesy with its nine fair odalisques, and disporting himself indolently in the shade of tall green laurels. It is very hard for him not to pick up stones in the road to throw at him and wound him over the wall, if he is skilful enough to do it.

The critic who has produced nothing of his own is a coward; he is like an abbé paying court to a layman's wife: the layman cannot pay him back in his own coin or fight with him.

I think that an account of the different methods of depreciating any sort of work,

resorted to during the last month, would be at least as interesting as the story of Tiglath-Pileser, or of Gemmagog, who invented peaked shoes.

There would be enough matter to fill fifteen or sixteen folio volumes, but we will have pity on the reader and confine ourselves to a few lines—a favor for which we demand more than everlasting gratitude.—In a very remote age, lost in the darkness of time—it was fully three weeks ago—the romance of the Middle Ages flourished principally in Paris and the suburbs. The coat of arms was held in high esteem; coiffures à la Hennin were not despised and party-colored trousers were thought well of; the dagger was priceless; the peaked shoe was adored as a fetich.—There was nothing but ogive windows, turrets, colonnettes, stained glass, cathedrals, and fortified châteaux;—the characters were all damoiselles and damoiseaux, pages and varlets, beggars and swash-bucklers, gallant knights and ferocious castellans;—all of which were more innocent certainly than innocent games, and did absolutely no harm to anybody.

The critic did not wait for the second romance before beginning his work of depreciation: as soon as the first appeared, he enveloped himself in his robe of camel's hair, and sprinkled a bushel of ashes on his head; then, in his loud, wailing voice, he began to cry:

"More Middle Ages, nothing but the Middle Ages! who will deliver me from the Middle Ages, from the Middle Ages which are not the Middle Ages?—Paste-board and terra-cotta Middle Ages, which have nothing of the Middle Ages save the name!—Oh! these iron barons, in their iron armor, with iron hearts in their iron breasts! Oh! the cathedrals with their rose-work always in bloom and their stained glass in flower, with their lace-work of granite, with their open-work trefoils, their toothed gables, their chasubles of stone embroidered like a bride's veil, with their tapers, their psalms, their glittering priests, with their people on their knees, their rumbling organ, and their angels soaring aloft and flapping their wings under the

arches!—how they have spoiled my Middle Ages, my refined, brightly-colored Middle Ages!—how they have blotted it from sight under a layer of coarse plaster!—what discordant colors!—Ah! ignorant daubers, who fancy you have created an effect by splashing red upon blue, white upon black, and green upon yellow, you have seen only the outer shell of the Middle Ages, you have not divined the true meaning of the Middle Ages, the blood does not circulate beneath the skin in which you have clothed your phantoms, there is no heart in your steel corselets, there are no legs in your tricot trousers, no stomach or breast behind your emblazoned skirts; they are clothes that have the shape of men and that is all.—So, down with the Middle Ages as they are presented to us by the fabricators"—the great word is out, the fabricators!—"The Middle Ages meet no need of the present day, we must have something else."

And the public, seeing how the feuilletonistes snarled at the Middle Ages, was seized with an ardent passion for the Middle Ages, which they claim to have killed at a single blow. The Middle Ages invaded everything, assisted by the obstruction of the newspapers:—dramas, melodramas, novels, tales, poetry—there were even Middle-Age vaudevilles, and Momus recited feudal mummeries.

Beside the romance of the Middle Ages flourished the carrion romance, a very pleasing variety, which nervous petites-maîtresses and blasé cooks consumed in great numbers.

The feuilletonistes speedily came flocking to the stench, like crows to the carrion, and they tore with the beaks of their pens and inhumanly put to death that poor species of novel, which asked nothing more than to be allowed to prosper and putrefy in peace on the greasy shelves of the book-stalls. What did they not say? what did they not write?—Literature of the morgue or the galleys, an executioner's nightmare, hallucination of a drunken butcher, or a convict-keeper with the jail-fever! They benignly gave us to understand that the authors were assassins and

vampires, that they had contracted the vicious habit of killing their fathers and mothers, that they drank blood from human skulls, that they used the bones of the legs for forks and cut their bread with a guillotine.

And yet they knew better than any one, from having frequently breakfasted with them, that the authors of those charming slaughters were excellent young men of family, very easy-going and in the best society, white-gloved and fashionably near-sighted,—with a decided preference for beefsteak over human cutlets, and more accustomed to drink Bordeaux wine than the blood of young girls or new-born children.—From having seen and touched their manuscripts, they knew perfectly well that they were written with ink of great virtue upon English paper, and not with blood from the guillotine upon the skin of a Christian flayed alive.

But whatever they might say or do, the age was after carrion, and the charnel-house suited them better than the boudoir; the reader would bite at no hook that was not baited with a little body already turning blue.—A state of things easily conceived; put a rose at the end of your line and the spiders will have time to spin their webs in the crook of your elbow before you catch the tiniest minnow; put on a worm or a piece of rank cheese, and carp, barbel, perch, eels, will all leap three feet out of water to snap at it.—Men are not so different from fish as people generally seem to believe.

One would have said that the newspaper men had become Quakers, Brahmins, or Pythagoreans, or bulls, they had been suddenly seized with such a horror of red and of blood.—Never had they been known to be in such a soft and melting mood;—it was cream and buttermilk.—They admitted the existence of only two colors, sky-blue and apple-green. Pink was only tolerated, and if the public would have allowed them to do as they chose, they would have led it to the banks of the Lignon to feed on spinach beside the sheep of Amaryllis. They had changed their black frock-coats for the dove-colored jacket of Celadon or Silvander, and surrounded

their goose-feathers with clusters of roses and ribbons after the style of a shepherd's crook. They let their hair float in the wind like a child's, and had made themselves virgins according to the recipe of Marion Delorme, and about as successfully as she.

They applied to literature the article in the Decalogue:

Thou shalt not kill.

The least little dramatic murder was no longer permissible, and the fifth act had become an impossibility.

They considered the poniard extravagant, poison monstrous, the axe horrible beyond words. They would have liked dramatic heroes to live to the age of Melchisedec; and yet it has been a recognized fact, from time immemorial, that the object of every tragedy is to have a poor devil of a great man, who cannot help himself, murdered in the last act, just as the object of every comedy is to join in matrimony two idiots of jeunes premiers of about sixty years each.

It was about this time that I threw into the fire—after having taken a duplicate, as almost always happens—two superb and magnificent Middle-Age dramas, one in verse, the other in prose, in which the heroes were quartered and boiled on the stage, which would have been very entertaining and decidedly unusual.

To conform to their ideas, I have since composed an antique tragedy in five acts called Héliogabale, the hero of which throws himself into the privy, an extremely novel situation and one that has the merit of introducing a bit of scenery not yet seen on the stage.—I have also written a modern drama, very much superior to Antoni,—Arthur, or L'Homme Fatal, where the providential idea arrives in the shape of a Strasbourg pâté de foie gras, which the hero eats to the last crumb after committing various rapes, and that, combined with his remorse, brings on a frightful attack of indigestion of which he dies.—A moral ending, if ever there was one, which proves that God is just, and that vice is always punished and virtue rewarded.

As for the monstrosity species, you know how they have dealt with that, how they

have abused Han d'Islande the cannibal, Habibrah the obi, Quasimodo the bell-ringer, and Triboulet, who is only a hunch-back—all that family so strangely swarming—all those gigantic deformities whom my dear neighbor sends crawling and leaping through the virgin forests and the cathedrals of his romances. Neither the great strokes à la Michael Angelo, nor the curiosities worthy of Callot, nor the effects of light and shade after the fashion of Goya, could find favor before them; they sent him back to his odes when he wrote novels, to his novels when he wrote dramas: the ordinary tactics of journalists who always praise what you have done at the expense of what you are doing. A fortunate man, however, is he who is acknowledged to be superior, even by the feuilletonistes, in all his works,—except, of course, the particular one with whom they are dealing,—and who need only write a theological treatise or a manual of cooking to have his plays admired.

Concerning the romance of the heart, the ardent, impassioned romance, whose father is Werther the German, and its mother Manon Lescaut the French-woman, we had a few words to say, at the beginning of this preface, of the moral scurf that has fastened itself upon it in desperation, on the pretext of religion and good morals. The critical louse is like the body-louse that deserts the dead body for the living. From the corpse of the Middle Ages the critics have passed on to the living body of this age, whose skin is tough and hard and might well break their teeth.

We think, notwithstanding a deep respect for the modern apostles, that the authors of these so-called immoral novels, without being so thoroughly married as the virtuous journalist, generally have a mother, and that several of them have sisters and are provided with an abundance of female relations; but their mothers and sisters do not read novels, even immoral novels; they sew and embroider and look after the house-keeping.—Their stockings, as Monsieur Planard would say, are—entirely white: you can look at them on their legs—they are not blue, and excellent Chrysale, who hated learned women so, would suggest them as models to the skilled Philaminte.

As for these gentlemen's wives, as they have so many of them, however spotless their husbands may be, it seems to my simple mind that there are certain things they ought to know.—Indeed, it may well be that their husbands have never shown them anything. In that case I understand that they are bent upon keeping them in that useful state of blessed ignorance. God is great and Mohammed is his prophet!—Women are inquisitive creatures; may Heaven and morality grant that they gratify their curiosity in a more legitimate way than that adopted by their grandmother Eve, and do not go putting questions to the serpent!

As for their daughters, if they have been at boarding-school, I fail to see what they can learn from these books.

It is as absurd to say that a man is a drunkard because he describes an orgy, or a debauchee because he narrates a debauch, as to claim that a man is virtuous because he has written a book on morals; we see the contrary every day. It is the character that speaks, not the author; his hero may be an atheist, that does not mean that he is an atheist; he represents brigands as acting and talking like brigands, but that does not make him a brigand. On that theory we should have to guillotine Shakespeare, Corneille, and all the writers of tragedy; they have committed more murders than Mandrin and Cartouche; we have not done it, however, and, indeed, I do not believe that we shall do it for a long time to come, however virtuous and moral criticism may become. It is one of the manias of these little shallow-brained scribblers always to substitute the author for the work, and to resort to personalities, in order to give some paltry scandalous interest to their miserable rhapsodies, which they are well aware that nobody would read if they contained only their individual opinions.

We can hardly imagine the tendency of all this wailing, or what good purpose all this indignation and snarling can serve—or who impels these Messieurs Geoffroy on a small scale to set themselves up as the Don Quixotes of morality, and, like genuine literary policemen, to lay hands upon and club, in the name of virtue, every idea that

appears in a book with its mob-cap awry or its petticoats raised a little too high.—It is very strange.

Whatever they may say, the present age is immoral,—if the word means anything, which we much doubt,—and we require no other proof of it than the quantity of immoral books it produces and the success they meet with.—Books follow morals, morals do not follow books.—The Regency produced Crébillon, not Crébillon the Regency. Boucher's little shepherdesses were painted and immodest because the little marchionesses of the day were painted and immodest.—Pictures are painted after models, not models after pictures. Somebody or other has said somewhere or other that literature and the arts have a great influence on morals. Whoever he is, he is unquestionably a great fool.—It is as if some one should say: "Green peas make the springtime grow;" on the other hand, green peas grow because it is spring, and cherries because it is summer. The trees bear fruit, the fruit assuredly does not bear the trees—the law is everlasting and invariable in its variations; the centuries succeed one another and each bears its fruit, which differs from that of the preceding century; books are the fruit of morals.

Beside the moral journalists, under this shower of homilies, as if it were a summer shower in a park, there has arisen, between the boards of the Saint-Simonian stage, a school of little mushrooms of a curious new variety, of which we propose to give the natural history.

They are the utilitarian critics,—poor fellows whose noses were so short that they would not hold spectacles, and who could not see to the end of their noses.

When an author tossed upon their desk a volume of any sort,—novel or poetry,—these gentry would lean back nonchalantly in their chairs, balance them on their hind legs, sway back and forth, puffing themselves out with a knowing air, and say:

"What purpose does this book serve? How can it be applied to securing the moral

and spiritual well-being of the most numerous and poorest class? What! not a word of the needs of society, nothing civilizing and progressive! How, instead of dealing synthetically with the great problems of humanity, and following, through the events of history, the phases of the regenerating, providential idea, can you waste time writing poetry and novels which lead to nothing, and which do nothing to help the generation forward in the pathway of the future? How can you concern yourself about form and style and rhythm, in presence of such grave interests?—What do we care for rhythm and style and form? that is all right in its place!" (Poor foxes, they are too green!)—"Society is suffering, it has a terrible gnawing at the vitals;" (translate: no one will subscribe to the utilitarian papers.) "It is for the poet to seek the cause of the trouble and cure it. He will find a way by sympathizing heart and soul with humanity;" (philanthropic poets! that would be something rare and charming.) "We await the coming of that poet, we pray for his coming with all our hearts. When he appears, his will be the acclamations of the multitude, his the palm-leaves, his the wreaths, his the Prytaneum."

Very fine; but as we desire the reader to stay awake to the end of this blessed preface, we will not continue this very close imitation of the utilitarian style, which, by its nature, is unusually soporific, and might advantageously replace laudanum and the discourses of the Academy.

No, fools, no, cretins and goitrous creatures that you are, a book does not make gelatine soup;—a novel is not a pair of seamless boots; a sonnet is not a syringe with a continuous stream; a drama is not a railroad,—all essentially civilizing things and tending to assist humanity along the pathway of progress.

By the bowels of all the popes, past, present, and to come, no, two hundred thousand times no.

You cannot make a nightcap out of a metonymy, or wear comparisons by way of slippers; you cannot use antithesis as an umbrella; unluckily we have not the secret

of clapping a few variegated rhymes upon the stomach as we put on a waistcoat. I have a firm conviction that the ode is a garment too light for winter, and that one would be no more warmly clad with the strophe, the antistrophe, and the epode, than the wife of the cynic who was contented to have only her virtue as a chemise and went about as naked as your hand, as history tells us.

The famous Monsieur de la Calprenède once had a coat, and when some one asked what kind of cloth it was made of, he answered: Silvandre.—Silvandre was a play of his that had just been produced with success.

Such arguments make one raise his shoulders above his head, higher than the Duke of Gloucester's.

People who claim to be economists and who wish to rebuild society from top to bottom, seriously put forward such trash.

A novel may be useful in two ways:—one material, the other spiritual, if we may use such an expression with reference to a novel.—Its material utility consists, first, of the few thousand francs that go into the author's pocket, and ballast him so that neither the devil nor the wind can whisk him away; to the publisher it is a noble race-horse who stamps and rears with his cabriolet of ebony and steel, as Figaro says; to the paper manufacturer, one more factory on some stream and often the means of spoiling a fine site; to the printers, divers hogsheads of logwood to put their windpipes in shape once a week; to the circulating libraries, piles of big sous covered with proletariat verdigris and a quantity of grease, which if it were carefully collected and utilized would render the whale-fishery useless.—The spiritual utility consists in this: that, while you are reading novels, you fall asleep, and you are not reading utilitarian, virtuous, and progressive newspapers, or other similar indigestible, stupefying drugs.

Let any one say after this that novels do not assist civilization.—I will say nothing of the tobacco agents, grocers, and dealers in fried potatoes, who have a very great

interest in this branch of literature, the paper used therein being, as a general rule, of a superior quality to that used by the newspapers.

Verily it is enough to make one split one's sides with laughter to hear messieurs the republican or Saint-Simonian utilitarians hold forth.—In the first place, I should be glad to know the exact meaning of that great lubberly substantive with which they daily lard the empty void of their columns, and which serves them as a sort of shibboleth and sacramental term:—Utility; what is the word, and to what is it applied?

There are two kinds of utilities, and the meaning of the word is always relative. What is useful for one is not for another. You are a cobbler, I am a poet.—It is useful for me to have my first line rhyme with my second.—A dictionary of rhymes is of great utility to me; you have no use for it in cobbling an old pair of boots, and it is fair to say that a cobbler's knife would be of no great use to me in writing an ode.—Now, you will remark that a cobbler is much above a poet, and that we could get along better without the latter than without the former. Without undertaking to cry down the illustrious profession of cobbler, which I honor equally with the profession of constitutional monarch, I will humbly confess that I should prefer to have my shoe down at heel rather than to have my lines haltingly rhymed, and that I should be more willing to go without boots than without poems. As I rarely go out, and walk more readily on my head than on my feet, I wear out fewer shoes than a virtuous republican who does nothing but run from one government department to another trying to induce somebody to toss him an office.

I know that there are those who prefer windmills to churches, and the bread that feeds the body to that that feeds the soul. To them I have nothing to say. They deserve to be economists in this world and also in the other.

Is there anything absolutely useful on this earth and in this life that we live? In the first place, there is very little use in one being on the earth and living. I challenge the

most erudite of the band to say of what use we are, unless it be to subscribe neither to the Constitutionnel nor to a journal of any sort.

Secondly, the utility of our existence being admitted a priori, what are the really useful things to maintain it? A plate of soup and a bit of bread twice a day are all that we need to fill the stomach, in the strict acceptation of the word. The man for whom a coffin six feet by two will be enough and more than enough after his death, does not need much more space during his life. A hollow cube, seven or eight feet broad, long and deep, with a hole to breathe through, a single cell in the hive, is all that he needs to lodge him and to keep the rain from falling on his back. A quilt, rolled properly about his body, will protect him from the cold as well as, yes, better than, Staub's most stylish and elegant frock-coat.

With that a man can exist, theoretically. They say that one can live on twenty-five sous a day; but to keep from dying is not living; and I cannot see wherein a city organized on utilitarian principles would be more agreeable to live in than Père La Chaise.

Nothing beautiful is indispensable to life.—If flowers should be suppressed, the world would not suffer materially; and yet who could wish that there were no flowers? I would rather give up potatoes than roses, and I do not believe there is more than one utilitarian in the world capable of digging up a bed of tulips to make room for cabbages.

What good purpose does female beauty serve? Provided that a woman is well-developed physically, in a condition to receive a man and to produce children, she will always be good enough for the economist.

What is the use of music? or painting? Who would be foolish enough to prefer Mozart to Monsieur Carrel, Michael Angelo to the inventor of white mustard?

Nothing is really beautiful but that which cannot be made use of; everything that is useful is ugly, for it is the expression of some need, and the needs of man are vile

and disgusting, like his poor, weak nature.—The most useful part of a house is the privy.

I myself, with due respect to those gentlemen, am one of those to whom superfluities are necessaries—and my liking for people and things is in inverse ratio to the services they render me. I prefer a Chinese vase, covered with dragons and mandarins, which is of no use to me at all, to a certain other vase, which is useful to me; and that one of my talents which I prize most highly is my inability to guess riddles and charades. I would very willingly renounce my privileges as a Frenchman and a citizen to see an authentic painting by Raphael, or a beautiful nude woman: the Princess Borghese, for instance, when she posed for Canova, or Julia Grisi when she was in her bath. For my part I would gladly consent to the return of that cannibal of a Charles X., if he would bring me, from his castle in Bohemia, a hamper of Tokay or Johannisberg, and I would agree that the suffrage laws were broad enough, if some of the streets were more so and other things less so.—Although I am not a born dilettante, I prefer the noise of squeaking fiddles and bass drums to that of Monsieur le Président's bell. I would sell my trousers to buy a ring and my daily bread for sweetmeats.—The most becoming occupation for a polished man is, it seems to me, to do nothing, or to smoke his pipe or his cigar analytically. I also have a high regard for those who play at skittles and for those who write good poetry. You see that my principles are very far from being utilitarian, and that I shall never become editor of a virtuous newspaper unless I am converted, which would be droll enough.

Instead of awarding a Monthyon prize as a reward of virtue, I would prefer to give, like Sardanapalus, that great philosopher who has been so misunderstood, a handsome premium to the man who should invent a new form of pleasure; for enjoyment seems to me the true aim of life and the only useful thing in the world. God has so willed it, for it was He who made women, perfumes, light, lovely flowers, good wines, prancing horses, greyhounds, and Angora cats; nor did he say

to his angels: "Be virtuous," but: "Love;" and he gave us a mouth, more sensitive than the rest of the skin, with which to kiss women, eyes uplifted to see the light, a subtle sense of smell to inhale the soul of flowers, well-knit thighs to press the sides of stallions and fly swifter than thought without railroad or steamboat, delicate hands with which to caress the long head of the greyhound, the velvety back of the cat, and the gleaming shoulders of creatures of doubtful virtue; in a word, he bestowed only upon us the threefold, glorious privilege of drinking without being thirsty, of striking a light, and of making love at all seasons, which distinguishes us from the brute much more than the custom of reading newspapers and drawing maps.

Mon Dieu! what an idiotic thing is this alleged perfectibility of the human race that is being dinned into our ears! One would say in truth that man is a machine susceptible of improvements, and that the more careful adjustment of a wheel, a counterpoise more conveniently placed, might make it work more smoothly and more handily. When they have succeeded in giving man a double stomach, so that he can chew his cud like an ox, and eyes in the back of his head, like Janus, so that he can see those who stick out their tongues at him behind his back, and contemplate his unworthiness in a less uncomfortable position than that of the Venus Callipyges at Athens, and in planting wings on his shoulder blades so that he will not be obliged to pay six sous to ride in an omnibus; when they have given him a new organ, well and good: then the word perfectibility will begin to mean something.

Since all these fine ameliorations, what has been done that was not done as well and better before the deluge?

Have we succeeded in drinking more than they drank in the days of ignorance and barbarism—old style? Alexander, the doubtful friend of the fair Hephæstion, was no small drinker, although there was no Journal des Connaissances Utiles in his day, and I am unable to conceive how any utilitarian, unless he should become oïnopic

and more puffed out than the younger Lepeintre or a hippopotamus, could drain the great beaker which he called Hercules' cup. The Maréchal de Bassompierre, who emptied his long boot to the health of the Thirteen Cantons, seems to me a singularly estimable personage in his way and very hard to improve upon. What economist will enlarge our stomachs so that they will hold as many beefsteaks as the late Milo of Crotona, who ate an ox? The bill of fare at Véfour's Café Anglais, or at any other culinary celebrity's that you choose, seems to me very ill-supplied and commonplace compared to the menu of Trimalcion's dinner.—At whose table in these days are a sow and her twelve shoats served on a single platter? Who has eaten muræna and lampreys fattened on man? Do you really think that Brillat-Savarin has improved upon Apicius? Could Vitellius's big tripe-man find at Chevet's the wherewithal to fill his famous Minerva's shield with pheasants' and peacocks' brains, tongues of flamingoes and scarus livers?—The oysters you eat at the Rocher de Cancale are such a great delicacy compared with the oysters of Lucrin, for which a lake was made expressly.—The little establishments in the suburbs kept by the marquises of the Regency were wretched little boxes, if we compare them with the villas of the Roman patricians at Baiæ, Capri, and Tibur. The Cyclopean splendor of the great voluptuaries who erected everlasting monuments for a day's pleasure should cause us to fall flat on our faces before the genius of antiquity and erase forever from our dictionaries the word perfectibility.

Has a new capital crime been invented? Unfortunately there are only seven of them as before, the number of the just man's backslidings for one day, which is very moderate.—Indeed, I do not think that after a century of progress, at the rate we are travelling, any lover would be capable of renewing the thirteenth labor of Hercules.—Can a man be agreeable to his divinity a single time oftener than in the days of Solomon? Many very illustrious scholars and very respectable ladies answer that question in the negative, and aver that amiability is on the wane. Very good! if that is so, why do you talk of progress?—I know that you will tell me that there is an

Upper Chamber and a Lower Chamber, that you hope that everybody will soon be an elector and the number of representatives doubled or trebled. Do you think that there are not enough mistakes in grammar made in the national tribune as it is, and that the deputies are not numerous enough for the vile work they have to do? I can hardly understand the utility of quartering two or three hundred provincials in a wooden barrack, with a ceiling painted by Monsieur Fragonard, there to botch and bungle nobody knows how many absurd or atrocious little laws.—What difference does it make whether it is a sabre, a holy-water sprinkler, or an umbrella that governs us?—It is a club all the same, and I am amazed that progressive men should dispute as to the kind of club that is to make their shoulders tingle, when it would be much more progressive and less expensive to break it and throw the pieces to all the devils.

The only one of you who has any common sense is a madman, a great genius, an imbecile, a divine poet far above Lamartine, Hugo, and Byron; it is Charles Fourrier, the phalansterian, who is all that in his single person: he alone is logical and has the courage to carry his theory through to its inevitable consequence.—He asserts, without hesitation, that man will soon have a tail fifteen feet long with an eye at the end of it; that surely is progress and will permit us to do a thousand fine things we could not do before, such as killing elephants without striking a blow, balancing ourselves on trees without swings, as handily as the most expert ape, doing without sunshade or umbrella by raising the tail above the head like a plume, as squirrels do, who get along very well without umbrellas; and other prerogatives too numerous to mention. Several phalansterians claim that they already have a little tail that asks nothing better than to grow longer, if only God gives them length of days.

Charles Fourrier has invented as many species of animals as George Cuvier, the great naturalist. He invented horses that will be thrice the size of elephants, dogs as large as tigers, fish capable of feeding more people than the three small fishes of the Saviour, which the incredulous Voltaireans believe were poissons d'Avril,[1] and I

the text of a noble parable. He has built cities beside which Rome, Tyre, and Babylon are simply mole-hills; he has piled Babels one upon another and built spiral stairways ascending among the clouds to a greater height than all those in John Martinn's engravings; he has conceived I cannot say how many orders of architecture and new sauces; he has drawn a plan for a theatre which would seem immense even to Romans of the Empire, and prepared a dinner menu that Lucius or Nomentanus might have deemed sufficient for a dinner to their friends; he promises to create new forms of pleasure and to develop the organs and the senses; he is to make women fairer and more voluptuous, men more robust and sturdy; he guarantees you children and proposes to reduce the population of the world so that every one will be in easy circumstances; which is more reasonable than to urge paupers to make other paupers, with the idea of shooting them down in the streets when they breed too fast and sending them bullets instead of bread.

Progress is possible in no other way.—All the rest is bitter mockery, buffoonery without wit, which is not even calculated to deceive gullible fools.

The phalanstery is really a step in advance of the abbey of Thélème, and definitely relegates the earthly paradise to the ranks of those things that are altogether superannuated and old-fashioned. The Thousand and One Nights and Madame d'Aulnay's Tales alone can contend successfully with the phalanstery. What fertility! what invention! There is material there from which to supply marvels for three thousand cartloads of romantic or classic poems; and our versifiers, whether academicians or not, are paltry inventors compared to Monsieur Charles Fourrier, the inventor of startling attractions.—This idea of making use of impulses which people have hitherto sought to repress, is most assuredly a lofty and powerful idea.

Ah! you say that we are making progress!—Suppose that a volcano should open its maw to-morrow at Montmartre, and should make a winding-sheet of ashes and a tomb of lava for Paris, as Vesuvius once did for Stabia, Pompeii, and Herculaneum,

and that, some thousand years hence, the antiquaries of that day should make excavations and exhume the corpse of the dead city, tell me what monument would remain standing to bear witness to the splendor of the mighty entombed, the Gothic Notre-Dame?—They would form truly a fine idea of our artistic development when they cleared away the rubbish from the Tuileries, redecorated by Monsieur Fontaine! The statues on Pont Louis XV. would look splendid in the museums of those days. And were it not for the pictures of the ancient schools and the statues of antiquity or the Renaissance crowded together in the gallery of the Louvre, that long shapeless conduit; were it not for the ceiling by Ingres, which would show that Paris was not a Barbary camp or a village of Welches or Topinamboux, the things that would be unearthed from the ruins would be very interesting.—Short swords carried by National Guardsmen, firemen's helmets, coins struck from pyriform dies, that is the kind of thing they would find instead of the beautiful, curiously-carved weapons that the Middle Ages left in the recesses of their towers and ruined tombs, the medallions that fill the Etruscan vases and pave the cellars of all Roman buildings. As for our wretched veneered furniture, all the cheap boxes, naked and ugly and shabby, that we call commodes or secretaries, and all our shapeless, fragile utensils,—I trust that time would have been compassionate enough to destroy the last vestige of them.

Once, this whim of erecting a magnificent, pretentious monument took possession of us. In the first place we were obliged to borrow the plan from the old Romans; and even before it was finished, our Panthéon tottered on its legs like a child with the rickets and staggered like a drunken man, so that we had to give it crutches of stone, otherwise it would have measured its shameful length on the ground, in sight of all the world, and would have given the nations something to laugh at for more than a hundred francs.—We thought it better to set up an obelisk on one of our squares; we had to go and filch it at Luxor, and we were two years bringing it home. Old Egypt lined its roads with obelisks as we line ours with poplars; it carried bundles of them under its arm as the market-gardener carries bunches of asparagus, and carved a

monolith from the sides of its mountains of granite more easily than we make tooth-picks or ear-picks. A few centuries ago Raphael was living and Michael Angelo; now we have Monsieur Paul Delaroche, all because we are progressing.—You boast of your Opéra; ten Opéras like yours could dance a saraband in a Roman circus. Monsieur Martin, himself, with his tame tiger and his poor gouty lion, sound asleep like a subscriber to the Gazette, makes a very poor showing beside the gladiator of antiquity. Take your benefit performances that last till two o'clock in the morning—what do they amount to when you think of the games that lasted a hundred days, of the plays in which real ships really fought in real water; in which thousands of men conscientiously cut one another in pieces;—aye, turn pale O heroic Franconi!—in which, when the sea retired, the desert arrived with its roaring tigers and lions, awe-inspiring supernumeraries who did duty but once; in which the leading rôle was taken by some robust, athletic Dacian or Pannonian whom they would very often have found it embarrassing to produce at the end of the play, his sweetheart being a lovely and dainty Numidian lioness who had fasted for three days?—Does it not seem to you that the rope-dancing elephant was superior to Mademoiselle Georges? Do you suppose Mademoiselle Taglioni is a better dancer than Arbuscula, and Perrot better than Bathyllus? I am convinced that Roscius could have given points to Bocage, excellent actor though he is,—Galeria Coppiola played ingénue rôles when she was more than a hundred years old. It is fair to say that the oldest of our jeunes premières is but little more than sixty, and that Mademoiselle Mars shows no sign of progress in that direction: they had three or four thousand gods in whom they believed, and we have only one and we hardly believe in him; that is a strange kind of progress.—Was not Jupiter a better man than Don Juan and a much more successful seducer? Verily, I cannot see what we have discovered or even improved.

After the progressive journalists, as if to serve as a foil to them, come the blasé journalists, who are usually twenty or twenty-two years old, who have never left

their quarter and have as yet lain only with their housekeeper. Everything bores them, tires them out; they are sated, blasé, used up, inaccessible. They know beforehand what you are going to say to them; they have seen, felt, heard, experienced everything that it is possible to see, feel, hear, and experience; the human heart has no corner so dark that they have not held a lantern to it. They say to you with marvellous self-possession: "The human heart is not like that; women are not made so; that character is falsely drawn;"—or else: "What's this! always love or hatred! always men and women! Can't you talk about something else? Why, man is worn threadbare, and woman, more so, since Monsieur de Balzac took a hand.

"'Who will deliver us from men and women?'

"Do you think your fable is new, monsieur? it is new after the fashion of the Pont-Neuf:[2] nothing in the world could be more common; I read it somewhere or other;—when I was out at nurse or somewhere else; it's been dinned into my ears for ten years.—By the way, monsieur, understand that there's nothing I don't know, that everything is worn threadbare for me, and that even if your idea were as virginal as the Virgin Mary, I would swear, none the less, that I had seen it prostituting itself on street corners to the vilest scribblers and the most contemptible pedants."

Journalists of that stamp are responsible for Jocko, Le Monstre Vert, Les Lions de Mysore, and a thousand other charming conceits.

They are constantly complaining of being obliged to read books and see plays. Apropos of a paltry vaudeville, they will talk about flowering almond-trees, limes that perfume the air, the breezes of spring, the odor of the young foliage; they set up for lovers of nature after the style of young Werther, and yet they have never set foot outside of Paris and could not tell a cabbage from a beet.—If it is winter, they prate about the joys of the domestic fireside, and the crackling fire, and the andirons, and the slippers, and the reverie and the state between sleeping and waking; they never fail to quote Tibullus's famous line:

Quam juvat immites ventos audire cubantem,

by the aid of which they assume a knowing and at the same time ingenuous air, the most fascinating thing imaginable. They pose as men upon whom the work of men can no longer make any impression, whom the emotions aroused by the drama leave as cold and hard as the knife with which they cut their quills, but who exclaim, nevertheless, with Jean Jacques Rousseau: "Ah! there's the periwinkle!" They profess fierce antipathy to the colonels at the Gymnase, the American uncles, the cousins, male and female, the sensitive old grumblers, the romantic widows, and try to cure us of the vaudeville by proving every day by the feuilletons that all Frenchmen are not born wicked.—In truth, we see no great harm in that, but the contrary, and we are glad to acknowledge that the extinction of the vaudeville or the opera-comique in France—national style—would be one of the greatest benefactions that the press and Heaven could bestow.—But I should be very glad to know what species of literature these gentlemen would allow to be established in its place. To be sure, it could be no worse.

Others preach against false taste and translate Seneca the tragedian. Lastly, and to close the procession, a new battalion of critics has been formed, of a species never before seen.

Their formula for estimating a work is the most convenient, the most elastic, the most malleable, the most peremptory, the most superlative, and the most successful that a critic ever could have conceived. Zoilus would certainly have lost nothing thereby.

Hitherto, when it has seemed desirable to depreciate a work of any sort or to cast odium upon it in the eyes of the patriarchal and simple-minded subscriber, the ordinary method has been to make false or cunningly isolated quotations; to maim sentences and mutilate lines in such a way that the author himself would have considered himself the most ridiculous creature on earth; to bring accusations of

imaginary plagiarisms; to place passages from his book side by side with passages from ancient or modern authors, which had not the least connection therewith; to accuse him, after the style of a cook and with innumerable solecisms, of not knowing his own language and of degrading the French of Racine and Voltaire; to assert in all seriousness that his book tended toward anthropophagy, and that readers would infallibly become cannibals or have hydrophobia in the course of the week; but all that was paltry, out of date, false and fossilized to the last degree. By dint of having dragged along through feuilletons and Variétés articles, the charge of immorality became insufficient, and so unfit for service that the Constitutionnel, a bashful and progressive journal, as we know, was almost the only one that had the desperate courage to continue to use it.

So they invented the criticism of the future, the Prospective criticism. Can you imagine, at first thought, what a charming thing it is and what a prolific imagination it indicates? The recipe is simple and I can tell you what it is. The book that will be considered fine and will be praised is the book that has not yet appeared. The one that has just appeared is infallibly detestable. The one to appear to-morrow will be superb; but it is always to-day. It is the same with this sort of criticism as with the barber who had these words in huge letters for his sign:

SHAVING FREE HERE TO-MORROW.

All the poor devils who read the placard promised themselves for the next day the ineffable, sovereign sweetness of being barbered once in their lives without unloosing their purse-strings: and the hair on their chins easily grew half a foot during the night that preceded that blessed day; but when they had the napkin around their necks, the barber asked them if they had any money and bade them pay up, or he would treat them like nut-pickers or apple-gatherers of Le Perche; and he swore a mighty sacre dieu that he would cut their throats with his razor unless they paid him; and when the poor devils, whining and whimpering, talked about the sign and the

sacrosanct inscription:—"Ha! ha! my little fatties!" said the barber, "you don't know so much after all, and you'd much better go back to school! The sign says: 'To-morrow!' I'm no such whimsical fool as to shave for nothing to-day; my confrères would say I was throwing away my trade.—Come another time, come the week that has two Sundays together, and you'll find everything all right. May I be called a niggardly fellow and a flat, if I don't shave you for nothing, on the word of an honest barber."

Authors who read a prospective article in which an existing work is attacked always flatter themselves that the book they are writing will be the book of the future. They try to accommodate themselves, as much as possible, to the ideas of the critic, and become socialists, progressives, moralizers, palingenetics, mystics, pantheists, buchezists, thinking in that way to escape the anathema; but the same thing happens to them that happened to the barber's customers:—to-day is not the eve of to-morrow. The to-morrow that we hear so much about will never shine upon the world; for the formula is too convenient to be abandoned so soon. Even while decrying the book of which they are jealous and which they would be glad to annihilate, they put on the gloves of the most generous impartiality. They apparently ask nothing better than to approve and praise it, and yet they never do it. This recipe is very superior to the one that we might call retrospective, which consists in vaunting ancient works only—works which no one reads and no one cares about—at the expense of modern books, which people do think about and which wound their self-esteem more directly.

We said, before beginning this review of messieurs the critics, that the material would fill fifteen or sixteen folio volumes, but that we would content ourselves with a few lines; I am beginning to fear that those lines will prove to be each two or three thousand fathoms long and will resemble those thick, bulky pamphlets that a cannon-ball would not make a hole through, which bear the perfidious title: "A word concerning the Revolution," a word concerning this or that. The history of the

doings of the manifold loves of the goddess Madeleine de Maupin, would run great risk of being elbowed out of the first book, and you will understand that two whole volumes are not too much to sing worthily the adventures of that lovely Bradamante.—That is why, however much we may desire to continue the blazonry of the illustrious Aristarchuses of the age, we will content ourselves with the partial sketch we have drawn, adding a few reflections concerning the good-nature of our easy-going confrères in Apollo, who, as stupid as the Cassander of pantomime, stand still to receive the blows from Harlequin's lath and the clown's kicks in the stern, without budging any more than an idol.

They resemble a fencing-master, who should fold his arms behind his back during a bout, and receive all his opponent's thrusts in his unprotected breast without attempting a single parry.

It is like the trial of a cause in which the king's attorney only is allowed to speak, or a debate in which no reply is permitted.

The critic puts forward this or that theory. He makes a great dash and ostentatious display. Absurd, detestable, monstrous; it resembles nothing, it resembles everything. A drama is produced, the critic goes to see it; he finds that it bears no resemblance to the drama he had constructed in his head on the strength of the title; thereupon he substitutes, in his feuilleton, his own drama for the author's. He interlards it with his erudite phrases; he relieves himself of all the knowledge he has collected the day before in some library, and belabors people to whom he ought to go to school, and the least of whom could teach greater men than he.

Authors endure this with a magnanimity, a long-suffering which seems to me truly inconceivable. After all is said and done, who are these critics whose tone is so cutting, whose words are so peremptory, that one would say they were veritable sons of the gods? they are simply men who were our school-fellows, and who have evidently profited less by their studies than we, since they have produced nothing

and can do nothing but befoul and spoil the work of others like genuine Stymphalian vampires.

Would it not be worth while to criticise the critics? for those disgruntled great men, who are so fond of playing the magnificent and the fastidious, are far from being infallible like the Holy Father. There would be matter enough to fill a daily newspaper of the largest size. Their errors, historical or otherwise, their distorted quotations, their mistakes in grammar, their plagiarism, their drivel, their oft-repeated, ill-bred jests, their paucity of ideas, their lack of intelligence and tact, their ignorance of the simplest things which leads them to mistake the Piræus for a man and Monsieur Delaroche for a painter, would furnish authors with ample material for vengeance, without other labor than that of drawing a line under the passages and reproducing them word for word; for one does not receive a commission as a great writer with a commission as critic, and to reproach others for errors in language or taste is not enough to ensure one against making them himself; our critics prove it every day.—If Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and other men of that stamp should become critics, I could understand that people might go down on their knees and worship them; but that Messieurs Z. K. Y. V. Q. X., or any other letter of the alphabet between Alpha and Omega, should set themselves up as little Quintilians and scold you in the name of morality and good literature—that is what always disgusts me and sends me into an unparalleled rage. I would like to have a police ordinance issued prohibiting certain names from attacking certain others. To be sure, a cat may look at a king, and Saint-Peter's at Rome, giant that it is, cannot prevent the Transteverins from defiling its base in strange fashion; but I do not believe, nevertheless, that it would be a bad idea to inscribe upon certain monumental reputations:

NO FILTH DEPOSITED HERE.

Charles X. alone understood the question. By ordering the suppression of

newspapers he conferred a great service upon the arts and civilization. Newspapers are in a certain sense courtiers or jobbers, who interpose between artists and public, between king and people. We know the fine things that resulted therefrom. This perpetual barking and snarling benumbs inspiration and causes such a feeling of distrust in the heart and mind, that no one dares place his confidence either in a poet or in a government; the result being that royalty and poesy, the two greatest things in the world, become impossible, to the great detriment of the people, who sacrifice their well-being to the paltry pleasure of reading every morning a few vile sheets printed on vile paper, besmeared with vile ink, and filled with vile stuff. There was no criticism of art under Julius II., and I never heard of any feuilleton on the subject of Daniel de Volterra, Sebastiano del Piombo, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Ghiberti della Porta, or Benvenuto Cellini; and yet I think that, for people who had no newspapers, who did not know the word art or the word artistic, they had a fair share of talent and acquitted themselves reasonably well at their trade. The reading of newspapers hinders the growth of genuine scholars and genuine artists; it is like daily dissipation that brings you, enervated and weak, to the bed of the Muses, those harsh, exacting damsels who will have none but fresh and lusty lovers. The newspaper kills the book, as the book has killed architecture, as artillery has killed physical courage and muscular strength. No one realizes the pleasures that the newspapers deprive us of. They strip everything of its virginity; they prevent us from having anything of our own, even from owning a book all by ourselves; they deprive us of the pleasure of being surprised at the theatre by telling us beforehand how every play ends; they deprive us of the pleasure of spreading idle gossip and tittle-tattle and slander, of inventing false news or peddling genuine news for a whole week through every salon in society. They drone ready-made opinions to us, do what we will, and warn us against things we might like; by their means, dealers in phosphorous matches, although they have poor memories, discuss literature as impertinently as provincial academicians; by their means we hear, all day long, in

place of artless opinions or individual nonsense, ill-digested fragments of newspapers, which resemble omelets half cooked on one side and burned on the other,—and we are pitilessly stuffed with news three or four hours old, which children at the breast already know; they deaden our taste, they make us like those people who drink spiced brandy, and those who swallow lemons and grape-stalks, and lose the flavor of the most generous wines and cannot appreciate their delicate, perfumed bouquet. If Louis-Philippe should suppress all literary and political journals once for all, I should be infinitely grateful to him and I would dash off on the spot a fine, rambling dithyramb, in soaring verse with alternate rhymes; signed: "Your most humble and loyal subject," etc. Pray do not imagine that there would be no further interest in literature; in the days when there were no newspapers, a quatrain engrossed all Paris for a week, and a first performance for six months.

It is true that this step would result in the loss of advertisements and puffs at thirty sous a line, and notoriety would be less sudden and less overwhelming. But I have thought out a very ingenious way of replacing advertisements. If, between now and the day when this magnificent novel is placed on sale, my gracious sovereign shall have suppressed the newspapers, I shall most assuredly make use of it, and I anticipate wonders therefrom. When the great day arrives, twenty-four mounted criers, in the livery of Renduel, with his address on their backs and breasts, carrying banners in their hands with the title of the novel embroidered on both sides, each preceded by a drummer and kettle-drummer, will ride through the city, and, halting on all the squares and corners, will shout in a loud, distinct voice: "To-day, not yesterday or to-morrow, is placed on sale the admirable, the inimitable, the divine and more than divine novel by the most illustrious Théophile Gautier, Mademoiselle de Maupin, which Europe, not to mention other parts of the world and Polynesia, has been awaiting so impatiently for a year and more. It is selling at the rate of five hundred a minute, and editions follow one another from half-hour to half-hour; the nineteenth is already on sale. A detachment of municipal guards is stationed at the

door of the shop, holding back the crowd and preventing all confusion." Surely that would be worth as much as three lines in the Débats or the Courrier Français, between advertisements of elastic belts, hoop-skirts, nursing-bottles with indestructible teats, Regnault paste, and remedies for fluor albus.

May, 1834.

[1] April fools—literally, April fishes.

[2] New Bridge.

MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN

I

You complain, my dear friend, of the infrequency of my letters.—What would you have me write you except that I am well and that my affection for you never changes?—Those are facts that you know perfectly well, and that are so natural to my age and to the noble qualities that every one recognizes in you, that it is almost absurd to send a paltry sheet of paper a hundred leagues to say nothing more.—In vain do I cudgel my brains, I know of nothing that is worth the trouble of repeating; mine is the most monotonous life imaginable and nothing happens to break the monotony. To-day leads up to to-morrow as yesterday led up to to-day; and without claiming to be a prophet, I can boldly prophesy in the morning what will happen to me in the afternoon.

This is how I arrange my day:—I rise, that goes without saying, and that is the beginning of every day; I breakfast, I fence, I go out to walk, I come home, I dine, make a few calls or amuse myself reading: then I go to bed precisely as I did the day before; I go to sleep, and as my imagination is not excited by unfamiliar objects, it supplies me with none but threadbare, often repeated dreams, as monotonous as my actual life: all this is not very entertaining, as you see. However, I reconcile myself to this existence better than I should have done six months ago.—I am bored, to be

sure, but in a tranquil, resigned fashion, which does not lack a certain agreeableness, which might well be compared to those gray, mild autumn days in which one finds a secret charm after the excessive heat of summer.

This sort of existence, although I have apparently accepted it, is hardly suited to me, however, or, at all events, it bears but little resemblance to the existence I dream of and consider myself well adapted for.—Perhaps I am mistaken and am in reality adapted for no other kind of life than this; but I can hardly believe it, for, if it were my real destiny, I should more readily have adapted myself to it and should not be so painfully bruised by its sharp corners in so many places.

You know what a powerful attraction strange adventures have for me, how I adore everything out of the common course, extravagant and dangerous, and with what avidity I devour novels and tales of travel; I doubt if there is on this earth a madder, more vagabond fancy than mine; and yet, by some curious fatality or other, I have never had an adventure, I have never made a journey. So far as I am concerned, the tour of the world means the tour of the town in which I live; I touch my horizon on every side; I am elbow to elbow with reality. My life is that of the shell on the sand-bank, of the ivy clinging to the tree, of the cricket on the hearth.—Verily, I am surprised that my feet have never taken root.

Cupid is represented with a bandage over his eyes; Destiny should be represented in the same condition.

I have for a valet a sort of rustic boor, loutish and stupid enough, who has travelled as much as the north wind, who has been to the devil, to every conceivable place, who has seen with his eyes all the things of which I conceive charming ideas, and cares as little about them as about a glass of water; he has been in the most extraordinary situations; he has had the most amazing adventures that a man can have. I make him talk sometimes, and I rage inwardly when I think that all those fine things have happened to a clown who is capable neither of sentiment nor reflection,

and who is good for nothing but to do what he does, that is to say, brush clothes and clean boots.

It is clear that that knave's life should have been mine.—For his part, he considers me very fortunate, and his surprise is unbounded when he sees how melancholy I am.

All this is not very interesting, my poor friend, and hardly worth the trouble of writing, is it? But as you insist upon it that I must write to you, I must tell you what I think and what I feel, and must give you the history of my ideas, in default of events and acts.—It may be that there will be little order and little novelty in what I shall have to say to you; but you must blame nobody but yourself for it. You would have it.

You are the friend of my childhood, I was brought up with you; we lived our lives in common for a long, long while, and we are accustomed to exchange our most secret thoughts. I can tell you, therefore, without blushing, all the absurd things that pass through my unoccupied brain; I will not add a word, I will not cut out a word, I have no self-love with you. So I will be absolutely frank—even in petty, shameful things; not before you, certainly, will I cover my nakedness.

Beneath the shroud of indifferent, depressed ennui to which I have referred just now, there stirs sometimes a thought that is benumbed rather than dead, and I have not always the sad and gentle tranquillity that melancholy gives.—I have relapses and fall back into my old attacks of agitation. Nothing in the world is so fatiguing as those motiveless paroxysms, those aimless impulses.—On those days, although I have no more to do than on any others, I rise very early in the morning, before sunrise, I have such a feeling of being in a hurry, of not having all the time I need; I dress in hot haste, as if the house were on fire, tossing on my clothes at random and bewailing a wasted minute.—Any one who happened to see me would think that I was going to keep an assignation or to hunt for money.—Not at all.—I have no idea

where I shall go; but go I must, and I should think my salvation endangered if I remained at home.—It seems to me as if somebody were calling me outside, as if my destiny were passing through the street at the moment and the question of my life or death were on the point of being decided.

I go down with an air of surprise and alarm, clothes in disorder, hair uncombed: people turn to look and laugh when they meet me, and take me for a young rake who has passed the night at the ale-house or elsewhere. I am drunk to all intent, although I have drunk nothing, and I have the aspect of a drunken man even to the uncertain gait, now slow, now fast. I go from street to street like a dog that has lost his master, looking in every direction, ill at ease, on the alert, turning at the slightest sound, gliding into the centre of every group, heedless of the rebuffs of the people I jostle against, and scrutinizing everything with a clear-sightedness that I do not possess at other times.—Then all of a sudden it is made clear to me that I am mistaken, that that surely is not the place, that I must go on farther, to the other end of the town, Heaven knows where.—And I rush off as if the devil were after me.—I touch the ground only with the tips of my toes and I don't weigh an ounce.—Really I must be a strange sight with my terrified, frantic manner, my waving arms and the inarticulate cries I utter.—When I think it over in cold blood, I laugh at myself with all my heart, which doesn't prevent me, I beg you to believe, from doing it all over again on the first occasion.

If any one should ask me why I rush about so, I certainly should be much embarrassed to answer. I am in no hurry to arrive, as I am going nowhere. I am not afraid of being late, as I have no appointment.—No one is waiting for me—and I have no possible reason for hurrying so.

Is it because an opportunity to love, an adventure, a woman, an idea, a fortune, or anything else is missing in my life, and I am seeking it unconsciously, impelled by a vague instinct? is my existence struggling to complete itself? is it a longing to get

away from myself and my surroundings, the tiresomeness of my life and the wish for something different? It is one of these, or perhaps all of them together.—At all events, it is a very unpleasant experience, a feverish irritation ordinarily succeeded by the most complete collapse.

I often have the idea that, if I had started an hour earlier, or if I had quickened my gait, I should have arrived in time; that, while I was passing through one street, the thing I was looking for passed through another, and that a block of carriages was enough to make me miss what I have been pursuing, regardless of everything else, for so long a time.—You cannot imagine the intense melancholy and profound despair into which I fall when I see that all this comes to nothing and that my youth is passing and no prospect opening before me; thereupon all my idle passions mutter in my heart and devour each other for lack of better food, like the wild beasts in a menagerie whom the keeper has forgotten to feed. Despite the stifled, unacknowledged disappointments of every day, there is something within me that resists and will not die. I have no hope, for, in order to hope, one must have a desire, a certain propensity to wish that things should turn out in one way rather than another. I desire nothing, for I desire everything. I do not hope, or rather I have ceased to hope;—this is too absurd—and it is absolutely one to me whether a thing is or is not.—I am waiting—for what? I don't know, but I am waiting.

It is a shuddering sort of expectation, overflowing with impatience, broken with somersaults and nervous movements, like the suspense of a lover waiting for his mistress.—Nothing comes;—I fly into a passion or begin to weep.—I am waiting for heaven to open and an angel to descend and make some revelation to me, for a revolution to break out and the people to give me a throne, for one of Raphaël's virgins to step out of its canvas and come and embrace me, for relations that I don't possess to die and leave me the wherewithal to set my fancy afloat upon a sea of gold, for a hippogriff to snatch me up and bear me away into unknown regions.—But whatever I am waiting for, it certainly is nothing commonplace and

ordinary.

It has gone so far that, when I return home, I never fail to ask: "Has no one been here? is there no letter for me? nothing new?"—I know perfectly well that there is nothing, that there can be nothing. That makes no difference; I am always much surprised and much disappointed when I receive the regular reply:—"No, monsieur—nothing at all."

Sometimes—very rarely, however—the idea takes a more definite form.—It will be some lovely woman whom I don't know and who doesn't know me, whom I have met at church or at the theatre and who has not taken the slightest notice of me.—I rush all over the house, and until I have opened the door of the last room—I hardly dare confess it, it is so utterly absurd—I hope that she has come and is there.—It is not conceit on my part.—I am so far from being conceited that several women have taken a most affectionate interest in me—at least so others have told me—when I had supposed them to be entirely indifferent to me and never to have thought much about me.—That comes from another source.

When I am not stupefied by ennui and discouragement my mind awakes and recovers all its former vigor. I hope, I love, I desire, and my desires are so violent that I imagine they will force everything to come to them, as a powerful magnet attracts bits of iron although they are at a great distance.—That is why I wait for the things I desire, instead of going to them, and I often neglect opportunities that open most favorably before my hopes.—Another than I would write the most amorous note you can imagine to his heart's divinity, or would seek an opportunity to approach her.—But I ask the messenger for the reply to a letter I have not written, and pass my time constructing in my brain situations most marvellously adapted to exhibit me to the woman I love in the most unlooked-for and most favorable light.—I could make a book thicker and more ingenious than the Stratagems of Polybius of all the stratagems I invent to make my way to her presence and reveal

my passion to her. Generally it would be enough to say to one of my friends: "Present me to Madame So-and-So," and to indulge in a mythological compliment suitably punctuated with sighs.

After listening to all this, one would naturally think me a fit subject for the Petites-Maisons; I am a sensible fellow enough, however, and I haven't carried many mad ideas into execution. All this takes place in the cellar of my brain, and all these ridiculous ideas are very carefully buried in my lowest depths; no one notices anything on the outside, and I am reputed to be a calm, cold young man, by no means susceptible to female charms and indifferent to things affected by most young men of my age; all of which is as far from the truth as society's judgments usually are.

However, in spite of all the things that have happened to dishearten me, some of my longings have been gratified, and from the small amount of pleasure their gratification has afforded me, I have come to dread the realization of the others. You remember the childish ardor of my longing to have a horse of my own? my mother gave me one very recently; he is as black as ebony, with a little white star on his face, flowing mane and tail, glossy coat, slender legs, just exactly the horse I wanted. When they brought him to me, it gave me such a shock, that I was as pale as death, and unable to recover myself, for a good quarter of an hour; then I mounted him, and started off at a gallop without saying a word; I rode straight ahead through the fields for more than an hour, in a state of ecstasy hard to conceive; I did the same every day for more than a week, and, upon my word, I don't know why I didn't founder him, or at least break his wind.—Gradually my intense zeal slackened. I rode my horse at a trot, then at a walk, then I began to ride so indifferently that he would frequently stop without my noticing it: the pleasure was transformed to a habit much more quickly than I supposed.—As for Ferragus—that is the name I gave him—he is really the most beautiful creature you can imagine. The hair on his feet is like the down on a young eagle; he is as active as a goat and as gentle as a

lamb. You will enjoy above all things taking a gallop on him when you come here; and, although my passion for equestrianism has grown decidedly cool, I am still very fond of him, for he has a very estimable equine character and I very much prefer him to many human beings. If you could hear his neigh of delight when I go to see him in his stable, and how intelligent his eyes are when he looks at me! I confess that I am touched by those marks of affection, and I put my arm around his neck and kiss him as affectionately, on my word, as if he were a lovely girl.

I had another longing also, more intense, more ardent, more constantly awake, more dearly cherished, upon which I had built a fascinating house of cards in my mind, a palace of chimeras, very often demolished, and reared again with desperate constancy;—it was to have a mistress—a mistress all my own—like the horse.—I cannot say whether the realization of that dream would have cooled my ardor as speedily as the realization of the other; I doubt it. But perhaps I am wrong, perhaps I should have grown weary as quickly.—It is a peculiarity of my disposition that I crave so frantically what I desire, although I never do anything to procure it, that if by chance, or by any other means, I attain the object of my desire, I am so afflicted with moral weakness and confused to such an extent, that I feel faint and ill, and have no strength left to enjoy it: so it is that the things that come to me without my having wished for them ordinarily afford me more pleasure than those I have most eagerly coveted.

I am twenty-two years old; I am not virgin.—Alas! nowadays nobody is so at that age,—either in body—or in heart—which is much worse.—Aside from those who afford pleasure to men for money, and who ought not to count any more than a bad dream, I have had, here and there, in some dark corner, divers virtuous, or almost virtuous women, neither lovely nor ugly, neither young nor old, such as fall in the way of a young man who has no settled attachment and whose heart is disengaged.—With a little good will and a considerable dose of romantic illusion, you can call that having a mistress, if you choose.—So far as I am concerned, it is

impossible, and if I should have a thousand of that sort I should still consider my longing as far from accomplishment as ever.

I have had no mistress, therefore, and my sole desire is to have one.—It is a matter that disturbs me strangely; it isn't an effervescent temperament, a boiling of the blood, the first glow of virility. It is not woman that I want, it is a woman, a mistress; I want her, I will have her, and before long; if I don't succeed, I admit that I shall never get over it and that I shall retain an inward timidity, a secret discouragement that will have a serious influence on the rest of my life.—I shall consider myself lacking in certain respects, inharmonious, incomplete—deformed in mind or heart; for, after all, what I ask is no more than fair, and nature owes it to every man. So long as I fail to gain my end, I shall look upon myself as nothing more than a child, and I shall not have the confidence in myself that I ought to have.—A mistress for myself, that is the toga virilis for a young Roman.

I see so many men, despicable in every respect, with lovely women whose lackeys they are hardly worthy to be, that a blush rises to my cheeks for the women—and for myself.—It gives me a pitiable opinion of women to see them sully themselves with such blackguards who despise and deceive them, rather than bestow themselves upon some loyal, sincere young man who would deem himself very fortunate and would adore them on bended knees; myself, for example. To be sure, that sort of creature frequents salons, struts about in all weathers, and is always sprawling over the back of some easy-chair, while I stay at home, with my face against the window-pane, watching the river steam and the mist rise, while rearing silently in my heart the perfumed sanctuary, the marvellous temple in which I am to set up the future idol of my soul.—A chaste and poetical occupation which makes women feel as little kindly toward you as possible.

Women have very little liking for contemplative men and take strangely to those who put their ideas into action. After all, they are not wrong. Compelled by their

education and social position to hold their tongues and to wait, they naturally prefer those men who come to them and talk, for they relieve them from an unnatural and wearisome silence: I realize all that; but never as long as I live shall I be able to make up my mind, as I see many men do, to leave my seat, walk across a salon and say unexpectedly to a woman: "Your dress makes you look like an angel," or: "Your eyes are particularly bright to-night."

All this does not make it any less essential for me to have a mistress. I don't know who it will be, but I see no one among the women I know who can fill that dignified and important position properly. I find in them but very few of the qualities I must have. Those who are young enough haven't sufficient beauty or charm of mind; those who are young and beautiful are disgracefully and repulsively virtuous or lack the necessary freedom of action; and then there is always some husband or brother about, or a mother or an aunt, or I don't know what, who has big eyes and long ears, and whom one must cajole or throw out of the window.—Every rose has its grub, every woman has heaps of relations whom you must get rid of like the caterpillars on a tree, if you want to pluck the fruit of her beauty some day. There is not one of them, even to the third cousins in the provinces, whom no one has ever seen, who is not determined to maintain his or her dear cousin's immaculate purity in all its snowy whiteness. That is nauseating, and I shall never have the necessary patience to tear up all the rank weeds and lop off the thorns that fatally obstruct the approaches to a pretty woman.

I don't care much for mammas and I care still less for little girls. I must confess, too, that married women have very moderate attractions for me.—There is a confusion and mixture in the latter case that disgust me; I cannot endure the idea of going shares. The woman who has a husband and a lover is a prostitute to one of them, often to both, and then I could never consent to give place to another. My natural pride would be incapable of stooping to such degradation. Never will I go away because another man is coming. Though the woman should be compromised and

ruined, though we should fight with knives, each with one foot on her body—I would remain.—Secret staircases, closets, wardrobes, and all the machinery of adultery would be poor expedients with me.

I am but little enamored of what is known as virgin purity, the innocence of the flower of life, purity of heart, and other charming things which sound most beautiful in verse; I call it all pure nonsense, ignorance, imbecility, or hypocrisy.—Virgin purity, which consists in sitting on the edge of a chair, with the arms pressed close against the body, the eye on the point of the corset, and in speaking only after permission from its grandparents, the innocence which has a monopoly of uncurled hair and white dresses, the purity of heart which wears the corsage high in the neck, because it has as yet no breast or shoulders, do not seem to me, in very truth, a marvellously tempting pleasure.

I am not at all anxious to teach little fools to say the alphabet of love.—I am not old enough or corrupt enough to take any great pleasure in that. I should have but ill-success, too, for I have never had the knack of teaching anybody, even the things that I knew best. I prefer women who can read freely, you get to the end of the chapter sooner; and in all things, but especially in love, what one must consider, is the end. In that respect I am much like those people who take a novel by the tail and read the conclusion first, being prepared then to go backward to the first page. That method of reading and loving has its charm. One relishes the details better when one's mind is at ease concerning the end, and reversing the natural order of things brings the unexpected to pass.

So young girls and married women are excluded from the category. Therefore we must select our divinity from among the widows.—Alas! I am very much afraid that although we have nothing left but them, we shall still fail to find what we want.

If I should fall in love with one of those pale narcissuses bathed in a warm dew of tears and stooping with melancholy grace over the brand-new marble gravestone of

some husband happily and recently deceased, I should certainly be, and in a very short time, as unhappy as the defunct spouse in his lifetime. Widows, however young and charming they may be, have one terrible inconvenience that other women have not; the instant that everything does not go well with them and the slightest cloud floats across the sky of love, they say at once, with a high and mighty, contemptuous manner: "Oh! how you act to-day! You are exactly like monsieur: when we quarrelled he never said anything but that; it's very strange, you have the same tone and the same expression; when you are angry, you can't imagine how much you resemble my husband:—it's enough to make one shudder."—It's very pleasant to have such things thrown in your face point-blank! There are some who carry their impudence to the point of praising the departed like an epitaph and extolling his heart and his leg at the expense of your leg and your—heart.—With women who have only one or several lovers, one has, at all events, the inestimable advantage of never hearing of one's predecessor, which is no trifling consideration. Women have too great an affection for what is proper and legitimate not to be very careful to keep quiet under such circumstances, and all those matters are relegated as speedily as possible to the old records.—It is always understood that one is always a woman's first lover.

I do not consider that there is any serious answer to be made to such a well-founded aversion. It is not that I look upon widows as altogether unpleasing, when they are young and pretty and haven't put off their mourning. There are the little languishing airs, the little tricks of letting the arms fall, bending the neck and puffing up like a half-fledged turtle-dove; a multitude of charming mannerisms prettily veiled behind the transparent mask of crêpe, a coquetry of despair so skilfully managed, sighs so adroitly husbanded, tears that fall so in the nick of time and make the eyes so bright!—Certainly, after my wine, if not before, the liqueur I love best to drink is a lovely, clear, limpid tear trembling at the end of a dark or light eyelash.—How is a man to resist that!—We don't resist it;—and then black is so becoming to

women!—The fair skin, poetry aside, turns to ivory, snow, milk, alabaster, to everything pure and white on earth that madrigal-makers can use: the dark skin has only a dash of brown, full of animation and fire.—Mourning is good fortune for a woman, and the reason why I shall never marry is that I am afraid my wife would get rid of me in order to wear mourning for me.—There are women, however, who do not know how to make the most of their affliction and who weep in such a way as to make their noses red and to distort their features so that they look like the grotesque figures we see on fountains: that's a great stumbling-block. A woman must have many charms and much art to weep agreeably; lacking those, she runs the risk of not being consoled for a long time.—Nevertheless, great as the pleasure may be of making some Artemisia unfaithful to the shade of her Mausolus, I do not intend to choose definitely, from among the lamenting swarm, the one whom I will ask to give me her heart in exchange for mine.

I hear you say at that: "Whom will you take, then?—You won't have unmarried girls nor married women, nor widows.—You don't love mammas; I don't imagine that you love grandmammas any better.—Whom in the devil do you love?"—That is the key to the charade, and if I knew it I should not torment myself so. Thus far I have never loved any woman, but I have loved and I do love love. Although I have had no mistresses and the women I have had have aroused in me nothing but desire, I have felt and I know the sensation of love itself: I do not love this one or that one, one rather than another, but some one I have never seen, who must exist somewhere, and whom I shall find, God willing. I know what she looks like, and when I meet her I shall know her.

I have very often imagined the place she lives in, the dress she wears, the color of her eyes and her hair.—I can hear her voice; I should know her step among a thousand others, and if, by chance, any one should mention her name, I should turn to look; it is impossible that she should not have one of five or six names I have assigned to her in my head.

She is twenty-six years old—no more, neither less nor more.—She is not ignorant and she has not yet become blasé. It is a charming age at which to make love as it should be made, without puerile nonsense and without libertinage.—She is of medium height. I don't like a giant or a dwarf. I want to be able to carry my deity from the sofa to the bed without assistance; but it would be unpleasant to me to have to hunt for her there. She must be just tall enough to put her mouth to mine for a kiss by standing on tiptoe. That is the proper height. As for her size, she is rather plump than thin. I am a little of a Turk on that point, and it would be very disagreeable to me to find an angle where I was looking for a rounded outline; a woman's skin should be well filled out, her flesh hard and firm as the pulp of an almost ripe peach: the mistress I shall have is made in just that way. She is a blonde with black eyes, the fair skin of a blonde and the rich coloring of a brunette, something red and sparkling in her smile. The lower lip a little thick, the pupil of the eye swimming in a sea of aqueous humor, the throat well-rounded and small, the wrists slender, the hands long and plump, the gait undulating like a snake rearing on its tail, the hips full and flexible, the shoulders broad, the back of the neck covered with down;—a refined and yet healthy style of beauty, animated and graceful, poetic and human; a sketch by Giorgione executed by Rubens.

This is her costume! she wears a dress of scarlet or black velvet slashed with white satin or cloth of silver, an open corsage, a huge ruff à la Medici, a felt hat, capriciously dented like Helena Systerman's, and long white feathers crisp and curled, a gold chain or a stream of diamonds around her neck, and on all her fingers a number of large rings of various enamels.

I would not waive a single ring or bracelet. The dress must be of velvet or brocade; if I should allow her to descend to satin, it would be the utmost concession I would make. I would rather rumple a silk skirt than a cotton one, and pull pearls or feathers from a head than natural flowers or a simple knot of ribbon; I am aware that the lining of the cotton skirt is often at least as appetizing as that of the silk skirt; but I

prefer the latter.—And so, in my dreams, I have taken for my mistress many queens, many empresses, many princesses, many sultanas, many famous courtesans, but never middle-class women or shepherdesses; and in my most vagabond desires, I have never taken advantage of any one on a carpet of turf or in a bed of Aumale serge. I consider that beauty is a diamond which should be mounted and set in solid gold. I cannot imagine a lovely woman who has not a carriage, horses, servants, and everything that one has with a hundred thousand francs a year: there is a certain harmony between beauty and wealth. One demands the other; a pretty foot calls for a pretty shoe, a pretty shoe calls for carpets and a carriage, and so on. A lovely woman with mean clothes in a wretched house is, to my mind, the most painful spectacle one can see, and I could never fall in love with her. Only the comely and the rich can fall in love without making themselves ridiculous or pitiable.—On that principle few people have the right to fall in love: I myself should be shut out first of all; however, that's my opinion.

It will be evening when we meet for the first time—during a lovely sunset;—the sky will have the bright orange-yellow and pale-green tints that we see in some pictures by the great masters of the old days: there will be a broad avenue of chestnuts in flower and venerable elms all covered with ringdoves,—lovely trees clothed in cool dark green, shadows full of mystery and moisture; here and there a statue or two, some marble vases, standing out in their snowy whiteness against the background of verdure, and a sheet of water in which the familiar swan disports itself,—and in the background a château of brick and stone as in the days of Henri IV., pointed, slate-covered roof, tall chimneys, weather-cocks on every gable, long, narrow windows.—At one of the windows, leaning in melancholy mood upon the balcony rail, stands the queen of my heart in the costume I described to you a moment ago; behind her is a little negro carrying her fan and her parrot.—You see that nothing is lacking and that it is all utterly absurd.—The fair one drops her glove;—I pick it up, kiss it and return it. We engage in conversation; I display all the wit that I do not

possess; I say some charming things; she answers me, I retort; it is a display of fireworks, a luminous shower of dazzling repartee.—In short, I am adorable—and adored.—The supper hour arrives, she invites me to join her;—I accept.—What a supper, my dear friend, and what a cook my imagination is!—The wine laughs in the crystal goblet, the white and gold pheasant smokes in a platter bearing her crest: the feast is prolonged far into the night and you can imagine that I don't finish up the night at home.—Isn't that a fine bit of imaginative work?—Nothing in the world could be simpler, and upon my word it's very surprising that it doesn't happen ten times rather than once.

Chapter I — What a supper——The wine laughs in the crystal goblet, the white and gold pheasant smokes in a platter bearing her crest: the feast is prolonged far into the night and you can imagine that I don't finish up the night at home.

Sometimes it is in a great forest.—The hunt sweeps by; the horn rings out, the pack gives tongue and crosses the path with the swiftness of lightning; the fair one in a riding habit is mounted on a Turkish horse, white as milk, spirited and swift beyond words. Although she is an excellent horsewoman, he paws and curvets and rears, and she has all the difficulty in the world in holding him; he takes the bit in his teeth and rushes straight toward a precipice with her. I fall from heaven for the express purpose of saving her, I stop the horse, I catch the swooning princess in my arms, I bring her to herself and escort her to her château. What well-born woman would refuse her heart to a man who has risked his life for her?—None;—and gratitude is a cross-cut that leads very quickly to love.

You will agree, at all events, that when I go into romance, I don't stop half-way, and that I am as mad as it is possible for a man to be. That is as it should be, for nothing in the world is more sickening than rational madness. You will agree also that, when I write letters, they are volumes rather than simple notes. I love whatever goes beyond ordinary bounds in everything.—That is why I love you. Don't laugh too

much at all the nonsense I have scribbled; I lay aside my pen to carry some of it into execution; for I recur always to my refrain! I mean to have a mistress. I cannot say whether it will be the lady of the park or the lady of the balcony, but I bid you farewell to go in quest of her. My mind is made up. Though she whom I seek should hide herself in the heart of the kingdom of Cathay or Samarcand, I shall find a way to dislodge her. I will let you know of the success or non-success of my undertaking. I hope that it will be success: give me your prayers, my dear friend. As for myself, I dress up in my best coat, and go out of the house determined not to return except with such a mistress as I have in my mind.—I have dreamed long enough; now to work.

P.S.—Tell me something about little D——; what has become of him? no one here knows anything about him; and give my compliments to your good brother and all the family.

II

Well, my friend, I have come home again, I have not been to Cathay or Cashmere or Samarcand;—but it is fair to say that I am no nearer having a mistress than ever.—And yet I took myself by the hand, I swore a mighty oath that I would go to the end of the world. I have not even been to the end of the town. I don't know what the matter is with me, but I have never been able to keep my word to anybody, even to myself: it must be that the devil takes a hand in it. If I say: "I will go there to-morrow," it is certain that I shall stay at home; if I propose to go to the wine-shop, I go to church; if I start to go to church, the roads get tangled under my feet like skeins of thread, and I find myself in an entirely different place. I fast when I have determined to have a debauch, and so it goes. Therefore I am inclined to believe that what prevents me from having a mistress is that I have determined to have one.

I must tell you about my expedition, step by step: it is well worth the honors of narration. I had passed at least two full hours at my toilet that day. I had had my hair

combed and curled and my moustaches, such as they are, twisted and waxed a little; and as the excitement of longing imparted some slight animation to my ordinarily pale face, really I was not so bad. At last, after scrutinizing myself attentively in the mirror in different lights, to see if I was fine enough and if my bearing was sufficiently gallant, I went resolutely forth with head erect, chin well raised, eyes front, one hand on the hip, making the heels of my boots ring like an anspessade, elbowing the bourgeois, and with a flawlessly triumphant and all-conquering air.

I was like another Jason setting out to conquer the Golden Fleece.—But, alas! Jason was more fortunate than I: besides the conquest of the fleece, he made, at the same time, the conquest of a beautiful princess, and I—I have neither fleece nor princess.

I walked through the streets, eying all the women, and hurrying toward them and gazing at them at closer quarters when they seemed to me to be worth the trouble of examining.—Some assumed their high and mighty virtuous air and passed without raising their eyes.—Others were surprised at first, then smiled if they had white teeth.—Some turned after a little time, to look at me when they thought I was not looking at them, and blushed like cherries when they found themselves face to face with me.—It was a lovely day; there were quantities of people out walking.—And yet I must confess, notwithstanding all the respect I feel for that interesting half of the human race, which is called by common consent the fair sex, it is, as a whole, devilishly ugly: out of a hundred women there is hardly one who is passably good-looking. This one had a moustache; that one had a blue nose; others had red spots in place of eyebrows; one was not badly built, but she had a pimply face. The head of another was charming, but she could scratch her ear with her shoulder; a third would have put Praxiteles to shame with the graceful roundness of certain outlines, but she stumbled along on feet like Turkish stirrups. Another exhibited the most magnificent shoulders imaginable; in revenge, her hands resembled in shape and size those immense scarlet gloves that haberdashers use for signs.—Generally speaking, what tired-looking faces! how worn and streaked they were, withered by

degrading petty passions and petty vices! What expressions of envy, of malevolent curiosity, of avarice, of brazen coquetry! and how much uglier is a woman who is not beautiful, than a man who is not handsome!

I saw nobody worth looking at—except a few grisettes;—but they have more cotton than silk to rumple, and they don't interest me.—In very truth, I believe that man, and when I say man I include woman, is the vilest animal on the face of the earth. That quadruped who walks on his hind feet seems to me extraordinarily presumptuous to claim the first place in creation as his undoubted right. A lion, a tiger, are finer animals than men, and in their species many individuals attain all the beauty that belongs to it. But such a thing rarely happens among human beings.—How many abortions for one Antinous! how many Goths for one Phyllis!

I am very much afraid, my dear friend, that I shall never be able to embrace my ideal, and yet there is nothing extraordinary or unnatural about it.—It is not the ideal of a third-form school-boy. I do not ask for ivory globes or alabaster pillars, or azure veins; I have not used in its composition either lilies, or snow, or roses, or jet, or ebony, or coral, or ambrosia, or pearls or diamonds; I have left the stars of heaven at rest, and I have not unhung the sun unseasonably. It is almost a bourgeois ideal, it is so simple, and it seems to me that with a bag or two of piastres I could find it all ready-made and realized in the first bazaar I might happen upon at Constantinople or Smyrna; it would probably cost me less than a blooded horse or dog; and to think that I shall not get what I want, for I have a feeling that I shall not! It is enough to drive a man mad, and I fly into the hottest sort of a rage against fate.

You are not such a mad fool as I, you are fortunate;—you have simply taken your life as it came, without tormenting yourself trying to shape it, and you have dealt with things as they turned up. You haven't sought for happiness, it has come in search of you; you love and are loved.—I don't envy you;—for Heaven's sake, don't think that! but I am not so happy as I ought to be when I think of your felicity, and I

say to myself, with a sigh, that I would like to enjoy felicity of the same sort.

Perhaps my happiness passed by my side and I did not see it, blind that I was; perhaps a voice spoke, and the uproar of my internal tempests prevented me from hearing it.

Perhaps I have been loved in secret by some humble heart that I have neglected or broken; perhaps I have myself been the ideal of another, the pole-star of a suffering heart,—the dream of a night and the thought of a day.—If I had looked at my feet, perhaps I should have seen there some fair Magdalene with her box of ointment and her dishevelled hair. I walked along with my arms raised to heaven, longing to pluck the stars that fled from me, and scorning to pick the little daisy that opened its golden heart in the dewy grass. I have made a great mistake: I have asked love for something other than love, something that it could not give. I forgot that love was naked, I failed to grasp the meaning of that magnificent symbol.—I asked him for brocade dresses, feathers, diamonds, sublime intellect, learning, poesy, beauty, youth, supreme power—everything that is not love;—love can offer naught but love, and he who seeks to extort anything else from him is unworthy to be loved.

I have been in too much of a hurry, of course: my hour has not yet come; God who lent me my life will not take it back without letting me live. What's the use of giving a poet a lyre without strings, or man a life without love? God cannot be guilty of such inconsistency; and I have no doubt that when the allotted moment comes, He will place in my path the woman I am to love and by whom I am to be loved.—But why has love come to me before a mistress? Why am I thirsty when I have no fountain at which to quench my thirst? or why can I not fly, like the birds of the desert, to the spot where water is to be found? The world to me is a Sahara without wells or date-trees. I have not in my whole life a single shady nook to give me shelter from the sun: I suffer all the ardors of passion without its ineffable ecstasy and delight; I know its torments and have not its pleasures. I am jealous of

something that does not exist; I am ill at ease for the shadow of a shade; I heave sighs that mean nothing; I have sleepless nights embellished by no adored vision; I shed tears that flow to the ground without being wiped away; I give the wind kisses that are not returned to me; I wear out my eyes trying to distinguish a vague, deceitful shape in the distance; I await what cannot come, and I count the hours with feverish anxiety as if I had an appointment.

Whoever you be, angel or demon, virgin or courtesan, shepherdess or princess, whether you come from north or south, you whom I do not know but whom I love! oh! do not force me to wait longer, or the flame will consume the altar, and you will find only a heap of cold ashes in place of my heart. Descend from the sphere where you now are; leave the crystal sky, O comforting spirit, and cast upon my heart the shadow of your great wings. Come, woman that I love, come, and let me clasp about you the arms that have been open so long. Ye golden doors of the palace where she dwells, turn on your hinges; raise yourself, latch of her humble cottage; untwine yourselves, ye branches of trees and thorns by the road-side; be broken, ye enchantments of the turret, ye spells of magicians; open, ranks of the common herd, and let her pass.

If you come too late, O my ideal! I shall not have the strength to love you:—my heart is like a dovecote full of doves. Every hour of the day some desire takes flight. The doves return to the dovecote, but my desires do not return to my heart.—The azure sky is whitened by their countless swarms; they wing their way through space, from world to world, from sky to sky, seeking some love to light upon and pass the night: haste, O my dream! or you will find naught in the empty nest save the shells of the birds that have flown.

My friend, my childhood's companion, you are the only one to whom I can say such things. Write me that you pity me and that you don't look upon me as a hypochondriac; comfort me, I never was in greater need of it; how greatly to be

envied are they who have a passion they can satisfy! The drunkard finds no cruelty in any sort of a bottle; he falls from the wine-shop to the gutter and is happier on his dung-heap than a king on his throne. The sensual man resorts to courtesans in search of ready loves or shameless refinements of indecency: a painted cheek, a short skirt, an exposed bosom, an obscene jest, he is happy; his eye turns white, his lip is moist; he attains the height of his happiness, he enjoys the ecstasy of his vulgar lust. The gambler needs only a green cloth and a worn and greasy pack of cards to procure the poignant excitement, the nervous spasms and the diabolical joy of his ghastly passion. Such people can satisfy their cravings or find distraction;—to me it is impossible.

This idea has taken such thorough possession of me that I no longer care for the arts, and poetry has now no charm for me; the things that used to be my delight do not make the least impression on me. I begin to believe that I am wrong, I demand more of nature and society than they can give. What I seek does not exist and I ought not to complain because I cannot find it. However, if the woman we dream of does not come within the conditions of human nature, how is it that we love only her and not others, since we are men and our instinct should draw us irresistibly toward them? What puts this imaginary woman into our head? with what clay do we mould this invisible statue? where do we get the feathers we fasten to the back of this chimera? what mystic bird laid in a dark corner of our soul the unseen egg from which our dream was hatched? what is this abstract beauty that we feel but cannot define? why, before a woman who may be charming, do we sometimes say that she is beautiful,—whereas we find her very ugly? Where is the model, the type, the interior pattern that serves us as a point of comparison? for beauty is always comparative and can be appreciated only by contrast.—Was it in the sky that we saw her—in a star—at a ball in the shadow of a mother, fresh bud of a leafless rose?—was it in Italy or in Spain? was it here or there, yesterday or long ago? was it the admired courtesan, the popular cantatrice, the prince's daughter? a proud and

noble head bending under a heavy diadem of pearls and rubies? a young and childish face stooping over the nasturtiums and volubilis in the window?—Of what school was the picture from which that beauty looked forth, fair and beaming amid dark shadows? Was it Raphael who caressed the contour that has caught your fancy? Was it Cleomenes who polished the marble that you adore?—are you in love with a Madonna or a Diana?—is your ideal an angel, a sylph, or a woman?

Alas! it is a little of all of these and it is none of them.

That transparent tint, that charming, blooming freshness, that flesh wherein the blood and the life flow in abundance, that lovely fair hair falling over the shoulders like a cloak of gold, that sparkling laughter, those amorous dimples, that figure undulating like a flame, that strength, that suppleness, that glistening satin, those rounded outlines, those plump arms, that full, smooth back, that whole appearance of blooming health belongs to Rubens.—Raphael alone could have given that pale tinge of amber to such pure features. What other than he drew the curves of those long, fine black eyebrows, and spread out the lashes of those modestly lowered lids?—Do you think that Allegri had no part in your ideal? From him the lady of your thoughts stole the warm, ivory whiteness of complexion that fascinates you. She stood long before his canvas to catch the secret of the angelic smile that is always on her lips; she modelled her oval features upon those of a nymph or a saint. That line of the hip that undulates so voluptuously is taken from the sleeping Antiope.—Those plump, well-shaped hands might be claimed by Danaë or Magdalen. Dusty antiquity itself supplied much material for the composition of your young chimera; those strong and supple loins, about which you twine your arms so passionately, were carved by Praxiteles. The divinity left everything for the express purpose of putting the toes of her charming foot outside the ruins of Herculaneum, so that your idol should not be lame. Nature also has contributed its share. You have seen here and there, in the prismatic rays of desire, a beautiful eye behind a blind, an ivory forehead pressed against a window, a mouth smiling behind a fan.—You have

divined the quality of the arm from the hand, of the knee from the ankle. What you saw was perfect; you assumed that the rest was like what you saw and you finished it out with bits of other beauties gathered elsewhere.—Not even ideal beauty, as realized by painters, is sufficient for you, and you must go and ask the poets for outlines even more gracefully rounded, shapes more ethereal, charms more divine, refinement more exquisite; you begged them to give breath and speech to your phantom, all their love, all their musings, all their joy and their sadness, their melancholy and their morbid fancies, all their memories and all their hopes, their knowledge and their passion, their mind and their heart; you took all these from them and you added, to cap the climax of the impossible, your own passion, your own mind, your dreams and your thoughts. The star lent its beams, the flower its perfume, the palette its colors, the poet his harmony, the marble its shape, and you, your longing.—How could a real woman, who eats and drinks, who goes to bed at night and gets up in the morning—however adorable and instinct with charm she may be—sustain comparison with such a creature! We cannot reasonably hope for such a thing, and yet we do hope for it and seek it.—What extraordinary blindness! it is sublime or absurd. How I pity and admire those who pursue the reality of their dream through everything and die content, if only they have once kissed their chimera on the lips! But what a frightful fate is that of the Columbuses who have not discovered their world, and of lovers who have not found their mistress.

Ah! if I were a poet, I would consecrate my verses to those whose existence is a failure, whose arrows have not reached the target, who have died with the word they had to say still unsaid and without pressing the hand that was destined for them; to all who have been unsuccessful or have passed by unnoticed, to genius without issue, stifled fire, the undiscovered pearl at the bottom of the sea, to all who have loved without being loved, to all who have suffered and not been pitied;—it would be a noble task.

How wise it was of Plato to wish to banish you from his republic, and what harm

you have done us, O poets! Your ambrosia has made our absinthe more bitter than ever; and we have found our lives more arid and more devastated after plunging our eyes into the vistas leading to eternity that you open to us! What a terrible struggle your dreams have brought upon our realities! and how our hearts have been stamped upon and trampled under foot by those rude athletes!

We have seated ourselves like Adam at the foot of the walls of the terrestrial paradise, on the steps of the staircase that leads to the world you have created, seeing a light brighter than the sunlight gleam through the chinks of the door, hearing vaguely some few scattered notes of a seraphic harmony. Whenever one of the elect enters or comes out amid a flood of glory, we stretch our necks trying to see something through the open door. It is fairy-like architecture equalled nowhere save in Arabian tales. Great numbers of pillars, superimposed arches, fluted spiral columns, leaf-work marvellously carved, trefoils hollowed out of the stone, porphyry, jasper, lapis-lazuli and Heaven knows what! transparencies and dazzling reflections, a profusion of strange stones, sardonyx, chrysoberyl, aquamarines, rainbow-hued opals, azerodrach, jets of crystal, torches to make the stars turn pale, a gorgeous vapor filled with noise and vertigo—genuine Assyrian magnificence!

The door closes: you see no more—and you cast down your eyes, filled with burning tears, to the poor, bare, lifeless earth, to the ruined hovels, to the people in rags, to your own soul, an arid rock upon which nothing grows, to all the woes and misfortunes of reality. Ah! if we could only fly as far as that, if the steps of that fiery staircase did not burn our feet; but alas! none but angels can climb Jacob's ladder!

What a fate is that of the poor man at the rich man's door! what ghastly irony in a palace opposite a hovel, the ideal opposite the real, poetry opposite prose! what deep-rooted hatred must tighten the knots at the bottom of the poor wretches' hearts! what a gnashing of teeth there must be at night on their poor beds, when the wind brings to their ears the sighing notes of the lutes and viols of love! Poets, painters,

sculptors, musicians, why have you lied to us? Poets, why did you tell us your dreams? Painters, why did you place upon your canvas the intangible phantom that ascended and descended between your heart and your brain with the throbbing of your blood, and say to us: "This is a woman." Sculptors, why did you procure marble from the bowels of Carrara to make it express for all time, in the eyes of all men, your most secret and most fleeting desire? Musicians, why did you listen to the song of the stars and the flowers during the night, and note it down? Why do you write such lovely ballads that the softest voice that says to us: "I love you!" seems to us as hoarse as the rasping of a saw or the cawing of a crow?—My curse on you, impostors!—and may the fire from heaven burn and destroy all pictures, poems, statues, and concerted pieces.—Ouf! there's a tirade of interminable length and a little out of the ordinary epistolary style.—What a harangue!

I just gave full swing to the lyric impulse, my dear friend, and I have been talking on stilts for a long, long time. All this is very far from our subject, which is, if I remember rightly, the glorious and triumphant history of the Chevalier d'Albert in pursuit of Daraïde, the loveliest princess in the world, as the old romances say. But in truth the story is so poor that I am compelled to have recourse to digressions and reflections. I hope that it will not always be so, and that, before long, the romance of my life will be more involved and complicated than a Spanish imbroglio.

After wandering about from street to street, I decided to call on one of my friends who was to present me at a house where, according to what he told me, I should see a world of pretty women—a collection of flesh and blood idealities—the wherewithal to satisfy a score of poets.—There are some there to suit all tastes:—aristocratic beauties with eagle glances, sea-green eyes, straight noses, chins haughtily elevated, queenly hands, and the gait of a goddess; silver lilies mounted upon golden stalks;—modest violets, pale of hue, sweet of perfume, with melting, downcast eyes, slender neck, transparent flesh;—animated, piquant beauties; devout beauties, beauties of all sorts;—for the house is a genuine seraglio,

minus the eunuchs and the Kislar aga.—My friend tells me that he has already had five or six affairs there—quite as many as that;—that seemed to me a prodigious record and I am very much afraid that I shall not have the like success; De C—— says yes, and that I shall succeed much better than I shall care to. According to him I have only one fault, which I am certain to correct as I grow older and go more into society—he says I think too much of woman and not enough of women.—It may well be that there's some truth in that.—He says that I will be perfectly lovable when I rid myself of that little failing. God grant it! It must be that women feel that I despise them; for a compliment, which they would consider adorable and delightful to the last degree in the mouth of another, in mine displeases them and makes them angry, as if it were the most savage epigram. That probably has something to do with the fault De C—— refers to.

My heart beat a little faster as I went up the stairs, and I had barely recovered from my emotion when De C——, taking me by the elbow, brought me face to face with a woman of about thirty—not ill-looking—dressed with dissembled magnificence and extreme affectation of childlike simplicity—which did not prevent her being daubed with rouge like a carriage-wheel:—it was the lady of the house.

De C——, assuming the shrill, mocking voice which is so different from his ordinary voice, and which he uses in society when he wants to be fascinating, said to her, half aloud, with abundant demonstrations of ironical respect, in which the most profound contempt could plainly be detected:

"This is the young man of whom I spoke to you the other day—a man of very distinguished merit; he is of unexceptionable birth and I think that it cannot be otherwise than agreeable to you to receive him; that is why I have taken the liberty to present him to you."

"Assuredly, monsieur, you have done well," rejoined the lady, with a most outrageously affected manner. Then she turned to me, and after looking me over out

of the corner of her eye, like a clever connoisseur, and in a way that made me blush to my ears, she said: "You may consider yourself invited once for all, and come as often as you have an evening to waste."

I bowed awkwardly enough, and stammered a few disconnected words which could not have given her a very exalted opinion of my talents; other persons came in and I was delivered from the ennui inseparable from an introduction. De C—— led me to a window recess and began to lecture me vigorously.

"What the devil! you will get me into a scrape; I announced you as a perfect phœnix of wit, a man of unbridled imagination, a lyric poet, everything that is most transcendent and impassioned, and you stand there like a ninny without lisping a word. What a wretched imagination! I thought your vein was more fruitful; come, come, give your tongue the rein, chatter away through thick and thin; you don't need to say sensible, judicious things, on the contrary, they might injure your chances; talk, that's the main thing; talk fast, talk all the time; attract attention to yourself; throw aside all fear and all modesty; fix it firmly in your head that all who are here are fools, or almost that, and don't forget that an orator who wants to succeed cannot despise his audience enough.—What do you think of the mistress of the house?"

"I dislike her very much already; and although I talked with her hardly three minutes, I was as bored as if I were her husband."

"Aha! that's what you think of her, eh?"

"Why, yes."

"Is your repugnance for her altogether insurmountable?—So much the worse; it would have been decent for you to have her, if only for a month; it's good form, and a young man with a little money can't get into society except through her."

"Very good! I'll have her," I said piteously, "since it must be; but is it as necessary as you seem to think?"

"Alas! yes, it is absolutely indispensable, and I will tell you why. Madame de

Thémines is the fashion now; she has all the absurd foibles of the day in a superior way,—sometimes those of to-morrow, but never yesterday's: she is thoroughly posted. People will wear what she wears, and she never wears what any one else has worn. She is rich, too, and her carriages are in the best taste.—She has no wit, but much small-talk; she has very keen fancies and little passion. People amuse her but do not move her; she has a cold heart and a dissolute head. As for her soul—if she has one, which is doubtful—it is of the blackest, and there is no malice and baseness of which she is not capable; but she is extremely adroit and keeps up appearances, just what is necessary to prevent anything being proved against her. For instance, she will lie with a man, but she will never write him the simplest kind of a note. Thus her most intimate enemies can find nothing to say against her except that she applies too much rouge and that certain parts of her person are not, in fact, so well rounded as they seem to be—which is false."

"How do you know?"

"What a question!—how does one know that sort of thing except by finding out for himself?"

"Then you have had Madame de Thémines?"

"Certainly I have! Why shouldn't I have had her? It would have been most unseemly of me not to have her.—She has done me some very great favors, and I am very grateful to her for them."

"I don't understand what kind of favors she can have done you."

"Are you really a fool?" said De C——, gazing at me with the most comical expression imaginable.—"Faith, I am much afraid of it; must I tell you everything? Madame de Thémines is considered, and justly, to have special information in certain directions, and a young man whom she has taken and kept for some time can present himself boldly anywhere, and be sure that he won't be long without having an affair—more likely two than one.—Aside from that ineffable advantage, there is

another hardly less great; and that is that, as soon as the female members of this circle see that you are Madame de Thémines' official lover, even though they have not the slightest taste for you, they will consider it a pleasure and a duty to take you away from a fashionable woman like her; and, instead of the advances and manœuvres you would otherwise have to make, you will have an embarrassment of riches, and you will necessarily become the focus of all imaginable cajoleries and blandishments.

"However, if she arouses too strong a repugnance in you, don't take her. You are not exactly obliged to do it, although that would be courteous and proper. But make your choice quickly and attack the one who pleases you best or seems to offer the most facilities, for by delaying you will lose the benefit of novelty, and the advantage it gives you over all the men here for a few days. All these ladies have no conception of the passions that are born in private intercourse and develop gradually in respect and silence; they are all for lightning strokes and occult sympathies; a wonderfully well-conceived scheme to avoid the ennui of resistance and all the long and wearisome repetitions that sentiment mingles with the romance of love, and which serve only to defer the conclusion to no purpose.—These ladies are very saving of their time, and it seems so valuable to them that they would be in despair at the thought of leaving a single moment unemployed.—They have a craving to oblige the human race which one cannot praise too highly, and they love their neighbor as themselves—which is most meritorious and perfectly angelic; they are very charitable creatures who would not, for anything in the world, drive a man to die of despair.

"There must be three or four of them already who are impressed in your favor, and I advise you as a friend to press your advantage warmly in that direction, instead of amusing yourself prattling with me in a window-recess, which will not materially assist your prospects."

"But, my dear C——, I am altogether green in such matters, I haven't the necessary experience of society to distinguish at first glance a woman who is impressed from one who isn't; and I might make some strange blunders unless you will assist me with your experience."

"Upon my word, you are a primitive creature without a name, and I didn't suppose it was possible to be so pastoral and bucolic in the blessed age we live in!—What the devil are you doing with that pair of great black eyes of yours, which would produce a most stunning effect if you knew how to use them?

"Just look over yonder, in the corner by the fire-place, at that little woman in pink playing with her fan: she has been staring at you for a quarter of an hour with most significant assiduity and fixity; no one in the world but she can be indecent in so superior a fashion and display such noble insolence. The women don't like her at all, for they despair of ever reaching that height of impudence, but, on the other hand, she is very popular with the men who find in her all the piquant flavor of the courtesan.—To be sure, her depravity is of a fascinating sort, she is full of wit and impulse and caprice.—She's an excellent mistress for a young man who has prejudices.—Within a week she will rid your conscience of all scruples and corrupt your heart to such an extent that you will never make yourself ridiculous or indulge in elegiacs. She has incredibly positive ideas on every subject; she goes to the bottom of everything with astonishing rapidity and accuracy of insight. The little woman is the incarnation of algebra; she is precisely what a dreamer and an enthusiast needs. She will soon cure you of your misty idealism: therein she will render you a great service. She will do it with the greatest pleasure, however, for her instinct leads her to disenchant poets."

My curiosity being aroused by De C——'s description, I emerged from my retreat, and, gliding from group to group, approached the lady in question and observed her closely,—she may have been twenty-five or twenty-six years old. She was small, but

well shaped, although a little inclined to be stout; she had round, white arms, well-formed hands and pretty feet, almost too small,—plump, polished shoulders, breast but little exposed, but what there was, very satisfactory and affording a favorable idea of the rest; her hair was extremely glossy and of a blue-black shade like a jay's wing; the corner of the eye was turned well up toward the temple, nose thin, nostrils very open, mouth moist and sensuous, a little crease on the lower lip and an almost imperceptible down at the corners. And with it all, vivacity, animation, health, and an indefinable suggestion of wantonness adroitly tempered by coquetry and tact, which made her a very desirable creature and more than justified the very lively passions she had inspired and continued to inspire every day.

I desired her; but yet I understood that that woman, agreeable as she might be, was not my ideal, or could make me say: "At last I have a mistress!"

I returned to De C—— and said: "I like her looks, and perhaps I may come to an understanding with her. But, before saying anything definite which will bind me, I would be very glad if you would have the kindness to point out those indulgent beauties who are so condescending as to be impressed with me, so that I may make my choice.—You will also oblige me, as you are acting as showman on this occasion, by adding a little descriptive notice and a list of their good and bad qualities; how I must attack them and the tone I must adopt with them in order not to seem too much like a provincial or a literary man."

"I most certainly will," said De C——. "Do you see that lovely, melancholy swan who manages her neck so gracefully and makes her sleeves move like wings? she is modesty itself, the most chaste and virginal creature in the world; she has a snow-white brow, a heart of ice, the expression of a madonna, the smile of an Agnes; she has a white dress and a soul of the same color; she wears nothing but orange-blossoms or water-lily leaves in her hair, and is attached to earth only by a thread. She has never had an evil thought and has no idea wherein man differs from

woman. The Blessed Virgin is a Bacchante beside her, all of which does not prevent her having had more lovers than any woman I know, and that is certainly saying a good deal. Just cast your eye on that discreet person's throat; it is a little masterpiece, and really it is very difficult to show so much without showing more; tell me if, with all her reserve and all her prudery, she isn't ten times more indecent than that good lady at her left, who bravely displays two hemispheres which, if they were united, would form a life-size globe,—or the other one at her right, décolletée to the navel, who parades her nothingness with fascinating intrepidity?—That virginal creature, unless I am very much mistaken, has already figured out in her head how much love and passion your pallor and your black eyes may be taken to promise; and my reason for saying so is that she hasn't once looked in your direction, visibly at least; for she can manage her pupils with such art and roll them into the corner of her eyes so cleverly that nothing escapes her; one would think that she looked through the back of her head, for she knows perfectly well what is going on behind her.—She's a female Janus.—If you want to succeed with her, you must lay aside anything like a free-and-easy, victorious manner. You must talk to her without looking at her, without moving, in a contrite attitude and in a subdued, respectful voice; in that way you can say whatever you choose to her, provided that it is suitably glossed over, and she will allow you to take the greatest liberties, at first in words; afterward in deeds. Simply take care to roll your eyes tenderly when hers are cast down, and talk to her about the joys of platonic love and the communion of souls, while you employ with her the least platonic and least ideal pantomime imaginable! She is very sensual and very sensitive; kiss her as often as you choose, but don't forget, even in the most intimate intercourse, to call her madame at least three times per sentence: she fell out with me, because, when I was in her bed, I said something or other to her and called her thou. What the devil! a woman is not virtuous for nothing!"

"After what you tell me I have no great desire to try my luck. A prudish Messalina! an entirely novel and monstrous combination."

"Old as the world, my dear boy! it is seen every day and nothing is more common.—You are wrong not to try your hand with her.—She has one great charm, which is that with her you always seem to be committing a deadly sin, and the least kiss seems altogether damnable; while with others you think of it as nothing more than a venial sin, and often you don't think you're doing anything wrong at all.—That is why I kept her longer than any other mistress.—I should have her still if she had not left me herself; she's the only woman who ever got ahead of me, and I look upon her with a certain amount of respect on that account.—She has the most delicate little refinements of pleasure and the great art of appearing to be forced to grant what she grants very freely; which gives to each of her favors the fascination of rape. You will find in society ten of her lovers who will swear to you that she is one of the most virtuous creatures on earth.—She is precisely the contrary.—It is an interesting study to analyze that virtue of hers on a pillow. Being forewarned, you run no risk, and you won't make the blunder of falling in love with her in earnest."

"How old is this adorable creature?" I asked De C——, for it was impossible to decide, even after examining her with the most careful attention.

"Ah! there you are! how old is she? that's a mystery and God only knows the clue. For my own part, and I pride myself on telling a woman's age almost to a minute, I have never succeeded in finding out hers. I can only estimate approximately that she is somewhere between eighteen and thirty-six.—I have seen her in full dress, in déshabille, in her linen, and I can tell you nothing in that connection: my knowledge is at fault; the age that you would generally take her to be is eighteen, and yet that can't be her age.—She is a combination of a virgin body and the soul of a harlot, and she must have had much time or much genius to corrupt herself so thoroughly and so speciously; she must have a heart of brass in a breast of steel; but she has neither; that makes me think that she is thirty-six, but in reality I know nothing about it."

"Hasn't she any intimate friend who could enlighten you on the subject?"

"No; she arrived here two years ago. She came from the provinces or from abroad, I don't know which—that is an admirable position for a woman who knows how to make the most of it. With such a face as she has, she can make herself any age she chooses and date only from the day she arrived here."

"That certainly is a most agreeable state of things, especially when some impertinent wrinkle doesn't give you the lie, and Time, the great destroyer, is kind enough to connive at that falsification of the certificate of baptism."

He pointed out several others, who, he said, would receive favorably whatever requests it might please me to prefer to them, and would treat me with peculiar philanthropy. But the woman in pink in the chimney-corner and the modest dove who was her antithesis were incomparably superior to all the others; and, if they had not all the qualities I require, they had some of them, at least in appearance.

I talked all the evening with them, especially with the last, and I took pains to cast my ideas in the most respectful mould;—although she hardly looked at me, I fancied sometimes that I could see her eyes gleaming behind the curtain of their lashes, and at some compliments that I ventured to address to her, decidedly broad but shrouded in the most modest gauze, I noticed just below the skin a tiny blush, held back and stifled, not unlike the effect produced by pouring a red liqueur into a glass that is half opaque.—Her replies were, in general, sedate and well-weighed, but keen and bright, and they implied much more than they expressed. The whole conversation was interspersed with pauses, unfinished phrases; veiled allusions, every syllable had its meaning, every pause its bearing; nothing could be more diplomatic or more charming.—And yet, however great my pleasure in it for the moment, I could not endure such a conversation very long. One must be forever on the alert and on his guard, and what I like best in conversation is ease, familiarity.—We talked first of music, which led us naturally to speak of the Opera, then of women, and then of love, a subject in which it is easier than in any other to find excuses for transition

from general principles to special instances.—We vied with each other in amatory talk; you would have laughed to hear me. Verily, Amadis on poor La Roche was no better than a dull pedant beside me. It was generosity, abnegation, self-sacrifice enough to put the late Curtius of Rome to the blush.—Really I didn't believe myself capable of such transcendent humbug and bathos. Can you imagine anything more ridiculous, a more perfect scene for a comedy, than myself indulging in the quintessence of platonism? And then my sugary manner, my demure, hypocritical little ways! tubleu! I looked as if I could never touch anything, and any mother who had heard me argue wouldn't have hesitated to let me lie with her daughter, any husband would have trusted his wife with me. It was the one evening in all my life when I seemed to be most virtuous and was least so. I thought it was more difficult than that to be a hypocrite and say things one doesn't believe. It must be very easy or else I must be strongly predisposed that way, to have succeeded so satisfactorily at the first trial.—Really I have some inspired moments.

As for the lady, she made many remarks, very shrewdly worded, which, notwithstanding the innocent air with which she made them, denoted a very extensive experience; you can't conceive the subtlety of her distinctions. The woman would split a hair in three pieces lengthwise, and make fools of all the angelic and seraphic pundits that ever were. Indeed, from her way of talking, it was impossible to believe that she has the shadow of a body.—It is all immaterial, vaporous, ideal enough to break your arms; and if De C—— had not warned me beforehand of the creature's manœuvring, I should certainly have despaired of the success of my undertaking, and stood shamefacedly aside. How in the devil, when a woman tells you for two hours, with the most indifferent air you can imagine, that love lives only on privation and sacrifice and other fine things of that sort, can you decently hope to persuade her to get between two sheets with you some day to stir your blood and see if you are made alike?

In short, we parted the best of friends, mutually congratulating each other on the

elevation and purity of our sentiments.

My conversation with the other was, as you will imagine, of a very different tenor. We laughed as much as we talked. We made fun, and very wittily too, of all the women there. When I say: "We made fun, and very wittily too," I am wrong; I ought to say: "She made fun;" a man never makes fun of a woman. I listened and approved, for it is impossible to draw with more telling strokes or to apply colors more brilliantly; it was the most interesting gallery of caricatures that I have ever seen. In spite of the exaggeration, you felt the truth underneath; De C—— was quite right; that woman's mission is to destroy the illusions of poets. There is an atmosphere of prose about her in which a poetic idea cannot live. She is charming, sparkling with wit, and yet when you are with her you think only of base, vulgar things; as I talked to her I felt a crowd of desires, incongruous and impracticable in that place; I felt like ordering wine and getting tipsy, taking her on my knee and kissing her neck—like lifting up her skirt to see if her garter was above or below the knee, like singing an obscene song at the top of my voice, smoking a pipe or smashing the windows: the devil knows what.—All the animal, all the brute rose in me; I would willingly have spat on Homer's Iliad and thrown myself on my knees before a ham.—I understand perfectly to-day the allegory of Circe changing the companions of Ulysses to swine. Circe was probably a wanton like my little woman in pink.

It is a shameful thing to say, but I felt a keen delight in the consciousness that the brute nature was gaining the upper hand; I did not resist it, I assisted it with all my strength, corruption is so natural to man and there is so much mud in the clay of which he is made.

Chapter II — My conversation with the other was, as you will imagine, of a very different tenor. We laughed as much as we talked. We made fun, and very wittily too, of all the women there.

And yet I was afraid for a minute of the gangrene that was gaining upon me, and I tried to leave my corrupter; but the floor seemed to have risen to my knees, and I was as if riveted to my place.

At last I made a determined effort and left her, and, it being then very late, I returned home in dire perplexity, very much disturbed in mind and with none too clear an idea what I ought to do.—I wavered between the prude and the wanton.—I found piquancy in the one, sensuousness in the other; and after a very close and very thorough examination of my conscience I discovered, not that I loved them both, but that I desired them both, one as much as the other, with sufficient eagerness to indulge in reverie and preoccupation.

According to all appearances, O my friend! I shall have one of those two women, perhaps I shall have them both, and yet I confess that I am only half satisfied by possessing them; it isn't that they're not very pretty, but at sight of them nothing cried out within me, nothing throbbed, nothing said: "It is they;"—I did not recognize them.—And yet I don't imagine that I shall find any one much better off in the way of birth and beauty, and De C—— advises me to try my hand with them. Most certainly I shall do it, and one or the other shall be my mistress before long or may the devil fly away with me; but way down in my heart a still small voice reproaches me for lying to my love and for pausing thus at the first smile of a woman I do not love, instead of seeking untiringly through the world, in cloisters and all sorts of bad places, in palaces and taverns, the woman who was made for me and whom God destines for me, be she princess or serving-maid, nun or courtesan.

Then I say to myself that I am indulging in chimeras, and that it's very much the same after all, whether I lie with that woman or another, that the earth will not swerve a hair's breadth from its course, and that the seasons will not change their order on that account; that nothing in the world is more indifferent to me, and that I am very simple to torment myself about such trifles: that is what I say to

myself.—But it's of no use for me to talk, I am not a whit more easy in my mind or more decided.

It may be because I live much alone and the smallest details take on too much importance in a life so monotonous as mine. I give too much heed to my living and thinking: I hear the throbbing of my arteries, the beating of my heart; by dint of close attention I disengage my most intangible ideas from the confused haze in which they float, and give them a body.—If I had more to do I should not notice all these trivial things and should not have time to look at my heart under a microscope, as I do all day long. The din of action would drive away this swarm of indolent thoughts that are flying about in my head and deafening me with the buzzing of their wings: instead of pursuing phantoms I should come to blows with realities; I should ask women for nothing beyond what they can give—pleasure—and I should not try to embrace some fanciful ideal decked out in hazy perfections.—This desperate tension of the eye of my heart toward an invisible object has impaired my sight. I am unable to see what is, from having stared at what is not, and my eye, so keen for the ideal, is terribly short-sighted for the real; so that I have known women whom everybody declared to be most ravishing creatures, but who seemed to me very far from that. I have greatly admired pictures generally considered to be daubs, and fantastic or unintelligible verses have given me more pleasure than the most courtly productions.—I should not be at all astonished if, after addressing so many sighs to the moon and looking at the stars with strained gaze, after perpetrating so many elegies and sentimental apostrophes, I should fall in love with some vile girl from the street, or some ugly old woman; that would be a great come-down!—Reality will perhaps take its revenge thus for the little care I have taken to pay court to it:—wouldn't it be a fine thing if I should conceive a romantic passion for a scullery wench or a low, dirty trollop? Can you imagine me playing a guitar under a kitchen window and supplanted by a lackey carrying an old toothless dowager's pet cur?—Or perhaps, finding nothing in this world worthy of my love, I shall end by

adoring myself, like the late Narcissus of selfish memory. To protect myself from such a great disaster, I look at myself in every mirror and in all the streams I pass. To tell the truth, as a result of musing and mental wandering I am terribly afraid of being led into something monstrous and unnatural. That is a serious matter and I must be on my guard.—Adieu, my friend;—I am going at once to call on the pink lady, for fear of relapsing into my usual state of meditation. I do not think that we shall trouble ourselves very much about actualities, and if we do anything it surely won't be in a spiritual direction, although she is very spirituelle. I carefully roll up and put away in a drawer the pattern of my ideal mistress in order not to try it upon this one. I propose to enjoy tranquilly such good qualities and merits as she has. I propose to leave her in a dress adapted to her figure, and not to try to fit clothes to her that I have cut out, in case of emergency, for the lady of my thoughts.—Those are very prudent resolutions, but I don't know whether I shall keep to them.—Once more, adieu.

III

I am the titular lover of the pink lady; that is almost a profession, an office, and it gives a man a firm footing in society. I no longer look like a scholar seeking a mistress among a parcel of grandmothers and afraid to sing a love-song to a woman unless she's a hundred years old; I notice, since my installation, that I receive much more consideration, that all the women talk to me with jealous coquetry and go out of their way to smile on me.—The men, on the other hand, are colder, and in the few words we exchange there is a touch of hostility and constraint; they feel that they have in me an enemy already formidable, who may become much more so.—I have heard that many of them had bitterly criticised my way of carrying myself and said that my style of dress was too effeminate; that my hair was curled and anointed with more care than beseemed me; that that fact, taken in connection with my beardless face, gave me a most absurd girlish appearance; that I affected rich materials that smelt of the stage, and that I looked more like an actor than a man: a parcel of trite,

sneering remarks, intended to justify themselves in being dirty and wearing wretched, ill-fitting clothes. But all this serves only to make me the whiter, and all the ladies consider that my hair is the finest in the world, and that the niceties of my toilet are in the best taste, and they seem strongly disposed to make up to me for all that I spend for their benefit, for they are not fools enough to believe that all that elegance has no other aim than my own private embellishment.

The lady of the house seemed at first a little offended at my choice, which she thought must inevitably fall upon herself, and for some days she was decidedly sour—to her rival only, for there was no change in her manner to me—her spleen manifesting itself in divers little "My dears," uttered in that dry, abrupt tone that women alone can master, and in certain uncomplimentary remarks concerning her costume, made in as loud a voice as possible, such as: "Your hair is done too high and not at all to correspond with your face," or: "Your waist bags under the arms; who in the world made that dress?" or: "You have black rings under your eyes; it seems to me you are much changed;" and a thousand other trivial observations to which the other did not fail to retort with all desirable malignity when opportunity offered; and if the opportunity was too slow in offering she made one for her own use and returned, with interest, what she had received. But soon, another object having distracted the attention of the slighted princess, the little war of words ceased and everything resumed its usual order.

I said baldly that I was the pink lady's titular lover; that is not enough for so accurate a man as you are. You will undoubtedly ask me what her name is: as for that, I shall not tell you; but, if you choose, to shorten the story and in memory of the color of the dress in which I first saw her, we will call her Rosette; it's a pretty name; my little dog has the same name.

You would like to know from point to point, for you love exactness in all things, the story of our love-affairs with this fair Bradamante, and by what successive steps I

passed from the general to the particular and from the condition of simple spectator to that of actor; how, after being one of the audience, I became the lover. I will gratify your desire with the very greatest pleasure. There is nothing unpleasant in our romance; it is all rose-colored, and no tears are shed except tears of pleasure; you will find no long descriptions or repetitions, and everything moves on toward the end with the haste and speed so urgently recommended by Horace;—it is a genuine French romance.—Do not imagine, however, that I carried the citadel at the first assault. The princess, although very humane to her subjects, is not as lavish of her favors at first, as you might think; she knows their value too well not to make you purchase them; she also knows too well how a judicious delay sharpens the appetite and what relish a semi-resistance adds to the pleasure, to abandon herself to you at first, however keen the inclination you have aroused in her.

To tell the whole story at length, I must go back a little. I gave you a very circumstantial account of our first interview. I had one or two, perhaps three others in the same house, and then she invited me to call on her; I did not make her repeat the invitation, as you can believe; I went there at discreet intervals at first, then a little more frequently, then still more so, and finally whenever the fancy seized me, and I must confess that it seized me at least three or four times a day.—The lady, after we had been parted a few hours, always received me as if I had just returned from the East Indies; which fact touched me as much as anything could and impelled me to show my gratitude in a marked manner by the most gallant and tenderest words you can imagine, to which she replied as best she could.

Rosette—as we have agreed to call her that—is a very bright woman and has a most admirable appreciation of man; although she postponed the end of the chapter for some time, I did not once lose my temper with her: which is really marvellous, for you know how I fly into a passion when I don't get what I want on the instant, and when a woman goes beyond the time I have mentally allowed her in which to surrender.—I have no idea how she did it at the first interview; she gave me to

understand that I should have her, and I was surer of her than if I had had her written promise signed by her hand. You will say perhaps that her bold and free-and-easy manners left the field free to rash hopes. I do not think that that is the real motive: I have seen some women whose prodigious freedom of manner excluded the last vestige of doubt, who did not produce that effect upon me, and in whose presence I was conscious of a timidity and uneasiness that were, to say the least, misplaced.

The result is, generally speaking, that I am less amiable with the woman I long to possess than with those who are indifferent to me; it is because of the excitement of waiting for an opportunity and my uncertainty as to the success of my project; that makes me gloomy and casts me into a fit of musing which takes away much of my power of pleasing and my presence of mind. When I see the hours I had set aside for another purpose passing one by one, I am filled with anger in spite of myself, and I cannot keep from saying very sharp, harsh things, which sometimes go as far as brutality and put my affair back a hundred leagues.

With Rosette I had no such feeling; never, even at the moment when she resisted me most stubbornly, did I have the idea that she wanted to escape from my love. I calmly allowed her to display all her little coquetries, and I endured in patience the overlong delays to which it pleased her to subject my ardor; there was something smiling in her harshness that consoled you for it as much as possible, and in her most Hyrcanian cruelties you could distinguish a background of humanity that made it impossible for you to have any very serious fear.—Virtuous women, even when they are not really virtuous at all, have a crabbed, disdainful way which is perfectly unendurable to me. They have the air of being always ready to ring and order their footmen to put you out; and it seems to me, really, that a man who takes the trouble to pay court to a woman—and it isn't always as agreeable as you may think—doesn't deserve to be looked at in that way.

Dear Rosette has no such glances as that, not she; and I assure you that she doesn't

lose anything by it; she is the only woman with whom I have ever been myself, and I am conceited enough to say that I have never been so agreeable. My wit has displayed itself freely; and, by the skill and fire of her retorts, she has led me to discover more than I had any idea that I possessed, and more perhaps than I really do possess.—To be sure, I haven't done much in the way of lyrics—that is hardly possible with her; it is not that she has no poetic side, notwithstanding what De C—— said of her; but she is so full of life and strength and movement, she seems to be so well placed in her present surroundings, that one has no desire to leave them for a flight among the clouds. She fills one's real life so pleasantly and makes of it something so entertaining to herself and others, that reverie has nothing better to offer you.

A miraculous thing! I have known her nearly two months, and in those two months the only times I have been bored have been when I was not with her. You will agree that she can be no inferior woman to produce such a result, for women usually produce exactly the opposite effect on me and are much more agreeable to me at a distance than near at hand.

Rosette has the best disposition in the world, with men I mean, for with women she's as wicked as a devil; she is bright, lively, alert, ready for anything, very original in her way of speaking, and has always some charming nonsense to tell you that you don't expect; she is a delightful companion, a jolly comrade with whom you sleep, rather than a mistress; and if I were a few years older and had fewer romantic ideas, I should be perfectly satisfied, indeed I should deem myself the most fortunate mortal on earth. But—but—that conjunction implies nothing good, and unfortunately that little devil of a restrictive word is the one most frequently employed in all human tongues;—but I am an imbecile, an idiot, a downright booby, never content with anything and always hunting mares' nests; and, instead of being altogether happy, I am only half so;—half, that is a good deal for this world, and yet I find it not enough.

In the eyes of the world I have a mistress whom several desire and envy me, and whom no one would disdain. My desire is gratified, therefore, in appearance, and I no longer have the right to pick a quarrel with fate. However, it seems to me that I have no mistress; I can convince myself that I have by arguing it out, but I do not feel it, and if anybody should ask me unexpectedly if I had one, I think I should answer no.—However, the possession of a woman who has beauty, youth, and wit, constitutes what, in all times and in all countries, has been and still is called having a mistress, and I think there is no other way. That doesn't prevent my having the strangest doubts in that connection, and it has gone so far that if several people should unite to convince me that I am not Rosette's favored lover, I should end by believing them in the face of the palpable evidence to the contrary.

Do not think from what I say that I do not love her or that she is displeasing to me in any way; on the contrary, I am very fond of her and I see in her what everybody else would see in her: a pretty, alluring creature. I simply do not feel that I possess her, that is all. And yet no woman ever gave me so much pleasure, and if I have ever known bliss, it has been in her arms.—A single one of her kisses, the most chaste of her caresses makes me shiver to the soles of my feet and sends all my blood back to my heart. Explain it all if you can. The facts, however, are as I tell them to you. But the human heart is full of such absurdities; and if we were obliged to reconcile all the contradictions it exhibits, we should have a heavy task on our hands.

How does it happen? Verily, I have no idea.

I see her all day, and all night too, if I choose. I bestow as many caresses on her as I please; I have her naked or dressed, in town or in the country. Her good humor is inexhaustible, and she enters heart and soul into my whims however eccentric they may be; one evening the fancy seized me to possess her in the middle of the salon, with all the candles lighted, the fire blazing on the hearth, the chairs arranged in a circle as if for a grand evening reception, she, in a toilette de bal with her bouquet

and her fan, all her diamonds on her fingers and her neck, feathers in her hair—the most magnificent costume imaginable—and I dressed like a bear; she consented.—When everything was ready, the servants were greatly surprised to receive orders to close the doors and admit no one; they acted as if they had not the slightest comprehension of what it all meant, and went away with a dazed look that made us laugh heartily. They certainly thought that their mistress was stark mad; but what they thought or did not think mattered little to us.

That was the most burlesque evening of my whole life. Can you imagine the appearance I must have presented with my hat and feather under my paw, rings on every claw, a little silver-hilted sword and a sky-blue ribbon on its hilt? I approached the fair one, and, having made her a most graceful reverence, sat down beside her and besieged her in due form. The flattering madrigals, the exaggerated compliments I addressed to her, all the jargon suited to the occasion assumed a strange significance in passing through my bear's muzzle; for I had a superb head of painted cardboard which I was soon obliged to throw under the table, my deity was so adorable that evening, and I longed so to kiss her hand and something better than her hand. The skin soon followed the head; for not being accustomed to play the bear, I was stifled in it, more so than was necessary. Thereupon the ball-dress had a fine time as you can imagine; the feathers fell like snow around my beauty, the shoulders soon came out of the sleeves, the bosom from the corset, the feet from the shoes, the legs from the stockings; the unstrung necklaces rolled on the floor, and I believe that fresher dress was never more pitilessly rumpled and torn; the dress was of silver gauze and the lining of white satin. Rosette displayed on that occasion a heroism altogether unusual to her sex, which gave me a most exalted opinion of her. She looked on at the sack of her costume like an uninterested witness, and did not for a single instant show the slightest regret for her dress and her lace; on the contrary, she was wildly gay, and assisted with her own hands in tearing and breaking anything that wouldn't untie or unclasp quickly enough to suit my taste and

hers.—Doesn't this strike you as worthy to be handed down in history beside the most brilliant deeds of the heroes of antiquity? The greatest proof of love a woman can give her lover is to refrain from saying to him: "Take care and not rumple me or spot my dress," especially if the dress be new.—A new dress is a greater source of security to a husband than is commonly supposed. It must be that Rosette adores me or else she is blessed with a philosophy superior to that of Epictetus.

Chapter III — Thereupon the ball-dress had a fine time as you can imagine; *** and I believe that fresher dress was never more pitilessly rumpled and torn; the dress was of silver gauze and the lining of white satin. Rosette displayed on that occasion a heroism altogether unusual to her sex.

Nevertheless I think that I paid Rosette the full value of her dress and more, in coin which is none the less esteemed and valued because it does not pass current with tradesmen. Such unexampled heroism surely deserved such a recompense. However, like the generous creature she is, she repaid what I gave her. I had a wild, almost convulsive sort of pleasure, such as I did not believe myself capable of enjoying. The resounding kisses mingled with bursts of laughter, the shuddering, impatient caresses, all the piquant, tantalizing sensations, the pleasure imperfectly enjoyed because of the costume and the situation, but a hundred times keener than if there had been no obstacles, produced such an effect on my nerves that I was seized with paroxysms which I had some difficulty in overcoming.—You cannot conceive the proud, affectionate way in which Rosette gazed at me as she tried to soothe me, and the joyful yet anxious manner with which she lavished attentions upon me: her face glowed with the pleasure that she felt in producing such an effect upon me, while her eyes, swimming in sweet tears, bore witness to her alarm at my apparent illness and the interest she took in my health.—She had never seemed so beautiful to me as at that moment. There was something so maternal and so chaste in her glance that I entirely forgot the more than anacreontic scene that had just taken place, and threw myself on my knees at her feet, asking permission to kiss her hand; which

permission she granted with extraordinary dignity and gravity.

That woman certainly isn't as depraved as De C—— claims and as she has often seemed to me to be; her corruption is in her mind and not in her heart.

I have cited this scene from among twenty others: it seems to me that after such an experience one can, without overweening conceit, believe himself a woman's lover.—And yet I have not that feeling.—I had no sooner returned home than that thought took possession of me and began to work upon me as usual.—I remembered perfectly all that I had said and heard, all that I had done and seen. The slightest gestures, the most insignificant attitudes, all the most trivial details stood out clearly in my memory: I remembered everything, even to the slightest inflections of the voice, the most indescribable shades of enjoyment; but it did not seem to me that all those things had happened to me rather than to some one else. I was not sure that it was not all an illusion, a phantasmagoria, a dream, or that I had not read it somewhere or other, or even that it was not a story invented by myself as I had invented many others. I dreaded being the dupe of my own credulity or the plaything of some deception; and notwithstanding the evidence of my weariness and the material proofs that I had not slept at home, I could easily have believed that I had gone to bed at my usual hour and slept till morning.

I am very unfortunate in my inability to acquire the moral certainty of something of which I am physically certain. In ordinary cases the contrary is the case and the fact proves the idea. I would like well to prove the fact by the idea; I cannot do it; although it is a strange thing, it is so. It rests with myself, to a certain extent, to have a mistress; but I cannot force myself to believe that I have one, even though that is the fact. If I have not the necessary faith in me, even for a thing so palpable as that, it is just as impossible for me to believe in so simple a fact as for another to believe in the Trinity. Faith is not to be acquired, it is a pure gift, a special grace from Heaven.

No one ever longed as I do to live the life of others and to assimilate another nature to my own; no one ever had less success. Whatever I may do, other men are little more than phantoms to me and I do not feel their existence; but it is not the desire to understand their lives and share in them that I lack. It is the power or the want of real sympathy with anything on earth. The existence or non-existence of a person or thing does not interest me enough to affect me in a perceptible and convincing way. The sight of a man or a woman who appears before me in flesh and blood leaves on my mind no more definite trace than the fanciful vision of a dream: a pale world of shadows and of apparitions, false or true, hovers about me, murmuring low, and in the midst of them I feel as utterly alone as possible, for not one of them has any effect upon me for good or evil, and they seem to me to be of a nature altogether different from mine. If I speak to them and they make what seems a sensible reply, I am as surprised as if my dog or my cat should suddenly open his mouth and take part in the conversation: the sound of their voices always astonishes me and I could easily believe that they are only fleeting apparitions and I the mirror in which they are reflected. Inferior or superior, I certainly am not of their kind. There are moments when I recognize none but God above me, and others when I deem myself hardly the equal of the earthworm under its stone or the mollusk on its sand-bank; but whatever my frame of mind, exalted or humble, I have never been able to persuade myself that men were really my fellows. When any one calls me monsieur, or, in speaking of me, refers to me as that man, it always seems strange to me. My very name seems to me but an empty one and not my real name; and yet, no matter how low it may be uttered, amid the loudest noise, I turn suddenly with a convulsive and peevish eagerness which I have never been able to explain.—Is it the dread of finding in the man who knows my name, and to whom I am no longer simply one of the common herd, an antagonist or an enemy?

It is when I have been living with a woman that I feel most strongly how utterly my nature repels every sort of alliance and mixture. I am like a drop of oil in a glass of

water. No matter how much you turn it and shake it, the oil will never mix with the water; it will separate into a hundred thousand little globules which will unite again and rise to the surface the instant it becomes calm: the drop of oil and the glass of water epitomize my history. Even lust—that diamond chain that binds all human beings together, that consuming fire that melts the stone and metal of the heart and causes them to fall in tears as material fire melts iron and granite—all powerful as it is, has never been able to subdue or move me. And yet my senses are very sharp; but my heart is a hostile sister to my body, and the ill-mated couple, like every possible couple, lawfully or unlawfully united, lives in a state of constant warfare.—A woman's arms, the strongest of all earthly bonds, so it is said, are to me very weak fetters, and I have never been farther from my mistress than when she was straining me to her heart.—I was stifled, that's the whole story.

How many times have I been angry with myself! What superhuman efforts have I made to be different! How I have exhorted myself to be affectionate, lover-like, passionate! how often I have taken my heart by the hair and dragged it to my lips in the middle of a kiss! Whatever I do, it always recoils, wiping the kiss away, as soon as I release my hold. What torture for that poor heart to look on at the orgies of my body and to be constantly compelled to sit through banquets at which it has nothing to eat!

It was when I was with Rosette that I determined, once for all, to ascertain if I am not hopelessly unsociable, and if I can take enough interest in another person's existence to believe in it. I exhausted the whole category of experiments, and I have not succeeded in solving my doubts to any great extent. With her my pleasure is so keen that my heart often finds itself diverted at least, if not touched, a state of things that impairs the accuracy of observations. After all, I have discovered that it didn't go below the skin and that my enjoyment was confined to the epidermis, the heart participating only through curiosity. I have pleasure because I am young and ardent; but the pleasures came from myself and not from another. Its source was in myself

rather than in Rosette.

It is of no use for me to struggle, I cannot go out of myself for a single moment. I am still what I was, that is to say, a very tired, very tiresome creature, who disgusts me exceedingly. I have failed utterly to introduce into my brain the idea of another human being, into my heart, another's emotion, into my body, another's pain or pleasure. I am a prisoner in myself and all escape is impossible: the prisoner longs to escape, the walls ask nothing better than to crumble, and the doors to open before him; but some inexplicable fatality keeps every stone immovable in its place, every bolt in its groove; it is as impossible for me to admit any one to my quarters as to go myself to others; I cannot make or receive calls, and I live in the most absolute solitude amid the multitude: my bed may not be widowed, but my heart always is.

Ah! to be unable to increase one's size by a single line, by a single atom; to be unable to admit others' blood into one's veins; to see always with one's own eyes, never clearer, never farther, never otherwise; to hear sounds with the same ears and the same sensation; to touch with the same fingers; to perceive changing objects with an unchangeable organ; to be doomed to the same tone of voice, the repetition of the same sounds, the same phrases, the same words, and not to be able to fly, to escape one's self, to take refuge in some corner where no one can follow; to be compelled to keep always to one's self, to dine and lie alone—to be the same man to twenty different women; to play, throughout the most complicated situations of the drama of your life, a part that is forced upon you, whose lines you know by heart; to think the same things, to have the same dreams:—what torture, what ennui!

I have longed for the horn of the Tangut brothers, for Fortunatus's hat, Abaris's bâton, Gygès's ring; I would have sold my soul to snatch the magic wand from a fairy's hand, but I have never longed so intensely for anything as to meet on the mountain, like Tiresias the soothsayer, those serpents who can change the sex of mortals, and what I most envy in the strange, monstrous gods of the Indies are their

constant incarnations and innumerable transformations.

I began by longing to be another man; then, as I reflected that I could, by analogy, foresee almost exactly what I should feel and therefore not experience the change and the surprise I expected, I concluded that I would prefer to be a woman; that idea always occurred to me when I had a mistress who was not ugly; for an ugly woman is like a man to me, and in my moments of enjoyment I would gladly have changed my rôle, for it is very annoying to know nothing about the effect one produces and to judge of others' pleasure only by one's own. Such reflections and many others have often given me, at moments when it was most inappropriate, a meditative, dreamy air, which has caused me to be accused most unjustly of coldness and infidelity.

Rosette, who, very luckily, doesn't know all this, believes me to be the most amorous man on earth; she takes that impotent frenzy for a frenzy of passion, and she does her utmost to humor all the experimental caprices that pass through my brain.

I have done all that I possibly could to convince myself that she belongs to me. I have tried to go down into her heart, but I have always stopped on the first step of the staircase, at her flesh or her mouth. Despite the intimacy of our corporeal relations, I feel that we have nothing in common. Never has an idea of the same tenor as mine spread its wings in that youthful, smiling head; never has that heart, overflowing with life and fire, whose palpitations cause that firm, white breast to rise and fall, beaten in unison with my heart. My soul has never coalesced with hers. Cupid, the god with the hawk's wings, has not kissed Psyche on her fair ivory brow. No!—that woman is not my mistress.

If you know all that I have done to compel my heart to share the love of my body! with what frenzy I have glued my mouth to hers and wound my arms in her hair, and how tightly I have embraced her rounded, supple figure. Like Salmacis of old,

enamored of the young Hermaphrodite, I have tried to melt her body and mine together; I have drunk her breath and her warm tears that bliss forced from the brimming chalice of her eyes. The more inextricably our bodies were intertwined, the closer our embrace, the less I loved her. My heart, sitting sadly by, looked on with a pitying air at that deplorable union to which it was not bidden, or veiled its face in disgust and wept silently behind the skirt of its cloak. All this is attributable perhaps to the fact that I do not really love Rosette, worthy to be loved though she be, and anxious as I am to love her.

To rid myself of the idea that I was myself, I transported myself to most unusual surroundings, where it was altogether unlikely that I should meet myself, and being unable to cast my individuality to the dogs, I tried to expatriate it so that it would no longer recognize itself. I have had but moderate success therein, for that devil of a myself follows me persistently; there is no way of getting rid of him; I haven't the resource of sending word to him, as I do to other uncomfortable callers, that I am not at home or that I have gone into the country.

I have had my mistress in the bath and I have played the Triton as best I could.—The sea was a huge marble tub. As for the Nereid, what she showed accused the water, transparent though it was, of not being sufficiently so for the exquisite beauty of what it concealed.—I have had her at night, by moonlight, in a gondola with music.

That would be very commonplace at Venice, but here it is anything but that.—In her carriage, with the horses going at a gallop, amid the rattling of the wheels, the leaping and jolting, sometimes by the light of lanterns, sometimes in the densest darkness.—That doesn't lack a certain stimulating interest and I advise you to try it: but I forget that you are a venerable patriarch, and that you don't indulge in such refinements.—I have climbed in at her window when I had the key to the door in my pocket.—I have made her come to my apartments in broad daylight, in fact, I have

compromised her so thoroughly that no one—myself excepted, be it understood—now doubts that she is my mistress.

By reason of all these inventions which, if I were not so young, would resemble the expedients of a blasé old rake, Rosette adores me far and away above all others. She sees therein the ardor of a teasing passion that nothing can restrain, and that is always the same despite the changes of time and place. She sees therein the constantly renewed effect of her charms and the triumph of her beauty, and, in truth, I would that she were right, and it is neither my fault nor hers—I must be just—that she is not.

The only wrong I have done her consists in being myself. If I told her that, the child would reply at once that that is my greatest merit in her eyes; which would be more courteous than sensible.

Once—it was in the beginning of our liaison—I believed that I had gained my end, for a moment I believed that I loved her—I did love her.—O my friend, I have never lived except during that moment, and if it had lasted an hour I should have become a god. We had ridden out together in the saddle, I on my dear Ferragus, she on a snow-white mare that looks like a unicorn, her feet are so delicate and her body so slender. We rode along a broad avenue of elms of prodigious height; the sun poured down upon us, bright and warm, sifting through the serrated foliage; ultra-marine patches showed here and there amid the fleecy clouds, broad bands of pale blue lay along the horizon, changing to a most delicate apple-green when they encountered the golden rays of the setting sun. The appearance of the sky was unusual and fascinating; the breeze wafted to our nostrils an indefinable perfume of wild flowers delicious beyond words. From time to time a bird rose in front of us and flew singing along the avenue. The church-bell of an invisible village softly rang the Angelus, and the silvery notes, which came but faintly to our ears because of the distance, were inexpressibly sweet. Our horses were going at a foot pace, and they

walked side by side in such perfect step that neither of them was an inch ahead of the other.—My heart dilated and my soul overflowed upon my body. I had never been so happy. I did not speak, nor did Rosette, and yet we never understood each other so perfectly. We were so close together that my leg touched her horse's side. I leaned toward her and put my arm about her waist; she made a similar movement and rested her head against my shoulder. Our mouths met; O such a chaste, delicious kiss! Our horses walked on, the reins lying on their necks. I felt Rosette's arms relax and her body yield more and more. I knew that my own strength was failing me, and I was near fainting.—Ah! I promise you that at that moment I cared but little whether I was myself or somebody else. We rode in that way to the end of the avenue, where the sound of footsteps caused us abruptly to resume our natural positions; some of our acquaintances, also in the saddle, rode up and spoke to us. If I had had my pistols, I believe I should have fired at them.

I glared at them with a fierce, lowering expression that must have seemed very strange to them. After all, I was wrong to be so angry with them, for they had unwittingly done me the service of cutting my pleasure short at the moment when, by its very intensity, it was certain to become pain or to sink under its violence. The science of stopping in time is not regarded with all the respect it deserves.—Sometimes, as you lie with a woman, you put your arm under her waist: at first it is a most blissful sensation to feel the pleasant warmth of her body, the soft, velvety flesh of her sides, the polished ivory of her hips, and to press your hand against her breast which throbs and quivers. The fair one falls asleep in that voluptuous, charming posture; the curve of her loins becomes less pronounced, the agitation of her bosom is calmed, her sides rise and fall with the freer, more regular respiration of sleep, her muscles relax, her face is hidden by her hair.—Meanwhile the weight upon your arm grows heavier, you begin to observe that she is a woman, not a sylph; but you would not remove your arm for anything on earth. There are many reasons for that: the first is that it is dangerous to wake a woman with whom

one is lying; one must be prepared to substitute for the blissful dream she is probably dreaming, a more blissful reality; the second is that, if you ask her to raise herself so that you can take away your arm, you tell her indirectly that she is heavy and discommodes you—which is not polite—or else you give her to understand that you are feeble and overdone—an extremely humiliating admission for you and likely to lower you greatly in her mind; the third is that, as you have had pleasure in that position, you think that if you retain the position the pleasure may be renewed, wherein you are mistaken. The poor arm is caught under the mass that crushes it, the blood is checked, the nerves are distended and numbness pricks you with its countless needles: you are a sort of Milo of Crotona on a small scale, and the mattress and the back of your divinity are a sufficiently accurate representation of the two parts of the tree that have reunited. Day comes at last to deliver you from your martyrdom and you leap out of that instrument of torture more eagerly than ever husband descended from the nuptial scaffold.

That is the history of many passions. It is the history of all pleasures.

However that may be—despite the interruption or because of the interruption—never had such a blissful sensation fallen to my lot: I felt that I was really somebody else. Rosette's soul in its entirety had entered into my body. My soul had left me and filled her heart as hers had filled mine. They had met, no doubt, during that long equestrian kiss, as Rosette dubbed it afterward—to my annoyance by the way—and had penetrated and mingled as inextricably as the souls of two mortal creatures can upon a morsel of perishable clay.

Angels surely must kiss like that, and the real paradise is not in heaven but on the lips of the woman we love.

I have waited in vain for such a moment and have tried unsuccessfully to lead up to a repetition of it. We have often ridden together through the avenue of elms at sunset on lovely evenings; the trees had the same verdure, the birds sang the same song, but

to us the sun seemed dull, the foliage withered: the song of the birds had a harsh, discordant sound, we were no longer in harmony with it all. We brought our horses to a walk and we tried the same kiss.—Alas! only our lips met and it was only the spectre of the former kiss.—The beautiful, the sublime, the divine, the only real kiss I have given and received in my whole life had flown away forever. Since that day I have always had an inexpressibly sad feeling on returning from the forest. Rosette, light-hearted madcap that she naturally is, cannot avoid the feeling and her reverie betrays itself by a sweet little pout, which is at least as attractive as a smile.

Scarcely anything but the fumes of wine and a great blaze of candles enable me to shake off these fits of depression. We both drink like men condemned to death, silently and glass after glass, until we have swallowed the necessary amount; then we begin to laugh and mock most heartily at what we call our sentimentality.

We laugh—because we cannot weep. Ah! who will succeed in sowing a tear in my parched eye?

Why did I enjoy that evening so? It would be very hard for me to say. I was the same man, Rosette the same woman. It was not my first experience on horse-back, nor hers; we had already watched the sun set and the spectacle had touched us no more than a picture, which one admires or not according as the colors are more or less brilliant. There is more than one avenue of elms and chestnuts in the world, and that was not the first one we had ridden through; what then caused us to find such a sovereign fascination there, what metamorphosed the dead leaves into topazes, the green leaves into emeralds, gilded all those whirling atoms and changed into pearls all the drops of water scattered over the greensward, what imparted such sweet melody to the tones of a bell that was usually discordant and to the twittering of countless young birds?—There must have been a very penetrating flavor of poesy in the air, as even our horses seemed to catch the scent of it.

And yet nothing in the world could be more pastoral and more simple: a few trees, a

few clouds, five or six clumps of wild thyme, a woman, and a sunbeam over all like a gold chevron on a coat of arms.—There was neither surprise nor bewilderment in my sensations. I knew perfectly well where I was. I had never been to that precise spot, but I remembered perfectly the shape of the trees and the position of the clouds, the white dove that flew across the sky I had seen flying in the same direction; the little silvery bell, which I then heard for the first time, had often tinkled in my ears, and its voice seemed to me like the voice of a friend; although I had never been there, I had many times passed through that avenue with princesses mounted on unicorns; my most voluptuous dreams rode there every evening and my desires had exchanged kisses absolutely like the one exchanged by myself and Rosette.—There was nothing new to me in that kiss; but it was as I had thought it would be. It was perhaps the only time in my life that I have not been disappointed and that the real has seemed to me as beautiful as the ideal.—If I could find a woman, a landscape, a building, anything that corresponded as closely to my desires as that moment corresponded to the moment I had dreamed of, I should have no reason to envy the gods, and I would gladly renounce my box in paradise.—But, in truth, I do not believe that any man of flesh and blood could have an hour of such exquisite enjoyment; two kisses like that would pump a whole life dry and leave a complete void in a heart and a body.—But no such consideration as that would stop me; for, not being able to prolong my life indefinitely, I am ready to die, and I should prefer to die of pleasure rather than of old age or ennui.

But that woman doesn't exist.—Yes, she does exist; it may be that only a wall separates us.—Perhaps I jostled her in the street yesterday or to-day.

In what does Rosette fall short of being that woman? In this, that I do not believe she is. By what fatality do I always have for mistresses, women that I do not love? Her neck is smooth enough to set off the most beautifully-wrought necklaces; her fingers are taper enough to do honor to the loveliest and richest rings; the ruby would blush with pleasure to gleam on the pink lobe of her delicate ear; the cestus of Venus

would fit her waist; but Love alone has the secret of tying his mother's scarf.

All Rosette's merit is in herself, I have attributed nothing to her that she has not. I have not cast over her beauty the veil of perfection with which love envelops the loved one;—the veil of Isis is transparent beside that veil. Naught but satiety can raise the corner of it.

I do not love Rosette; at least my love for her, if I have any, does not resemble the ideal I have formed of love. It may be that my ideal is not a just one, I do not dare to say. Certain it is that it makes me insensible to the merits of other women, and I have desired no other with any consistency since I have had her. If she has any reason to be jealous, it is of phantoms only, about which she worries very little, and yet her most formidable rival is my imagination; that is something which, with all her shrewdness, she will probably never discover.

If women only knew!—How many infidelities the least fickle lover is guilty of to the most adored mistress!—It is to be presumed that they pay us back in full and more; but they do as we do and say nothing. A mistress is a necessary subject, who ordinarily disappears under flourishes and embroidery. Very often the kisses you give her are not for her; you embrace the idea of another woman in her person, and she profits not infrequently—if it can be called profiting—by the desires aroused by another. Ah! my poor Rosette, how many times you have served as a body to my dreams and given reality to your rivals; to how many infidelities have you unwittingly been accessory! If you could have imagined, at times when my arms clasped you so tightly, when my mouth was most closely united to yours, that your beauty and your love had nothing to do with my passion, that the thought of you was a hundred leagues from my mind; what if some one had told you that those eyes, veiled with amorous languor, were cast down simply in order not to look at you and not to banish the illusion that you served only to complete, and that, instead of being a mistress, you were simply an instrument of lust, a means of assuaging a desire

impossible of realization!

O divine creatures, ye lovely virgins, slender and diaphanous, who lower your periwinkle eyes and clasp your lily hand in the pictures with golden backgrounds of the old German masters, ye stained-glass saints, ye missal martyrs who smile so sweetly amid the convolutions of the arabesques, and come forth so fresh and fair from the flower-bells!—O ye lovely courtesans lying all naked in your hair on beds strewn with roses, beneath great purple curtains, with your bracelets and necklaces of huge pearls, your fan and your mirrors, gleaming in the shadow in the fiery rays of the setting sun!—ye dark-skinned maidens of Titian, who display so wantonly your undulating hips, your firm, round thighs, your polished breasts and your supple and muscular loins!—ye antique goddesses, who rear your white phantoms in the shady corners of gardens!—ye are a part of my seraglio; I have possessed you all in turn.—Sainte Ursule, I have kissed your hands on the fair hands of Rosette; I have toyed with the black hair of the Muranese and Rosette never had such a hard task to rearrange her hair: I have been with you more than Acteon was, O virgin Diana, and I have not been changed to a stag: it was I who replaced your handsome Endymion!—What a multitude of rivals whom she does not suspect and upon whom she cannot be revenged! yet they are not all painted or carved!

Women, when you notice that your lover is more affectionate than usual, that he presses you in his arms with unwonted emotion; when he rests his head upon your knees and raises it to look at you with moist and wandering eyes; when enjoyment serves only to augment his desire and he stifles your voice with his kisses as if he dreaded to hear it, be sure that he simply does not know that you are there; that he has, at that moment, an assignation with a chimera which you make palpable, and whose part you play.—Many chamber-maids have profited by the love that queens inspire.—Many women have profited by the love that goddesses inspire, and a commonplace reality has often served as the pedestal for an ideal idol. That is why poets habitually take dirty trollops for mistresses.—You can lie ten years with a

woman without ever seeing her; that is the history of many great geniuses, whose ignoble or obscure connections have caused the world to wonder.

I have been unfaithful to Rosette in no other way than that. I have been false to her only for pictures and statues and she has been equally concerned in the treachery. I have not the slightest material sin upon my conscience with which to reproach myself. I am, in that respect, as white as the snow-capped Jungfrau, and yet, while not in love with anybody, I would like to be with some one. I do not seek the opportunity, but I shall not be sorry if it comes; if it should come, I might not use it, perhaps, for I have an innate conviction that it would be the same with another, and I prefer that it should be so with Rosette than with any other; for, take away the woman, I still have a jolly companion, witty, and very agreeably depraved; and that consideration is not one of the least of those that restrain me, for, in losing the mistress, I might be distressed to find that I had lost the friend.

IV

Do you know that it will soon be five months, yes, fully five months, five eternities that I have been the titular Celadon of Madame Rosette? That is admirable to the last degree. I would not have believed myself to be so constant, nor would she, I will wager. We are in very truth a couple of plucked pigeons, for only turtle-doves are capable of such affection. How we have cooed! how we have pecked at each other! what pictures of clinging ivy! what a charming existence à deux! Nothing could be more touching, and our two poor little hearts might have been placed on a dial pierced by the same spit, and as though trembling in a gust of wind.

Five months' tête-à-tête, so to speak, for we see each other every day and almost every night—the door being always closed to visitors; doesn't it make your flesh creep simply to think of it? Well! to the glory of the incomparable Rosette be it said, I am not greatly bored, and those months will doubtless prove to be the most agreeable in my life. I do not think it would be possible to entertain more constantly

and more successfully a man who has no passion in his heart, and God knows what pitiable idleness it is that is attributable to an empty heart! You cannot imagine that woman's expedients. She began by taking them from her mind, then from her heart, for she loves me to adoration.—With what skill she makes the most of the slightest spark and how well she knows how to fan it into a conflagration! how adroitly she guides the slightest impulses of the heart! how she transforms languor into tender reverie! and by what roundabout roads does she bring back to her the mind that is slipping away!—It is marvellous!—And I admire her as one of the greatest geniuses imaginable.

I have been to her house in very bad humor, sulky, looking for a quarrel. I have no idea how the witch did it, but in a very few minutes she had compelled me to say flattering things to her, although I hadn't the slightest desire to do it, to kiss her hands and laugh with all my heart, although I was horribly angry. Can you conceive of such tyranny as that?—However, adroit as she is, the tête-à-tête cannot last much longer, and in the course of the last fortnight I have frequently done what I never did before—open the books on the chimney and on the table and read a few lines during the pauses in the conversation. Rosette has noticed it, it has alarmed her so that she has had hard work to dissemble her feelings, and she has taken all the books out of her room. I confess that I regret them, although I dare not ask for them.—The other day—an alarming symptom!—some one called while we were together, and instead of flying into a rage as I used to do at the beginning, I was conscious of a sort of pleasure. I was almost affable: I kept up the conversation when Rosette tried to let it languish so that monsieur would take his leave, and when he had gone I ventured to say that he didn't lack wit and that he was a very agreeable fellow. Rosette reminded me that only two months before I had found the same man intensely stupid and the most annoying idiot on earth, to which I had no reply to make, for I did actually say it; and I was right, too, despite the apparent contradiction: for the first time he disturbed a charming tête-à-tête, and the second he came to the assistance of a

conversation that was exhausted and running dry—on one side at least—and spared me for that day a tender scene that I was tired of acting.

That is the point at which we now are; it is a serious state of things, especially when one of the two is still in love and is clinging desperately to the remains of the other's love. I am in great perplexity. Although I am not in love with Rosette, I am very, very fond of her, and I should hate to do anything to cause her pain. I wish her to believe, as long as possible, that I love her.

In gratitude for all the hours to which she has lent wings, in gratitude for the love she has given me for pleasure, I wish it.—I shall deceive her; but is not pleasurable deceit preferable to painful truth?—for I shall never have the heart to tell her that I do not love her. The empty shadow of love on which she is feeding seems to her so adorable and so dear, she embraces the pale spectre with such rapture and effusion that I do not dare cause it to vanish; and, yet I am afraid that she will discover at last that it is only a phantom. This morning we had an interview which I propose to repeat in dramatic form for greater accuracy, and which makes me fear that I cannot prolong our liaison very long.

The scene is Rosette's bed. A sunbeam streams through the curtains: it is ten o'clock. Rosette has one arm under my neck and lies perfectly still for fear of waking me. From time to time she rises a little on her elbow and leans over my face, holding her breath. I see all this through my eyelashes, for I have been awake an hour. Rosette's night-dress has a neck ruffle of Malines lace which is all torn: it has been a stormy night; her hair protrudes in disorder from under her little cap. She is as pretty as a woman can be, when one doesn't love her and is lying in bed with her.

ROSETTE (seeing that I am awake).

Oh! sleepyhead!

I (yawning).

Ah-h-h!

ROSETTE.

Don't yawn like that or I won't kiss you for a week.

I.

Oh!

ROSETTE.

It seems, monsieur, that you don't care much whether I kiss you or not.

I.

Yes, I do.

ROSETTE.

How indifferently you say it!—All right; you can depend upon it that I won't touch you with the end of my lips for a week to come.—To-day is Tuesday: not till next Tuesday.

I.

Nonsense!

ROSETTE.

What's that? nonsense?

I.

Yes, nonsense! you'll kiss me before night, or I shall die.

ROSETTE.

You die! What a silly fellow!—I have spoiled you, monsieur.

I.

I shall live.—I am not silly and you have not spoiled me—quite the contrary. In the first place I demand the instant suppression of monsieur; I know you well enough for you to call me by my name and speak in the language of intimates.

ROSETTE.

I have spoiled you, D'Albert.

I.

Very good.—Now put your mouth over here.

ROSETTE.

No, next Tuesday.

I.

Well, well! has it come to this, that we exchange caresses, calendar in hand? We are both a little too young for that.—Come, your mouth, my child, or I shall get a crick in my neck.

ROSETTE.

No.

I.

Ah! you want me to force you, mignonne; pardieu! then I will force you. The thing is feasible, although perhaps it has never been done.

ROSETTE.

Impertinent!

I.

Notice, my lovely one, that I was courteous enough to say perhaps; that was very good of me.—But we are getting away from the subject. Put down your head. Hoity-toity! what is all this, my favorite sultana? and what means the sulky expression on your face? It is a pleasure to kiss a smile and not a pout.

ROSETTE. (stooping to kiss me).

How do you expect me to laugh? you say such harsh things to me!

I.

My purpose is to say very tender things to you. Why should I say harsh things?

ROSETTE.

I don't know; but you do say them.

I.

You mistake meaningless jests for harshness.

ROSETTE.

Meaningless! You call it meaningless, do you? everything has a meaning in love. I tell you I would rather have you beat me than laugh as you do.

I.

Then you would like to see me weep?

ROSETTE.

You always go from one extreme to the other. No one asks you to weep, but to talk reasonably and drop that tone of persiflage that becomes you so ill.

I.

It is impossible for me to talk reasonably and not joke; I'll beat you, if that's what you want!

ROSETTE.

Do it.

I (giving her a little tap or two on the shoulder).

I would rather cut off my own head than mar your adorable little body and make blue stripes on that lovely white back.—However much a woman may enjoy being beaten, my goddess, I swear that you shan't be.

ROSETTE.

You don't love me any more.

I.

That doesn't follow very logically from what precedes; it's almost as logical as to

say: "It rains, so don't give me my umbrella;" or: "It's cold, open the window."

ROSETTE.

You don't love me, you have never loved me.

I.

Aha! the plot thickens; you don't love me any more and you have never loved me. That is rather contradictory; how can I cease to do a thing which I never began to do?—You see, my little queen, you don't know what you are saying and you are perfectly ridiculous.

ROSETTE.

I longed so to have you love me that I helped to deceive myself. It is easy to believe what one desires; but now I see that I am mistaken. You made a mistake yourself; you mistook liking for love and desire for passion. It's something that happens every day. I bear you no ill will for it: it wasn't your fault that you weren't in love with me; my own lack of charm is all that I have to blame. I ought to have been prettier, more playful, more of a flirt; I ought to have tried to rise to your level, O my poet! instead of trying to pull you down to mine: I was afraid of losing you among the clouds, and I dreaded lest your head should steal your heart from me. I imprisoned you in my love and I thought that, if I gave myself to you utterly, you would keep a little something of me—

I.

Move away a little, Rosette; your leg burns me—you're like a hot coal.

ROSETTE.

If I annoy you, I'll get up.—Ah! stony heart, drops of water pierce the stone, but my tears have no effect on you. (She weeps).

I.

If you weep like that, you will certainly make a bathtub of our bed.—A bathtub, did

I say? an ocean.—Can you swim, Rosette?

ROSETTE.

Villain!

I.

Oho! now I am a villain! You flatter me, Rosette, I haven't that honor. I am a blithesome bourgeois, alas! and I have never committed the least crime; I have done a foolish thing, perhaps, in loving you to distraction; that is all.—Are you absolutely determined to make me repent that?—I have loved you and I love you now as much as I can. Since I have been your lover I have always walked in your shadow: I have given you all my time, my days and my nights. I have indulged in no high-flown phrases with you because I don't care for them except when they are written; but I have given you a thousand proofs of my affection. I won't speak of the most scrupulous fidelity, for that goes without saying; but I have lost a pound and three-quarters since you have been my mistress. What more do you want? Here I am in your bed; I was here yesterday, I shall be here to-morrow. Is that the way a man acts with a woman he doesn't love? I do whatever you want; you say: "Go," and I go; "stay," and I stay; I am the most admirable lover in the world, it seems to me.

ROSETTE.

That is just what I complain of—you are the most perfect lover in the world.

I.

What have you to reproach me for?

ROSETTE.

Nothing; and I would prefer to have some reason to complain of you.

I.

This is an extraordinary quarrel.

ROSETTE.

It's much worse than that.—You don't love me.—I can do nothing about it, nor can you.—What remedy have I for that? Certainly I would prefer to have something to forgive you for.—I would scold you; you would apologize as best you could and we should make up.

I.

That would be all clear gain for you. The greater the crime, the more imposing the reparation.

ROSETTE.

You know very well, monsieur, that I am not yet reduced to that, and that if I chose, at this moment, although you don't love me and we are quarrelling—

I.

Yes, I agree that it is purely the result of your kindness of heart.—Be a little kind now; that would be better than syllogizing over our heads as we are doing.

ROSETTE.

You want to cut short a conversation that embarrasses you; but by your leave, my good friend, we will be content with talking.

I.

That's a cheap repast.—I assure you that you are making a mistake, for you are distractingly pretty, and I have sensations.

ROSETTE.

Which you can describe some other time.

I.

Aha! my adorable, you have become a little Hyrcanian tigress, have you? your cruelty to-day is beyond words!—Have you been taken with the fever to set yourself up as a vestal? It would be an amusing whim.

ROSETTE.

Why not? stranger whims have been known; but this much is sure, I shall be a vestal so far as you are concerned.—Understand, monsieur, that I give myself only to people who love me or who I think love me.—You are in neither position.—Allow me to rise.

I.

If you rise, I shall rise too.—You will have the trouble of going back to bed, that's all.

ROSETTE.

Let me go!

I.

Pardieu, no!

Rosette (struggling).

Oh! you shall let me go!

I.

I venture, madame, to assure you of the contrary.

ROSETTE (seeing that she is not the stronger).

All right! I will stay! you squeeze my arms so tight!—What do you want of me?

I.

I think you know.—I would not allow myself to put in words what I allow myself to do; I have too much respect for decency.

ROSETTE (already beyond the power to defend herself).

On condition that you will love me dearly—I surrender.

I.

It's a little late to strike your flag, when the enemy is already in the citadel.

ROSETTE (half swooning, throwing her arms around my neck).

Unconditionally. I rely on your generosity.

I.

You do well.

At this point, my dear friend, I think it would not be amiss to place a line of asterisks, for the rest of the dialogue could hardly be translated except by onomatopœia.

The sunbeam has had time, since the opening of the scene, to make the tour of the bedroom. A pleasant, penetrating odor of linden-trees comes up from the garden. It is as beautiful a day as can be imagined; the sky is as blue as an Englishwoman's eye. We rise, and, after breakfasting with a good appetite, we take a long drive in the country. The clear air, the beauty of the landscape and the aspect of nature in her joyous mood instilled enough sentimentality and tenderness into my soul to make Rosette agree that, after all, I have something in the shape of a heart like other men.

Have you never noticed how the shade of the woods, the plashing of fountains, the singing of birds, a bright and laughing landscape, the odor of the leaves and flowers, all the paraphernalia of eclogues and descriptive poems which we have agreed to despise, none the less retain a secret influence over us, however depraved we may be, which it is impossible for us to resist? I will tell you in confidence, under seal of the most profound secrecy, that I surprised myself very recently in a most provincial state of emotion in connection with a nightingale's song. It was in D——'s garden; the sky, although it was night, was almost as bright as at noonday; it was so measureless and so transparent that one's glance easily penetrated to God. It seemed to me as if I could see the folds of the angels' robes on the white windings of the Milky Way. The moon had risen, but a great tree hid it completely; it riddled the dark foliage with a million little luminous holes and showered more spangles about than ever glittered upon a marchioness's fan. A silence laden with faint sounds and

sighs filled the garden—perhaps this resembles pathos, but it is not my fault;—although I saw nothing save the bluish gleam of the moon, it seemed to me as if I were surrounded by a whole population of phantoms, unknown yet adored, and I had no feeling of loneliness, although there was no one but myself on the terrace.—I was not thinking, I was not dreaming, I was blended with my surroundings and I felt myself shiver with the foliage, glisten with the water, gleam with the moonbeams, bloom with the flowers; I was no more myself than the tree, the streamlet, or the four-o'clock. I was all of them at once, and I do not think it possible to be more thoroughly removed from one's self than I was at that moment. Suddenly, as if something extraordinary had happened, the leaf ceased to flutter at the end of the branch, the drop of water from the fountain remained suspended in the air and did not fall. The silvery thread, starting from the edge of the moon, stopped on the way; my heart alone beat with such resonance that it seemed to fill the whole vast space with clamor.—My heart ceased to beat and there was such a profound silence that you could have heard the grass grow, and a word spoken in an undertone two hundred leagues away. And then the nightingale, who probably was awaiting that moment to begin his song, emitted from his little throat a note so shrill and piercing that I heard it with my breast no less than with my ears. The sound spread quickly through the crystalline expanse, until that moment as still as death, and created a harmonious atmosphere, wherein the other notes that followed it flew to and fro, flapping their wings.—I understood what he said as perfectly as if I had known the secret of the bird language. The story of the loves I have not found was what the nightingale sang. Never was a truer story told or told with greater fulness. He did not omit the smallest detail, the most imperceptible shade. He told me what I had not been able to tell myself, he explained what I had not been able to understand; he gave voice to my reverie and compelled the phantom, hitherto dumb, to reply. I knew that I was beloved, and a thrill most languorously drawn out informed me that I should soon be happy. It seemed to me that I could see the white

arms of my beloved extended toward me through the trills and quavers of his song and beneath the shower of notes, in a moonbeam.

She rose slowly before me with the perfume of the heart of a hundred-petalled rose.—I will not try to describe her beauty. It is one of those things that words decline to attempt. How describe the indescribable? how paint that which has neither form nor color? how note down a voice without quality and speechless?—I have never had so much love in my heart; I would have pressed nature to my bosom, I embraced the empty void as if my arms were clasped about a virgin form; I kissed the air that blew upon my lips, I swam in the magnetic fluids that exhaled from my glowing body. Ah! if Rosette had been there, what adorable rhapsodies I would have indulged in! But women never know enough to arrive at the opportune moment.—The nightingale ceased to sing; the moon, who could keep awake no longer, pulled her cap of clouds over her eyes, and I left the garden; for the cool night air was beginning to make itself felt.

As I was cold, I naturally thought that I should be warmer in Rosette's bed than my own, and I went to lie with her.—I let myself in with my pass-key, for everybody in the house was asleep.—Rosette herself had fallen asleep, and I had the satisfaction of seeing that it was over a volume uncut, of my latest poems. She had both arms under her head, her mouth half open and smiling, one leg stretched out and the other partly curled up, in an attitude instinct with ease and grace; she was so lovely that I mortally regretted that I was no longer in love with her.

As I looked at her I reflected that I was as stupid as an ostrich. I had what I had so long desired, a mistress as entirely my own as my horse and my sword, young, pretty, amorous and clever; with no stern-principled mother, no father with a decoration, no cross-grained aunt, no swaggering brother, and with the priceless advantage of a husband duly sealed and nailed up in a fine oaken casket lined with lead, the whole covered over with a large block of hewn granite, which is not to be

despised; for, after all, it is a very doubtful pleasure to be caught in the act in the middle of a blissful paroxysm, and to complete one's sensations on the pavement, after describing an arc of 40 to 45 degrees, according to the floor on which you happen to be;—a mistress as free as the mountain air and rich enough to indulge in the most exquisite refinements and luxuries, and, moreover, free from anything like moral ideas, never talking about her virtue as she tries a new posture, nor of her reputation, any more than if she had never had one; with no intimate female friends, and despising all women almost as much as if she were a man, entertaining a very low opinion of platonic affection and making no secret of it, and always playing with her heart in the game; a woman who, if her lines had fallen in another sphere, would indubitably have become the most admirable courtesan on earth and dimmed the glory of the Aspasias and Imperias!

Now, that woman, so made, was mine. I did what I chose with her; I had the key to her room and her drawer; I broke the seals of her letters; I had taken away her name and given her another. She was my chattel, my property. Her youth, her beauty, her love, all belonged to me; I used them, I abused them. I made her go to bed in the daytime and sit up at night, if the whim seized me, and she obeyed simply, without any affectation of making a sacrifice, and without assuming the air of a resigned victim.—She was attentive, caressing, and—a most extraordinary thing!—absolutely faithful; that is to say, if in the days when I was lamenting that I had no mistress, six months ago, any one had given me a glimpse of such happiness, even in the distant future, I should have gone mad with joy and tossed my hat up to knock at the gates of heaven, in token of my delight. And now that I have that happiness, I am cold; I am hardly conscious that I have it, I am not conscious of it, and my present position makes so little impression upon me that I often doubt if I have changed my position at all. If I should leave Rosette, I am convinced in my inmost soul that, at the end of a month, perhaps less, I should have so thoroughly and carefully forgotten her, that I shouldn't know whether I had ever known her or not! Would she do the same? I

think not.

I reflected, as I say, upon all these things, and impelled by a sort of repentant feeling, I deposited on the fair sleeper's brow that most chaste and melancholy kiss that ever young man bestowed upon young woman—just on the stroke of midnight. She moved slightly, the smile about her mouth became a little more pronounced, but she did not wake. I undressed slowly, and, creeping under the clothes, stretched myself out by her side like a snake. The coolness of my body startled her; she opened her eyes, and, without speaking, put her mouth to mine and twined herself about me so completely that I was warmed in less than no time at all. All the poetry of the evening changed to prose, but to poetic prose at all events. That night was one of the sweetest sleepless nights I ever passed. I can hope for no more such.

We still have pleasurable moments, but they must be led up to and prepared for by some outside incident like this, and in the beginning I did not need to have my imagination excited by gazing at the moon and listening to the nightingale, in order to have all the pleasure one can have when one is not really in love. There are as yet no broken threads in our woof, but there are knots here and there, and the chain is not nearly so smooth as it was.

Rosette, who is still in love, does what she can to avert all these inconveniences. Unfortunately there are two things in the world that cannot be guided: love and ennui.—For my own part I make superhuman efforts to conquer the drowsiness that steals over me in spite of myself, and like the provincials who fall asleep at ten o'clock in Parisian salons, I keep my eyes as wide open as possible and hold up my eyelids with my fingers!—nothing serves the purpose and I take conjugal liberties that are most unpalatable.

The dear child, who found the rural expedition so successful the other day, took me off to her country estate yesterday.

It would not be out of place, perhaps, to give you a little description of the aforesaid

estate, which is very attractive; it will lighten up all this metaphysics a little, and then, too, we must have a background for the characters, and figures will not stand out in relief against an empty void, or against the vague shade of brown with which painters fill up the field of their canvas.

The approach is very picturesque.—Driving through a broad avenue, lined with venerable trees, you come to a star, the centre of which is marked by a stone obelisk surmounted by a sphere of gilded copper: five roads form the points of the star. Then the land suddenly descends. The road plunges down into a narrow valley, with a small stream flowing at the bottom, which is crossed by a bridge of a single span; then, ascends the opposite slope, where the village lies, whose slated church-tower can be seen among the thatched roofs and the rounded tops of the apple-trees. The view is not very extensive, for it is limited on both sides by the crest of the hill, but it is bright and pleasant and rests the eye.—Beside the bridge there is a mill and a tower-shaped structure built of red stone: almost incessant barking and the sight of a brach-hound or two and some young terriers with crooked legs warming themselves in the sun before the door, would inform you that it was the head-keeper's abode, if the buzzards and martens nailed to the shutters could leave you for a moment in doubt. At that point an avenue of sorb-trees begins; the red berries attract clouds of birds; as there is little passing, there is only a band of white in the middle of the road; all the rest is covered with short, fine moss, and, in the double rut made by carriage wheels, little grasshoppers, as green as emeralds, buzz and hop about.

After driving some little distance along this avenue you come to a painted iron fence, with gilt trimmings, and bristling with spikes and chevaux de frise. Thence the road leads to the château—which is still invisible, for it is buried in verdure like a bird in its nest—but its progress is leisurely and it frequently turns aside to visit a brook and a fountain, a dainty summer-house or a point from which a fine view can be had, crossing and recrossing the stream over Chinese or rustic bridges. The inequality of the land and the dams built for the purposes of the mill cause several

waterfalls some four or five feet in height, and you can imagine nothing more delightful than to hear the splashing of all these cascades close beside you, but generally out of sight, for the osiers and elders that line the bank form an almost impenetrable curtain. But all that part of the park is, so to speak, only the antechamber of the other part: unfortunately, a public highway passes through the estate and cuts it in two, a drawback for which a very ingenious remedy has been devised. Two high crenelated walls, provided with barbicans and loopholes in imitation of a ruined fortress, stand on each side of the road; connected with a tower on the château side, completely covered by gigantic ivy plants, is a genuine drawbridge which is lowered every morning, by iron chains, upon the opposite bastion. You drive through a lovely ogive archway inside the tower, and thence into the second enclosure, where the trees, which have not been cut for more than a century, are of extraordinary height, with gnarled trunks swathed in parasitic plants—the handsomest and most curious trees I have ever seen. Some have leaves only at the very top like broad umbrellas; others taper toward the top like plumes; others, on the contrary, have a large tuft of foliage near the bottom, from which the naked trunk rises toward the sky like a second tree planted in the first; you would say it was the foreground of a landscape painting or flies painted for a scene on the stage, the trees are so curiously misshapen;—ivies that reach from one to another and hug them so tight as to choke them, mingle their dark hearts with the green leaves and seem like their shadow. Nothing can be more picturesque. The stream widens at that spot, so as to form a little lake, and it is so shallow that you can see, through the transparent water, the lovely aquatic plants that carpet its bed. There are nymphæas and lotuses swimming nonchalantly in the purest crystal with the reflection of the clouds and the weeping-willows that lean over the bank: the château is on the other side, and yonder little skiff, painted apple-green and bright red, will save you a long detour to the bridge. The château is a collection of buildings built at different periods with gables of unequal heights and a multitude of little turrets. One

ell is of brick with stone trimmings; another portion is in the rustic style, with quantities of excrescences and vermiculated work. Another ell is entirely modern; it has a flat Italian roof with vases and a tile balustrade, and a canvas porch in the shape of a tent. The windows are all of different sizes and do not correspond; there are some of all styles, even the trefoil and ogive, for the chapel is Gothic. Certain parts are trellised, like Chinese houses, with trellises painted different colors, covered with climbing honeysuckle, jasmin, nasturtiums, and virgin's bower, whose tendrils look familiarly in at the chamber windows and seem to put out their hands to you as they say good-morning.

Despite this lack of regularity, or rather because of it, it is a fascinating structure; at least, one does not see it all at a single glance; there is an opportunity for choice and one is always on the lookout for something one has not seen.

This château, with which I was not familiar, for it is twenty leagues from town, pleased me immensely at first sight, and I was extremely grateful to Rosette for conceiving the admirable idea of selecting such a nest for our love.

We arrived just at nightfall; and, as we were tired, after eating a hearty supper there was nothing we were so anxious to do as to go to bed—in separate rooms, mind you, for we intended to sleep in good earnest.

I was dreaming some rose-colored dream, full of flowers and sweet perfumes and birds, when I felt a warm breath on my forehead and a kiss descend upon it with quivering wings. A slight smacking of the lips and a pleasant moisture on the spot breathed upon led me to think that I was not dreaming: I opened my eyes and the first thing I saw was Rosette's cool, white neck, as she leaned over the bed to kiss me. I threw my arms around her waist and returned her kiss more passionately than I had done for a long while.

She went and drew the curtain and opened the window, then returned and sat on the edge of my bed, holding my hand in hers and playing with my rings. Her costume

was marked by the most coquettish simplicity. She was without corsets or skirt, and had absolutely nothing on save a lawn peignoir as white as milk, very ample and full; her hair was held in place on top of her head by a little white rose of the sort that has only three or four petals; her ivory feet were encased in embroidered slippers of brilliant, diversified colors, as small as they possibly could be, although they were too large for her, and without quarterings like those of the young Roman dames. I regretted, when I saw her so, that I was already her lover and hadn't the prospect still before me.

Chapter IV — She went and drew the curtain and opened the window, then returned and sat on the edge of my bed, holding my hand in hers and playing with my rings. Her costume was marked by the most coquettish simplicity.

The dream I was dreaming at the moment that she waked me in such pleasant fashion was not very far removed from the reality.—My chamber looked on the little lake I described just now. The window was surrounded by jasmin, which shook its stars over my floor in a silvery shower: large, exotic flowers swayed in the wind under my balcony as if to waft incense up to me; a vague, sweet perfume, composed of a thousand different perfumes, penetrated to my bed, from which I could see the water gleaming and flashing with millions of spangles; the birds chattered and warbled and whistled and chirped; it was a confusion of harmonious sounds like the hum and buzz of a fête.—Opposite, on a hill-side lying in the sunlight, was a smooth field of a golden green, with fat cattle feeding here and there, under the care of a small boy.—Higher up the hill and farther away were great patches of forest of a darker green, above which the bluish smoke of charcoal-kilns rose in spiral columns.

Every detail of the picture was calm and fresh and smiling, and wherever I turned my eyes, I saw only what was young and fair. My chamber was hung with chintz, with mats on the floor, and blue Japanese jars with rounded bodies and tapering necks, filled with strange flowers, artistically arranged on étagères and on the

dark-blue marble chimney-piece; the fire-place also was filled with flowers. Panels above the doors, representing rural or pastoral scenes, bright-colored and daintily executed, sofas and divans in every nook and corner—and a lovely young woman, all in white, whose flesh gave a delicate pink tinge to the transparent dress where it came in contact with it: one can conceive nothing better calculated to give pleasure to the soul as well as to the eyes.

And so my gratified, careless glance wandered, with equal pleasure, from a magnificent jar thickly strewn with dragons and mandarins, to Rosette's slipper, and thence to the corner of her shoulder that glistened under the lawn; it rested on the fluttering stars of the jasmin and the white hairs of the willows on the bank, crossed the water and sauntered over the hill-side, then returned to the chamber to fix itself on the rose-colored ribbons of some shepherdess's long corset.

Through the openings in the foliage the sky showed millions of blue eyes; the water rippled gently and I gave myself up to the enjoyment of the moment, plunged in blissful tranquillity, saying nothing, with my hand still in Rosette's tiny hands.

It is of no use to talk: happiness is white and pink; it can hardly be represented otherwise. Delicate colors belong to it as of right. It has on its palette only sea-green, sky-blue and light yellow: its pictures are all light like those of the Chinese painters. Flowers, bright light, perfumes, a soft and velvety skin touching yours, a veiled melody coming from you know not where,—with those one can be perfectly happy; there is no way of being happy otherwise. I myself, who have a horror of the commonplace, who dream only of strange adventures, violent passions, frenzied bliss, unusual and difficult situations, I must be happy like an animal in that way, and, whatever I may do, I can find no other.

I beg you to believe that I made none of these reflections at the time; they have come to me since as I sat here writing to you; at that moment I thought of nothing but enjoying myself—the only occupation of a reasonable man.

I will not describe the life we lead here, it is easily imagined. There are walks under the great trees, violets and strawberries, kisses and little blue flowers, luncheons on the grass, readings and books forgotten under the trees; water parties with the end of a scarf or a white hand dipping in the stream, long ballads and long laughter repeated by the echoes of the bank;—the most Arcadian life imaginable!

Rosette overwhelms me with caresses and little attentions; more amorous than the dove in May, she twines about me and envelops me in her folds; she tries to let me breathe no other atmosphere than her breath and see no other horizon than her eyes; she maintains a very strict blockade and allows nothing to go in or out without permission; she has built a little guard-house beside my heart, from which she keeps watch on it night and day.—She says delightful things to me; she makes very complimentary speeches; she sits on my knee and acts in my presence exactly like a submissive slave before her lord and master; all of which suits me very well, for I like such little humble ways and I have a leaning toward Oriental despotism; she doesn't do the smallest thing without asking my opinion, and seems to have completely laid aside her own fancy and her will; she tries to divine my thought and anticipate it; she crushes me with her wit, her affection and her submission; she is perfect enough to throw out of the window.—How in the devil can I leave a woman so adorable without seeming to be a monster? It would be enough to discredit my heart forever.

Oh! how I would like to catch her tripping, to find some grievance against her! how impatiently I await an opportunity for a quarrel! but there is no danger that the hussy will give me one! When I speak sharply to her, in a harsh tone, to bring about a quarrel, she answers me so sweetly, in such a silvery voice, with her eyes swimming in tears, and such a sad, loving expression, that I seem to myself to be more than a tiger, or at least a crocodile, and, inwardly raging, I am forced to ask her pardon.

She is literally murdering me with love; she puts me to the question and every day

she draws closer the planks between which I am caught. She probably wants to drive me to tell her that I detest her, that she bores me to death, and that, if she doesn't leave me in peace, I will slash her face with my hunting crop. Pardieu! she will succeed, and if she continues to be as amiable, it will be before long or may the devil carry me off!

Notwithstanding all this fine show, Rosette is surfeited with me as I am with her; but as she has done some notoriously foolish things for me, she doesn't want to take to herself the discredit of a rupture in the eyes of the excellent corporation of sensible women. Every great passion claims to be everlasting, and it is very convenient to assume the credit of that everlastingness without suffering its disadvantages.—Rosette reasons thus:—"Here is a young man who has hardly a vestige of fondness left for me, and, as he is simple-minded and easy-going, he doesn't dare show it openly and doesn't know which way to turn: it is plain that I bore him, but he will wear his life out in the toils rather than take it on himself to leave me. As he is a poet after a fashion, he has his head full of fine phrases about love and passion, and considers himself bound in conscience to be a Tristan or an Amadis. Now, as nothing in the world is more insupportable than the caresses of a person one is beginning not to love—and to cease to love a woman is to hate her intensely—I propose to lavish them on him in a way to sicken him, and the result will be either that he will send me to the devil or will begin to love me again as he did on the first day, which he will take very good care not to do."

No reasoning could be better.—Isn't it charming to play the part of the abandoned Ariadne?—People pity you and admire you, and there are no imprecations strong enough for the infamous wretch who has been so inhuman as to abandon such an adorable creature; you assume an air of grieved resignation, you put your hand under your chin and your elbow on your knee so as to show off the pretty blue veins in your wrist. You wear your hair more dishevelled, and your dresses for some little time are of soberer hue. You avoid mentioning the ingrate's name, but you make

roundabout allusions to him, at the same time heaving beautifully modulated little sighs.

A woman so good, so beautiful, so passionate, who has made such great sacrifices, who has done nothing worthy of blame, a chosen vessel, a pearl of love, a spotless mirror, a drop of milk, a white rose, an ideal essence to perfume a life;—a woman whom you should have adored on your knees, and who will have to be cut in little pieces after her death, to make relics:—such a woman to be abandoned iniquitously, villainously, fraudulently! Why a pirate would do no worse! To give her her death-blow!—for she certainly will die of it.—One must have a paving-stone in his breast, instead of a heart, to act so.

O men! men!

I say this to myself, but perhaps it's not true.

However great actresses women naturally are, I find it hard to believe that they carry it as far as that; and, when all is said, are all Rosette's demonstrations simply the exact expression of her sentiments for me?—However it may be, the continuation of the tête-à-tête is impossible, and the fair chatelaine has at last issued invitations to her acquaintances in the neighborhood. We are busily engaged making preparations to receive the worthy provincials.—Adieu, my dear fellow.

V

I was mistaken.—My evil heart, incapable of love, seized upon that reason to deliver itself from the burden of a gratitude it did not wish to bear; I joyfully grasped that idea to excuse myself to my own conscience; I clung fast to it, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Rosette was not playing a part, and if ever woman was true, she is the woman.—Ah! well! I am almost angry with her for the sincerity of her passion, which is an additional bond and makes a rupture more difficult or less excusable; I would prefer her to be false and fickle.

What an extraordinary position! You long to go, but you stay; you long to say: "I

hate you," but you say: "I love you;"—your past urges you forward and prevents you from turning back or stopping. You are faithful and you regret it. An indefinable sense of shame prevents your abandoning yourself altogether to other acquaintances and leads you to compromise with yourself. You give to one all you can steal from the other and at the same time keep up appearances; the opportunities for meeting which formerly came about so naturally are very hard to find to-day.—You begin to remember that you have business of importance.—Such a perplexing situation as that is very painful, but it is much less so than my present situation.—When it is a new friendship that steals you from the old, it is easier to extricate yourself. Hope smiles sweetly upon you from the threshold of the house that contains your new-born love.—A fairer and rosier illusion hovers on its white wings over the scarce-closed tomb of its sister who has died; another flower, blooming more radiantly and of sweeter perfume, upon whose petals trembles a celestial tear, has suddenly sprung forth from among the withered calyxes of the old bouquet;—lovely, azure-hued perspectives open before you; avenues of fresh and unpretentious beeches stretch away to the horizon; there are gardens with white statues here and there, or a bench against an ivy-covered wall, lawns dotted with marguerites, narrow balconies, on whose rails you lean and gaze at the moon, and shadows cut by fleeting rays of light;—salons from which the daylight is excluded by heavy curtains;—all the darkness and isolation that the passion craves which dares not avow itself. It is as if your youth had come again. You have, moreover, a complete change of haunts and habits and persons; you feel a sort of remorse, to be sure; but the desire that flutters and hums about your head, like a bee in spring, prevents your hearing its voice; the void in your heart is filled and your memories are effaced by present impressions,—But in my case it is different: I love no one and it is from weariness and disgust with myself rather than with her that I wish I were able to break with Rosette.

My former ideas, which had become a little indistinct in my mind, are coming to the

front again, more foolish than ever.—I am, as formerly, tortured by the longing to have a mistress, and, as formerly, even in Rosette's arms I doubt whether I have ever had one.—I see once more the lovely lady at her window, in her park of the time of Louis XIII., and the huntress on her white horse gallops along the forest path.—My ideal beauty smiles upon me from her hammock of clouds, I fancy that I recognize her voice in the song of the birds, in the rustling of the foliage; it seems to me that some one is calling me from every direction, and that the daughters of the air brush my face with the fringe of their invisible scarfs. As in the days of my agitation, I imagine that, if I should set out instantly and go somewhere very far away at great speed, I should reach some place where things that concern me are taking place and where my destiny is being decided.—I feel that somebody is impatiently awaiting my coming in some corner of the earth, I don't know where. Some suffering soul who cannot come to me is calling eagerly to me and dreaming of me; that is the reason of my uneasiness and of my inability to remain in one place; I am being violently drawn away from my centre. Mine is not one of those natures to which others flock, one of those fixed stars about which other radiant bodies gravitate; I must needs wander through the expanse of heaven like an erratic meteor, until I have fallen in with the planet whose satellite I am to be, the Saturn about whom I am to pass my ring. Oh! when will that union take place? Until then I cannot hope for rest or peace of mind, but I shall be like the bewildered, vacillating needle of a compass, seeking its pole.

I allowed my wing to be caught in the deceitful snare, hoping to leave only a feather there and to retain the power to fly away when it seemed good to me: nothing could be more difficult; I find myself covered by an invisible net, harder to break than the one forged by Vulcan, and the mesh is so fine and close that there are no openings through which I can escape. The net is large and roomy, however, and I can move about in it with an appearance of freedom; it is hardly perceptible except when you try to break it; but then it resists and becomes as firm as a wall of brass.

How much time I have lost, O my ideal! without the slightest effort to realize thee! How basely I have yielded to the temptation of a night's pleasure! and how little I deserve to meet thee!

Sometimes I think of forming another liaison; but I have no one in view; more frequently I make up my mind that, if I succeed in bringing about a rupture, I will never again involve myself in such bonds, and yet there is nothing to justify that resolution, for the present connection has been, to all appearance, a very happy one and I have no reason in the world for complaining of Rosette.—She has always been kind to me, and has behaved as well as any one could; she has been exemplarily faithful to me and has not given an opening for suspicion; the most alert and most anxious jealousy could have had no word of blame for her and must have slept in security.—A jealous man could have been jealous only of the past; in that direction, it is true, there was ample ground for jealousy. But luckily, jealousy of that sort is a very rare article, and one has quite enough to do to look after the present without going back to fumble under the ashes of extinct passion for phials of poison and cups of gall.—What woman could a man love, if he thought of all that?—You may have a sort of vague idea that a woman has had several lovers before you; but you say to yourself—a man's pride has so many tortuous folds and counterfolds!—that you are the first she has really loved, and that it was through a combination of fatal circumstances that she became connected with men unworthy of her, or else through a vague craving of a heart that sought to satisfy itself and changed because it had not met its affinity.

Perhaps one can really love none but a virgin—a virgin in body and in mind—a fragile bud that has never been caressed as yet by any zephyr and whose carefully hidden breast has neither received the drop of rain nor the pearl of dew; a chaste flower that displays its white robe for you alone, a beautiful lily with a silver urn at which no desire has slaked its thirst and which has been gilded only by your sun, swayed by no breath but yours, watered by no hand but yours.—The glare of the

noonday sun is less agreeable than the divine pallor of the dawn, and all the ardor of an experienced heart that knows what life is, yields the palm to the celestial ignorance of a youthful heart just awaking to love.—Ah! what a bitter, degrading thought it is that you are wiping away another's kisses, that there may not be a single spot upon that brow, those lips, that bosom, those shoulders, that whole body which is yours now, that has not been reddened and branded by other lips; that those divine murmurs which come to the relief of the tongue that can find no more words of love, have been heard before; that those excited senses did not learn their ecstasy and their delirium from you, and that away, away down in one of those recesses of the heart which are never visited, there lives an inexorable memory which compares the joys of an earlier day to the joys of to-day!

Although my natural nonchalance leads me to prefer the high roads to unbroken paths, and the public watering-trough to the mountain spring, I absolutely must try to love some virginal creature as spotless as the snow, as timid as the sensitive plant, who can only blush and look down; it may be that, from that limpid stream, which no diver has as yet investigated, I shall fish up a pearl of the fairest water, worthy to be a pendant to Cleopatra's; but, in order to do that, I should have to cast off the bond that binds me to Rosette,—for I am not likely to realize that longing with her,—and to tell the truth, I do not feel strong enough to do it.

And then, too, if I must make the confession, there is at the bottom of my heart a secret, shameful motive, which dares not show itself in broad daylight, but which I must tell you of, since I have promised to conceal nothing from you, and a confession, to be deserving of credit, must be complete;—the motive I speak of has much to do with all this uncertainty.—If I break with Rosette, some time must necessarily pass before her place is filled, however easy of access the class of women may be among whom I shall seek her successor; and I have fallen into a habit of enjoying myself with her which it will be hard for me to break off. To be sure I have the resource of courtesans; I liked them well enough in the old days and I

did not hesitate to resort to them under such circumstances;—but to-day they disgust me beyond measure and make me ill.—So I must not think of them, and I am so softened by indulgence, the poison has penetrated so deep into my bones that I cannot bear the idea of being one or two months without a woman.—That is pure egoism of the basest kind; but it is my opinion that the most virtuous men, if they would be perfectly frank, would have to make nearly a similar confession.

That is the true secret of my captivity and, if it weren't for that, Rosette and I would long ago have fallen out for good and all. Indeed it is such a deathly bore to pay court to a woman, that I haven't the heart to attempt it. To begin again the charming idiocies I have already said so many times, to play the adorable once more, to write notes and reply to them; to escort the charmer, in the evening, to some place two leagues away; to catch cold in your feet and your head standing in front of the window watching a beloved shadow; to sit upon a sofa calculating how many thicknesses of tissue separate you from your goddess; to carry bouquets and go the round of the ball-rooms to reach the point where I now am, is a vast deal of trouble!—It's about as well to remain in one's rut.—What is the use of leaving it, only to fall into another exactly like it, after much unnecessary agitation and untold trouble? If I were in love, the thing would go of itself and it would all seem perfectly delightful to me; but I am not, although I have the most earnest desire to be; for, after all, there is nothing but love in the world; and if pleasure, which is only its shadow, has so many allurements for us, what must the reality be? In what an ocean of ineffable bliss, in what seas of pure, unalloyed delight must they swim whose hearts Love has pierced with one of his gold-tipped arrows, and who burn with the delicious warmth of a mutual flame!

Beside Rosette I feel that insipid tranquillity, that sort of slothful well-being which results from the satisfaction of the senses, but nothing more; and that is not enough. Often that voluptuous indolence turns to torpor, and that tranquillity to ennui; thereupon I fall into aimless meditation and dull, spiritless reveries that weary and

harass me;—it is a state of things that I must put an end to at any price.

Oh! if I could only be like some of my friends, who kiss an old glove with ecstasy; who are made perfectly happy by a clasp of the hand; who would not exchange for a sultana's jewel-case a few wretched flowers half-withered by the heat of the ball-room; who cover with tears and sew into their shirt, where it will rest against the heart, a note written in an inelegant style and so stupid that you would think it was copied from the Parfait Secrétaire; who adore women with large feet and apologize for them on the ground that they have noble souls! If I could follow tremblingly the vanishing folds of a dress, or wait for a door to open in order to see a cherished white apparition pass in a blaze of light; if a word spoken beneath the breath would make me change color; if I had the virtue to go without my dinner so as to arrive sooner at a rendezvous; if I were capable of killing a rival or fighting a duel with a husband; if by a special dispensation of Providence, I were endowed with the power of considering ugly women clever, and those who are ugly and stupid as well, pleasant and agreeable; if I could make up my mind to dance the minuet and to listen to sonatas played by young ladies on the harpsichord or harp; if my capacity should rise to the height of learning ombre and reversis; in short, if I were a man and not a poet—I certainly should be much happier than I am; I should be less bored myself and should bore others less.

I have never asked but one thing of women—beauty; I am very willing to go without intellect and soul.—In my eyes a beautiful woman is always intellectual;—she knows enough to be beautiful, and I know no other knowledge as valuable as that.—It takes many sparkling sentences and keen shafts of wit to equal the value of the flash of a lovely eye. I prefer a pretty mouth to a pretty speech, and a well-modeled shoulder to a virtue, even one of the theological sort; I would give fifty souls for a dainty foot, and all poetry and all the poets for the hand of Joanna of Aragon, or the brow of Foligno's virgin.—Above all things I adore a beautiful figure; to my mind beauty is manifest Divinity, palpable happiness, heaven come

down to earth.—There are certain undulations of outline, certain turns of the lip, a certain droop of the eyelids, certain inclinations of the head, certain elongations of the profile which enchant me beyond all expression and fix my attention for whole hours.

Beauty, the only thing that cannot be acquired, inaccessible forever to those who haven't it at first; an ephemeral and fragile flower that grows without being sown, a pure gift from heaven!—O beauty, the most radiant diadem with which chance can crown the human brow—thou art admirable and precious like everything that is beyond man's reach, like the azure of the firmament, like the gold of the star, like the perfume of the seraphic lily!—Man may change his stool for a throne, may conquer the world; many have done it; but who could fail to kneel before thee, thou pure personification of God's thoughts?

I ask only beauty, it is true; but I must have beauty so perfect that I probably shall never find it. I have seen here and there women who were admirably beautiful in some respects but only mediocre in others, and I have loved them for what was best in them, ignoring the rest; it is a difficult task, however, and painful, to suppress thus the half of one's mistress, and to amputate mentally the ugly or commonplace portions of her anatomy, limiting one's glances to what points of beauty she may have.—Beauty is harmony, and a woman who is equally ugly in all parts is often less disagreeable to look at than one who is unevenly beautiful. Nothing offends my sight so much as an unfinished masterpiece, or beauty in which something is lacking; a grease-spot is less offensive upon coarse sackcloth than upon rich silk.

Rosette is not ill-favored; she might be considered beautiful, but she is far from realizing the ideal of my dreams; she is a statue, several portions of which have been completed. The others are not so sharply cut from the block; there are some parts brought out with much skill and charm, and others more carelessly and hurriedly. To ordinary eyes the statue seems entirely completed and perfectly beautiful; but a more

careful observer soon discovers places where the work is not close enough, and outlines which need to be touched and retouched many times by the workman's nail before attaining the purity that belongs to them;—it is for love to polish the marble and complete it, which is equivalent to saying that I shall not be the one to do it.

However, I do not confine beauty to this or that particular form or contour.—The manner, the gesture, the gait, the breath, the coloring, the voice, the perfume, everything that is a part of life enters into the composition of beauty in my estimation; everything that sings or shines or perfumes the air is rightfully a part of beauty.—I love rich brocades, gorgeous stuffs with their ample and stately folds; I love great flowers and jars of perfume, transparent running water and the gleaming surface of fine weapons, blooded horses and the great white dogs that we see in Paul Veronese's pictures. I am a genuine heathen in that respect, and I do not adore misshapen gods;—although I am not at heart exactly what is called irreligious, there are few who are in fact worse Christians than myself. I do not understand the mortification of the flesh that forms the essence of Christianity, I consider it a sacrilegious act to lay hands upon God's work, and I do not believe that the flesh is wicked, since He Himself moulded it with His own fingers and in His own image. I think but little of the long sober-hued frocks from which only a head and two hands emerge, or of the pictures in which everything is drowned in shadow except some one radiant brow. I want the sun to shine everywhere, to have as much light and as little shadow as possible, the bright colors to gleam, the lines to undulate, the nude body to exhibit itself proudly and the flesh not to lie hidden, since it, as well as the spirit, is a never-ending hymn to the praise of God.

I can understand perfectly the wild enthusiasm of the Greeks for beauty; and for my part I can see nothing absurd in the law that compelled the judges to listen to the arguments of the lawyers in some dark place, lest their noble bearing, the grace of their gestures and attitudes should prejudice the judges in their favor and throw undue weight into the scales.

I would buy nothing of an ugly shopwoman; I give alms more freely to beggars whose rags and emaciation have a touch of the picturesque. There is a little fever-ridden Italian, as green as an unripe lemon, with great black and white eyes that take up half of his face;—you would say he was an unframed Murillo or Espagnolet exposed for sale on the sidewalk by a second-hand dealer:—he always gets two sous more than the others. I would never whip a handsome horse or a handsome dog, and I would not care for a friend or a servant who is not pleasant to look at.—It is downright torture to me to look at ugly things or ugly people.—Bad taste in architecture, a piece of furniture of ugly shape, prevent my enjoying myself in a house, however comfortable and attractive it may otherwise be. The best wine seems to me almost sour in an ungraceful glass, and I confess that I would prefer the most unsubstantial broth on one of Bernard of Palissy's enamelled plates to the most toothsome game on an earthen platter.—The exterior of things has always exerted a powerful influence upon me, and that is why I avoid the society of old men; they irritate me and affect me disagreeably because they are wrinkled and deformed, although some of them have some special beauty; and in the pity that I feel for them there is much disgust;—of all earthly ruins, the ruin of man is assuredly the saddest to contemplate.

If I were a painter—and I have always regretted that I am not—I should people my canvases with none but goddesses, madonnas, nymphs, cherubim, and loves. To devote one's brush to painting portraits, unless of beautiful people, seems to me a crime against the majesty of the art; and, far from seeking to duplicate those mean or ugly faces, those insignificant or vulgar heads, I should incline toward ordering the originals to be cut off. The ferocity of Caligula, if diverted in that direction, would seem to me almost praiseworthy.

The only thing on earth that I have desired with any constancy, is to be beautiful.—By beautiful, I mean as beautiful as Paris or Apollo. To have no deformity, to have features almost regular, that is to say, to have the nose in the

centre of the face and neither flat nor hooked, eyes that are neither red nor bloodshot, a mouth of suitable dimensions, is not to be beautiful: on that theory I should be, and I consider myself as far removed from my ideal of virile beauty as if I were one of the puppets that strike the hour on church-bells; if I had a mountain on each shoulder, the crooked legs of a terrier and the muzzle of a monkey, I should resemble it as closely. Often and often I sit and look at myself in the mirror, for hours at a time, with incredible fixity and close scrutiny, to see if my face has not improved in some degree; I wait for the outlines to make a movement and straighten out or take on a more graceful and purer curve, for my eye to brighten and swim in a more sparkling fluid, for the hollow that separates my forehead from my nose to fill up, and for my profile thus to become as simple and regular as the Greek profile; and I am always greatly surprised that it does not happen. I am always in hopes that some spring or autumn I shall cast off my present shape as a serpent casts his old skin.—To think that I need so little to be handsome and that I never shall be! What! half a hair's breadth, the hundredth or the thousandth part of a hair's breadth more or less in one place or another, a little less flesh on this bone, a little more on that—a painter or sculptor would have it all arranged in half an hour. What was it that made the atoms of which I am composed crystallize in this way or that? Why need that outline bulge out here and sink in there, and why was it necessary that I should be thus and not otherwise?—Upon my word if I had chance by the throat, I believe I would strangle him.—Because it pleased a vile mass of I don't know what to fall from I don't know where and coagulate stupidly into the awkward creature that I visibly am, I shall be miserable forever! Isn't it the most absurd and pitiful thing in the world? How is it that my soul, although eagerly longing to do so, cannot let the poor carcass that it now holds erect, fall prostrate, and enter into and animate one of those statues whose exquisite beauty saddens and ravishes it? There are two or three people whom it would give me the greatest pleasure to assassinate, taking care, however, not to bruise or mar them, if I knew the word by which souls are made to

pass from one to another.—It has always seemed to me that, in order to do what I wish—and I don't know what I do wish—I needed very great and perfect beauty, and I fancy that if I had had it, my life, which is so entangled and harassed, would have been just the same.

We see so many lovely faces in pictures!—why is not one of them mine?—so many charming faces disappearing under the dust and decay of time in the recesses of old galleries! Would it not be better for them to leave their frames and bloom anew on my shoulders? Would Raphaël's reputation suffer greatly if one of the angels whom he drew in swarms flying about in the deep blue of his pictures, should turn his mask over to me for thirty years? There are so many parts of his frescoes, and among them some of the most beautiful, that have scaled off and fallen because of their age! No one would notice. What have the silent beauties to do that hang around those walls, and at whom men scarcely cast an absent-minded glance? and why has not God or chance the wit to do what a man does with a few hairs stuck in the end of a stick and pigments of different colors mixed together on a board?

My first sensation before one of those marvellous faces whose painted glance seems to look through you and into infinite space beyond, is profound amazement and admiration not unmixed with terror: tears fill my eyes, my heart beats fast; then, when I have become a little accustomed to it and have penetrated farther into the secret of its beauty, I mentally draw a comparison between it and myself; deep down in my soul jealousy writhes in knots more intricate than a viper's, and it is with the utmost difficulty that I refrain from throwing myself upon the canvas and tearing it in pieces.

To be beautiful, that is to say, to have in yourself such a charm that every one smiles upon you and welcomes you; that every one is prepossessed in your favor and inclined to be of your opinion, even before you have spoken; that you have only to pass through a street or show yourself on a balcony to raise up friends or mistresses

for yourself in the crowd. To have no need to be lovable in order to be loved, to be exempt from all the expenditure of wit and complaisance which ugliness makes incumbent upon you, and to be excused from having the thousand and one moral qualities that one must have to supplement physical beauty—what a superb, magnificent gift!

And he who should combine supreme strength with supreme beauty, who, beneath Antinous's skin, should have the muscles of Hercules,—what more could he desire? I am sure that with those two things and the mind that I now have I should be emperor of the world within three years!—Another thing that I have longed for almost as much as beauty and strength is the gift of transporting myself from one place to another with the swiftness of thought. Angelic beauty, the strength of the tiger and the wings of the eagle, and I should begin to conclude that the world is not so badly organized as I used to think.—A beautiful mask to charm and fascinate the prey, wings to pounce down upon it and carry it off, nails to tear it to pieces;—so long as I have not those I shall be unhappy.

All the passions and all the tastes I have had have been simply disguised forms of those three desires. I have loved weapons, horses, women: weapons to replace the muscles I had not; horses to serve as wings; women, so that I might possess in some one the beauty that I lacked myself. I sought in preference the most ingeniously deadly weapons, and those whose wounds were incurable. I have never had occasion to use any of the krises or yataghans, yet I like to have them around me; I take them from their scabbards with an indescribable sense of security and power, I lay about me in every direction with the greatest energy, and if by chance I see the reflection of my face in a mirror, I am astonished at its ferocious expression.—As for my horses, I override them so that they must either founder or say why.—If I hadn't given up riding Ferragus he would have died long ago, and it would be a pity, for he's a fine beast. What Arabian steed ever had limbs so fleet as my desire? In women I have not looked below the exterior, and as those whom I have seen thus far

are a long way from fulfilling my ideal of beauty, I have fallen back upon pictures and statues; which, after all, is a pitiful expedient when one's senses are so inflammable as mine. However, there is something grand and noble about loving a statue, for it is a perfectly disinterested love, you have to dread neither satiety nor distaste with your triumph, and you cannot reasonably hope for a second miracle like the story of Pygmalion.—The impossible always had a charm for me.

Is it not strange that I, who am still in the fairest months of youth, who have not even used the simplest things, much less abused anything, have reached such a degree of satiety that I am tempted only by what is unusual or difficult of accomplishment?—That satiety follows enjoyment is a natural law and easily understood. Nothing is more easily explained than that a man who has eaten heartily of every dish at a banquet should no longer be hungry and should try to stimulate his benumbed palate by the thousand stings of condiments or dry wines; but that a man who has just taken his seat at the table and has hardly tasted the first course, should already be assailed with that superb disgust, should be unable to touch without vomiting any except highly-seasoned dishes, and should like only gamey meats, cheese with blue streaks running through it, truffles and wine that smells of the flint, is a phenomenon that can result only from a peculiar constitution; it is as if a child of six months should deem his nurse's milk insipid and refuse to suck anything but brandy. I am as exhausted as if I had performed all the prodigious feats of Sardanapalus and yet my life has been apparently very chaste and peaceful; it is a mistake to think that possession is the only road leading to satiety. We arrive there also through desire, and abstinence is more exhausting than excess.—Such a desire as mine is more fatiguing than possession. Its glance envelops and penetrates the object which it longs to have and which gleams above it, more swiftly and more deeply than if it were in contact with it. What more could use teach it? what experience can equal that constant, passionate contemplation?

I have gone through so much, although I have travelled very little, that only the

steepest peaks tempt me now. I am attacked by the disease that fastens upon nations and powerful men in their old age—the impossible. Anything that I can do has not the slightest attraction for me. Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, ye great Romans of the Empire, whom posterity has so ill understood, and whom the pack of ranters pursues with its yelping, I suffer with your disease and I pity you with all the pity I have left in my heart! I, too, would like to bridge the sea and pave its waves; I have dreamed of burning cities to illuminate my fêtes; I have longed to be a woman to learn new forms of pleasure. Thy golden palace, O Nero, is only a filthy stable beside the palace I have built; my wardrobe is better furnished than thine, Heliogabalus, and much more magnificent.—My circuses are noisier and bloodier than yours, my perfumes more acrid and more penetrating, my slaves more numerous and of better figure; I also have nude courtesans harnessed to my chariot, I have walked over men's bodies with as disdainful heel as you. Colossi of the ancient world, there beats behind my feeble ribs a heart as great as yours, and if I had been in your places I would have done all that you have done and perhaps more. How many Babels have I piled one upon another to reach the sky, to cudgel the stars and spit upon all creation! Why am I not God—as I cannot be man?

Oh! I believe that I shall need a hundred thousand centuries of nothingness to rest from the fatigue of these twenty years of life.—God in heaven, what stone will You roll down upon me? into what darkness will You plunge me? from what Lethe will You make me drink? beneath what mountain will You entomb the Titan? Am I destined to breathe a volcano through my mouth and to cause earthquakes when I turn from side to side?

When I think of this, that I was born of a gentle, resigned mother, simple in her tastes and manners, I am surprised that I did not burst her womb when she was carrying me. How does it happen that none of her calm, pure thoughts passed into my body with the blood she transmitted to me? and why must it be that I am the son of her flesh only, not of her mind? The dove begat a tiger who would like to have all

creation fall a prey to his claws.

I grew up amid the most chaste and tranquil surroundings. It is difficult to imagine an existence in a setting so pure as mine. My years were passed in the shadow of my mother's easy-chair, with my little sisters and the house-dog. I saw about me only the kindly, placid faces of old servants who had grown gray in our service and were in a certain sense hereditary, of grave, sententious relations or friends, dressed in black, who placed their gloves one after another in their hat brims; a few aunts of uncertain age, plump and neat and sedate, with dazzling linen, gray skirts, thread mitts, and hands upon their waist-bands like people of a religious turn of mind; furniture severely simple to the point of melancholy, bare oak wainscoting, leather hangings—a gloomy, sober-hued interior such as some Flemish masters have painted. The garden was damp and dark; the box that marked the divisions, the ivy that covered the walls, and a few firs with bare branches were entrusted with the duty of representing verdure there and had but ill success; the brick house, with its very high roof, although roomy and in good condition, had something dull and drowsy about it. Certainly nothing could be better adapted to prepare one for a secluded, austere, melancholy life than such a place of abode. It seemed as if all the children brought up in such a house must inevitably end by becoming priests or nuns: ah well! in that atmosphere of purity and repose, amid that gloom and meditation, I rotted away little by little, without any outward sign, like a medlar on the straw. In the bosom of that upright, pious, saintly family I reached a horrible depth of depravity.—It was not contact with the world, for I had never seen it; nor the fire of passion, for I was benumbed in the icy sweat that oozed from those stout walls.—The worm did not crawl from the heart of another fruit to my heart. It came to life of itself where my pulp was thickest and gnawed and furrowed it in every direction: but nothing appeared outside and warned me that I was tainted at the core. I had neither spot nor worm-hole; but I was all hollow inside and nothing remained but a thin bright-colored pellicle, which the slightest blow would have broken.—Is it

not an inexplicable thing that a child born of virtuous parents, brought up with care and judgment, kept at a distance from everything bad, should become perverted all by himself to such an extent, and reach the point I have reached? I am sure that, even if you should go back to the sixth generation, you would not find among my ancestors a single atom like those of which I am made. I do not belong to my own family; I am not an offshoot of that noble trunk, but a poisonous toadstool planted among its mossy roots on some dark, stormy night; and yet no one ever had more aspirations, more impulses towards the beautiful than I, no one ever tried more obstinately to spread his wings; but every attempt has made my fall the greater and the things that should have saved me have been my ruin.

Solitude has a worse effect upon me than society, although I desire the first more than the second. Whatever takes me out of myself is salutary; society bores me, but it tears me by force from the vain reverie whose winding staircase I ascend and descend, with bent head and folded arms. And so, since one tête-à-tête came to an end and there have been people here with whom I am compelled to put some constraint upon myself, I am less subject to my black moods and am less tormented by those immeasurable longings that pounce upon my heart like a swarm of vultures, as soon as I am left for a moment without occupation. There are some very pretty women and one or two young men who are very pleasant and jovial; but of all this swarm of provincials, the one who has the most charm for me is a young cavalier who arrived two or three days ago. He took my fancy at the very first, and I became fond of him simply from seeing him alight from his horse. It is impossible to be more graceful; he is not very tall, but slender and well set-up; there is something supple and undulating in his gait and his movements, which is pleasing beyond expression; many women would envy him his hand and foot. His only defect is that he is too beautiful and has too delicate features for a man. He is blessed with a pair of the loveliest and blackest eyes in the world, which have an expression impossible to define and a glance that it is not easy to sustain; but, as he is very young and has

no sign of a beard, the softness and perfection of the lower part of his face temper somewhat the vivacity of those eagle eyes; his glossy, brown hair falls over his neck in great curls and gives his head a character of its own.—Here then at last is one of the types of beauty I have dreamed of, made flesh, and actually before my eyes! What a pity that it's a man, or what a pity that I am not a woman! This Adonis, who, in addition to his lovely face, has a very keen intellect of very wide range, still enjoys the privilege of having at the service of his bright remarks and his jests, a voice of a silvery and penetrating quality which it is difficult to hear without emotion.—He is really perfect.—It seems that he shares my taste for beautiful things, for his clothes are very rich and well chosen, his horse very spirited and a thoroughbred; and, in order that everything might be complete and well assorted, he had behind him, riding a pony, a page of some fourteen or fifteen years, fair-haired, pink-cheeked, pretty as a seraph, who was half asleep, and so exhausted by his long ride that his master was obliged to lift him from his saddle and carry him to his room in his arms.

Rosette welcomed him very warmly and I think she has formed a plan to use him to arouse my jealousy and thus kindle the tiny flame that is sleeping under the ashes of my passion. However redoubtable such a rival may be, I am little inclined to be jealous of him, and I am so attracted to him that I would gladly abandon my love to secure his friendship.

Chapter V — A page of some fourteen or fifteen years, fair-haired, pink-cheeked, pretty as a seraph, who was half asleep, and so exhausted by his long ride that his master was obliged to lift him from his saddle and carry him to his room in his arms.

VI

At this point, with the permission of the indulgent reader, we propose to abandon for some little time to his meditations, the worthy personage who has thus far occupied the stage all by himself and has spoken in his own behalf, and to adopt the ordinary

form of the novel, reserving the right, however, to resume the dramatic form hereafter, if occasion should arise, and to draw still farther upon the species of epistolary confession that the aforesaid young man addressed to his friend, being fully persuaded that, however penetrating and sagacious we may be, we certainly cannot know so much about him as he knows about himself.

The little page was so overdone that he slept in his master's arms, and his little head, with its hair all in disorder, rolled from side to side as if he were dead. It was some distance from the stoop to the apartment set aside for the new arrival, and the servant who escorted him offered to take his turn at carrying the child; but the young gentleman, to whom the burden seemed no more than a feather-weight, thanked him and declined to relinquish it; he laid him gently on the couch, taking the utmost care to avoid waking him; a mother could have done no better. When the servant had retired and the door was closed, he knelt beside him and tried to remove his boots; but his little feet were so swollen and painful that the operation was a difficult one, and the pretty sleeper uttered from time to time vague, inarticulate exclamations, like a person who is on the point of waking; thereupon the young gentleman would stop and wait until he was sound asleep again. The boots yielded at last and the most important point was gained; the stockings made little resistance.—This operation at an end, the master took the child's feet and placed them side by side on the velvet covering of the sofa; surely they were the two loveliest feet in the world, no larger than that, white as new ivory, and reddened a little by the pressure of the boots in which they had been imprisoned seventeen hours—feet that were too small for a woman and looked as if they had never walked; the part of the leg that could be seen was round, plump, smooth, transparent, delicately veined, and of the most exquisitely graceful shape—a leg worthy of the foot.

Chapter VI — The pretty sleeper uttered from time to time vague, inarticulate exclamations, like a person who is on the point of waking; thereupon the young gentleman would stop and wait until he was sound asleep again. The boots yielded

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The young man, still on his knees, gazed at the two little feet with amorous, admiring intentness; he stooped, raised the left one and kissed it, then the right one and kissed that; then, from kiss to kiss, he ascended the leg to the place where the clothes began.—The page raised his long lashes slightly and cast an affectionate, sleepy glance at his master, in which there was no trace of surprise.—"My belt hurts me," he said, passing his finger under the ribbon; and he fell asleep again.—The master loosened the belt, placed a cushion beneath the page's head, and finding that his feet, which had been burning hot, were a little cold, he wrapped them carefully in his cloak, drew an arm-chair close to the sofa and sat down. Two hours passed thus, the young man watching the sleeping child and following the shadow of his dreams on his brow. The only sounds to be heard in the room were his regular breathing and the ticking of the clock.

It was certainly a very lovely picture. In the contrast between the two types of beauty there was an opportunity for effect, of which a skilful painter might have made good use.—The master was as beautiful as a woman—the page as lovely as a young girl. The round, rosy face, set in its frame of hair, resembled a peach among its leaves; it had the same fresh and velvety look, although the fatigue of the journey had lessened somewhat its usual brilliancy; the half-open mouth disclosed two rows of small teeth of a milky whiteness, and beneath the full, gleaming temples a network of blue veins crossed and recrossed; his eyelashes, like the golden threads around the heads of virgins in missals, reached almost to the middle of his cheeks; his long, silky hair resembled both gold and silver—gold in the shadow, silver in the light; his neck was at the same time plump and slender, and gave no sign of the sex indicated by his clothes; two or three buttons of his doublet were unbuttoned to enable him to breathe more freely and as the fine shirt of Dutch lawn beneath was open, a glimpse was afforded of an inch or two of firm rounded flesh of admirable whiteness, and the beginning of a certain curved line difficult to account for on a

young boy's breast; upon looking closely one might have discovered also that his hips were a little too fully developed.—The reader will form what opinion he chooses; these are simple conjectures that we put forward; we have no better information on the subject than he, but we hope to learn something more in a short time, and we promise to keep him fully informed of our discoveries.—Let the reader, if his sight is keener than ours, bury his eyes under the lace of that shirt and decide conscientiously whether the contour is too swelling or not; but we warn him that the curtains are drawn and that there is a sort of half-light in the room, ill-adapted to that sort of investigation.

The young gentleman was pale, but his was a golden pallor, full of strength and vitality; his eyes swam in a crystalline blue fluid; his straight, thin nose imparted a wonderful air of pride and energy to his profile, and the flesh was of so fine a texture that it allowed the light to pass through it on the edge; his mouth wore the sweetest smile at certain moments, but ordinarily it was arched at the corners, curving in rather than out, as in some of the faces we see in the pictures of the old Italian masters; a detail that gave a charmingly disdainful expression to his face, a smorfia alluring beyond words, an air of childish sulkiness and ill humor, very unusual and very fascinating.

What were the bonds that united the master to the page and the page to the master? Assuredly there was something more between them than any conceivable affection between master and servant. Were they friends or brothers?—In that case, why this masquerading?—It would have been difficult for any one witnessing the scene we have just described to believe that those two individuals were just what they seemed to be and nothing more.

"Dear angel, how he sleeps!" murmured the young man; "I don't believe he ever travelled so far in his life. Twenty leagues in the saddle, and he so delicate! I'm afraid that he will be sick with fatigue. But no, it will amount to nothing; to-morrow

there will be no sign of it; he will have recovered his brilliant color and will be fresher than a rose after the rain.—How handsome he is like that! If I weren't afraid of waking him I would eat him up with kisses. What a fascinating dimple he has in his chin! what fine, white skin!—Sleep soundly, sweet treasure.—Ah! I am downright jealous of your mother, and I wish I had brought you into the world.—He can't be sick? No, his breathing is regular and he doesn't stir.—But I believe some one knocked."

In fact, some one had knocked twice, as gently as possible, on the panel of the door.

The young man rose, but, fearing that he might be mistaken, waited for a repetition of the knocking before opening the door.—Two more taps followed, a little more pronounced, and a soft female voice said, in a very low tone:—"It is I, Théodore."

Théodore opened the door, but with less eagerness than a young man naturally exhibits about admitting a woman whose voice is soft and who knocks mysteriously at his door at nightfall.—The open door gave passage to—whom do you suppose?—to the mistress of the perplexed D'Albert, to the Princess Rosette in person, rosier than her name, and her bosom as deeply moved as ever woman was upon entering a handsome youth's room in the evening.

"Théodore!" said Rosette.

Théodore lifted his finger and placed it on his lips so as to represent a statue of silence, and, pointing to the sleeping child, led her into the adjoining room.

"Théodore," continued Rosette, who seemed to take strange pleasure in repeating the name, and at the same time to be collecting her thoughts,—"Théodore," she continued, retaining the hand the young man had offered her to lead her to her chair, "so you have returned at last? What have you been doing all the time? where have you been?—Do you know that it is six months since I saw you! Ah! Théodore, that is not right; we owe some consideration, some pity to those who love us, even if we do not love them."

THÉODORE.

What have I been doing.—I have no idea.—I have gone away and come home, I have waked and slept, I have sung and wept, I have been hungry and thirsty, I have been too warm and too cold, I have been bored, I have less money and am six months older—I have lived, that's the whole of it.—And how about yourself, what have you been doing?

ROSETTE.

I have loved you.

THÉODORE.

Have you done nothing but that?

ROSETTE.

Absolutely nothing.—I have made a bad use of my time, haven't I?

THÉODORE.

You might have made a better use of it, my poor Rosette; for example, you might have loved some one who could return your love.

ROSETTE.

I am unselfish in love as in everything.—I don't lend love at interest; it is a pure gift on my part.

THÉODORE.

That is a very rare virtue and one that can exist only in a noble heart. I have often wished that I could love you, especially as you desire it; but there is an insurmountable obstacle between us which I cannot tell you.—Have you had any other lover since I left you?

ROSETTE.

I have had one whom I still have.

THÉODORE.

What sort of a man is he?

ROSETTE.

A poet.

THÉODORE.

The devil! who is this poet, and what has he written?

ROSETTE.

I haven't a very clear idea—a volume that nobody knows anything about, and that I tried to read one evening.

THÉODORE.

So you have an unpublished poet for a lover?—That must be interesting.—Is he out at elbows, does he wear dirty linen and rumpled stockings?

ROSETTE.

No; he dresses very well, washes his hands and has no ink-spots on the end of his nose. He's a friend of C——; I met him at Madame de Thémines',—you know, that tall woman, who plays the child and puts on such innocent airs.

THÉODORE.

And might one know the name of this eminent personage?

ROSETTE.

Oh! Mon Dieu, yes! he is the Chevalier d'Albert.

THÉODORE.

Chevalier d'Albert! I think that was the young man who was on the balcony when I alighted from my horse.

ROSETTE.

Precisely.

THÉODORE.

And who examined me so closely.

ROSETTE.

Himself.

THÉODORE.

He's a very good-looking fellow.—And he has not made you forget me?

ROSETTE.

No. Unfortunately you are not one of those whom one forgets.

THÉODORE.

He loves you dearly no doubt?

ROSETTE.

I am not so sure of that.—There are moments when you would think he loved me very dearly; but at heart he doesn't love me, and he is not far from hating me, for he is angry with me because he can't love me.—He did as many others before him have done; he developed a very keen taste for passion, and was greatly surprised and disappointed when his desire was surfeited.—It is a mistake to think that two people must mutually adore each other because they have lain together.

THÉODORE.

And what do you propose to do with this lover who is not a lover?

ROSETTE.

What we do with bygone quarters of the moon or with last year's fashions.—He hasn't courage enough to leave me the first, and although he does not love me in the true sense of the word, he is bound to me by the habit of enjoyment, and those are the habits it is hardest to break. If I don't assist him, he is quite capable of conscientiously submitting to be bored with me till the last judgment and beyond;

for he has within him the germ of all noble qualities; and the flowers of his soul ask naught but an opportunity to bloom in the sunshine of everlasting love.—Really I am very sorry that I did not prove to be the sunbeam for him. Of all my lovers whom I have not loved, I love him the most; and, if I were not as kind-hearted as I am, I would not give him back his liberty, but I would still keep him.—But that is what I will not do; I am finishing with him at this moment.

THÉODORE.

How long will it last?

ROSETTE.

A fortnight, three weeks, but at all events not so long as if you had not come.—I know that I shall never be your mistress.—There is, you say, an unknown reason for that, to which I would bow if it were possible for you to disclose it to me. Thus I am forbidden to entertain any hope in that direction, and yet I cannot make up my mind to be another man's mistress when you are here; it seems to me like a profanation, and as if I should not have the right to love you.

THÉODORE.

Keep this lover for love of me.

ROSETTE.

If it will give you pleasure I will do it.—Ah! if you could have been mine, how different my life might have been from what it has been!—The world has a very false idea of me, and I should have lived and died without any one suspecting what I am—except you, Théodore, the only one who has understood me and been cruel to me.—I have never wanted any one but you for a lover, and I have never had you. O Théodore, if you had loved me, I should have been virtuous and chaste, I should have been worthy of you; instead of that, I shall leave behind me—if any one remembers me—the reputation of a dissolute woman, a sort of courtesan, who differed from her of the gutter only in rank and fortune.—I was born with the

highest aspirations; but nothing depraves one so much as being unloved.—Many people despise me who have no idea what I have had to suffer before reaching my present position.—Being sure that I shall never belong to the man I would prefer above all others, I have allowed myself to float with the current, I have not taken the trouble to defend a body that could not be yours.—As for my heart, no one has had it and no one ever will. It is yours, although you have broken it;—and I am different from the majority of women who believe themselves virtuous provided they have not passed from one bed to another, in this respect—although I have prostituted my flesh, I have been faithful in heart and soul to the thought of you.—At all events I shall have made some few people happy, I shall have caused white-robed illusions to dance about some pillows. I have innocently deceived more than one noble heart. I have been so miserable at being spurned by you, that I have always been horrified at the thought of compelling any one else to undergo such torture. That is the sole worthy motive of adventures which are commonly attributed to a spirit of libertinage pure and simple!—I, a libertine! O society!—If you knew, Théodore, how intensely painful it is to feel that your life is a failure, that you have let slip your chance of happiness, to see that everybody misunderstands you and that it is impossible to make people change their opinion of you, that your most estimable qualities are tortured into defects, your purest essences into deadly poisons, that nothing except the evil in you has transpired; to have found doors always open to your vices and always closed to your virtues, and to have been unable to bring to perfection, amid such a wilderness of hemlock and aconite, a single lily or a single rose! you know nothing of that, Théodore.

THÉODORE.

Alas! alas! Rosette, what you have just said includes the history of the whole world; the best part of us is that which remains within us and which we cannot display.—It is the same with poets.—Their noblest poem is the one they have not written; they carry more poems to the grave than they leave in their library.

ROSETTE.

I shall carry my poem to the grave with me.

THÉODORE.

And I mine.—Who has not written one at some time in his life? who is so fortunate, or so unfortunate, as not to have composed his in his head or in his heart?—Even headsmen may have composed poems, all moist with tears of the tenderest sensibility; poets perhaps have composed some that would be suited to headsmen, so bloody and monstrous they are.

ROSETTE.

Yes.—White roses can fitly be placed on my grave. I have had ten lovers, but I am a virgin, and I shall die a virgin. Many virgins, on whose graves there is a constant snow of jasmine and orange blossoms, were veritable Messalinas.

THÉODORE.

I know what a noble creature you are, Rosette.

ROSETTE.

You only in all the world have seen what I am; for you have seen me under the influence of a love that is perfectly genuine and very deep-rooted, as it is hopeless; and no one who has not seen a woman in love can say what she is; that is the one thing that consoles me in my bitterness of spirit.

THÉODORE.

And what does this young man think of you, who is your lover to-day in the eyes of the world?

ROSETTE.

The mind of a lover is a gulf deeper than the Bay of Portugal, and it is very difficult to say what there is in the depths of a man; if the lead were attached to a line a hundred fathoms long and every fathom unreeled, it would still sink without meeting

anything to stop it. Yet I have touched bottom several times with this man, and the lead has sometimes brought up mud, sometimes lovely shells, but most frequently mud and fragments of coral mixed together.—As to his opinion of me, it has varied greatly; he began where others leave off, he despised me; young men with vivid imaginations are likely to do that. There is always a tremendous fall in the first step they take, and the passage from their chimera to reality cannot be made without a shock.—He despised me and I entertained him; now he esteems me and I bore him. In the early days of our liaison he saw only the commonplace side of me, and I think that the certainty of meeting with no resistance had much to do with his determination. He seemed in great haste to have an affair, and I thought at first that it was a case of a full heart seeking only an opportunity to overflow, one of those vague passions that a man has in the May of youth and that impel him, in default of women, to throw his arms around the trunks of trees, and to kiss the flowers and grass in the fields.—But it wasn't that;—he simply passed through me to reach something else. I was a means to him, and not an end.—Beneath the fresh exterior of his twenty years, beneath the first down of adolescence, he concealed profound corruption. He was tainted to the core; he was a fruit containing nothing but ashes. In that young and lusty body was a heart as old as Saturn—a heart as incurably wretched as heart ever was.—I confess, Théodore, that I was frightened and that I was almost taken with vertigo as I looked into the black depths of that existence. Your sorrows and mine are nothing compared to those. If I had loved him more I should have killed him. Something irresistibly attracts and summons him—something that is not of this world or in this world, and he cannot rest day or night; and like the heliotrope in a cellar, he twists about to turn toward the sun which he cannot see.—He is one of those men whose mind was not completely dipped in the waters of Lethe before being attached to his body, but retains memories of the eternal beauty of the heaven from which it comes—memories that work upon it and torment it—and remembers that it once had wings and now has feet only.—If I were

God, I would deprive of poetry for two eternities, the angel guilty of such negligence.—Instead of being under the necessity of building a castle of bright-colored cards in which to shelter a fair, youthful fancy for a single spring, it was necessary to erect a tower higher than the eight temples of Belus piled one upon another. I had not the strength, I pretended not to have understood him, and I let him flutter about on his wings in search of a peak from which he could take flight into boundless space.—He thinks I have noticed nothing of all this, because I have fallen in with all his caprices without seeming to suspect their object. Being unable to cure him, I determined—and I hope that I shall receive credit for it some day before God—to give him at least the happiness of believing that he was passionately loved.—He aroused in me so much pity and interest that I was easily able to assume a tone and manner sufficiently affectionate to deceive him. I have played my part like a consummate actress; I have been playful and melancholy, sensible and voluptuous; I have feigned anxiety and jealousy; I have shed false tears, and I have summoned flocks of ready-made smiles to my lips. I have arrayed this counterfeit of love in the richest stuffs; I have taken him to drive through the avenues of my parks; I have requested all my birds to sing as he passed, and all my dahlias and daturas to bend their heads in salutation; I have sent him across my lake on the silvery back of my darling swan; I have concealed myself inside the manikin and bestowed my voice, my wit, my youth and beauty upon it and given it such a seductive appearance that the reality fell far short of my deception. When the time comes to shatter this hollow statue, I shall do it in such a way that he will think the wrong is all on my side and so will have no remorse. I shall be the one to make the pinhole through which the air with which the balloon is filled will make its escape.—Is not that sanctified prostitution and honorable deception? I have in a glass jar some tears that I have collected just as they were about to fall.—They are my jewel-case and my diamonds, and I shall present them to the angel who comes for me to lead me before God.

THÉODORE.

They are the loveliest that can glisten on a woman's neck. A queen's jewels are less precious than they. For my own part, I believe that the ointment Magdalen poured on Christ's feet was made of the tears of those she had comforted, and I believe, too, that the Milky Way is strewn with such tears, and not, as has been said, with drops of Juno's milk.—Who will do for you what you have done for him?

ROSETTE.

No one, alas! since you cannot.

THÉODORE.

O dear heart! would that I could!—But do not lose hope. You are lovely and still very young. You have many avenues of lindens and flowering acacias to pass through before reaching the damp road lined with box and leafless trees, which leads from the tomb of porphyry in which your happy dead years will be buried, to the tomb of rough and moss-covered stone where they will hasten to bestow the remains of what once was you, and the wrinkled, tottering spectres of the days of your old age. You still have much of the mountain of life to climb and it will be long before you reach the zone where the snow begins. You are now only at the level of aromatic plants, of limpid cascades over which the iris suspends its tri-colored arches, of stately green oaks and sweet-smelling larches. Mount a little higher and from that point, with the broader horizon spread out before you, perhaps you will see the blue smoke rising above the roof beneath which he who will love you sleeps. You must not, in the very beginning, despair of life, for vistas open in our destiny which we had ceased to expect. Man, in his life, has often made me think of a pilgrim toiling up the winding stairway of a Gothic tower. The long granite serpent winds upward in the darkness, every coil a stair. After a few circumvolutions the little light that came from the door dies out. The shadow of the houses, which are not yet passed, does not allow the loopholes to admit the sun: the walls are black and

moisture oozes from them; you seem rather to be going down into a dungeon from which you are never to come forth, than ascending to the turret which, from below, seemed to you so slender and graceful, covered with lace-work and embroidery as if it were about starting for the ball.—You hesitate whether you ought to go higher, the damp shadows weigh so heavily upon your forehead.—A few more turns of the staircase and more frequent openings cast their golden trefoils on the opposite wall. You begin to see the notched gables of the houses, the carving of the entablatures, the strange forms of the chimneys; a few steps more and your eye overlooks the whole city; it is a forest of steeples, of spires and towers, bristling upon all sides, toothed and slashed and hollowed, stamped as with dies, and allowing the light to shine through their numberless apertures. The domes and cupolas raise their rounded forms like a giant's breasts or the skulls of Titans. The islets formed by houses and palaces appear through shadowy or luminous openings. A few steps more and you will be on the platform; and then you will see, beyond the walls of the city, the green fields, the blue hill-sides and the white sails on the changing ribbon of the stream. A dazzling light bursts upon you, and the swallows fly hither and thither, close at hand, with their joyous twitter. The distant sounds reach your eyes like a soothing murmur or the hum of a swarm of bees; all the bells scatter their necklaces of pearls of sound through the air; the breezes bring you the odors of the neighboring forest and of the mountain flowers: it is all light and melody and perfume. If your feet had been weary or discouragement had seized upon you, and you had remained on a lower step or had turned back and gone down again, that spectacle would have been lost to you.—Sometimes, however, the tower has only a single opening, in the centre or at the top.—The tower of your life is built so.—In that case you must have more obstinate courage, perseverance armed with sharper nails, to cling, in the darkness, to the protruding stones, and to reach the opening, resplendent with light, through which the eye embraces the surrounding country; or it may be that the loopholes have been filled up, or no one has thought to cut them, and then you must go on to

the summit; but the higher one goes without looking out, the more extended the horizon seems, and the greater the surprise and pleasure.

ROSETTE.

O Théodore, God grant that I may soon reach the point where the window is! For a long, long time I have been following the winding staircase in the most profound darkness; but I am afraid the opening has never been cut and I must climb to the very top; and suppose this staircase with the countless stairs should end at a walled-up doorway, or an arch closed by blocks of stone?

THÉODORE.

Do not say that, Rosette, do not think it.—What architect would build a stairway that led nowhere? Why imagine that the placid Architect of the world was stupider and less far-sighted than an ordinary architect? God makes no mistakes and forgets nothing. It is incredible that He should have amused Himself by playing a trick upon you and shutting you up in a long stone tunnel without exit or opening. Why should you suppose that He would haggle with such poor ants as we are over our paltry momentary happiness and the imperceptible grain of millet that falls to each of us in this immeasurable universe?—In order to do that He must be as savage as a tiger or a judge; and if we were so obnoxious to Him, He would simply have to bid a comet turn aside a little from its path and annihilate us all with a hair of its tail. How the devil can you think that God diverts Himself by spitting us all on a gold pin as the Emperor Domitian did with flies?—God isn't a concierge or a church-warden, and although He is old, He is not yet in His dotage. All such petty malice is beneath Him and He is not foolish enough to show off His smartness to us and play tricks on us.—Courage, Rosette, courage! If you are out of breath, stop a bit and take breath and then continue your upward course; perhaps you have only a score more steps to climb to reach the embrasure from which you will see your happiness.

ROSETTE.

Never! oh never! and if I reach the top of the tower, it will only be to hurl myself from it.

THÉODORE.

Banish these gloomy thoughts that flutter about you like bats, and cast the opaque shadow of their wings on your fair brow, my poor afflicted one. If you want me to love you, be happy, and do not weep. (He draws her gently to his side and kisses her on the eyes).

ROSETTE.

What a misfortune for me that I ever knew you! and yet, if I could live my life over, I would still prefer to have known you.—Your harshness has been sweeter to me than the passion of other men; and, although you have made me suffer intensely, all the pleasure I have ever had has come to me from you; through you I have caught a glimpse of what I might have been. You have been a flash of light in my darkness, and you have illuminated many dark places in my soul; you have opened new perspectives in my life.—I owe it to you that I know what love is,—unhappy love, it is true; but there is a melancholy and profound fascination in loving without being loved, and it is pleasant to remember those who forget us. It is a joy simply to be able to love, even when one loves alone, and many die without having had it, and often they who love are not the most to be pitied.

THÉODORE.

They suffer and feel their wounds, but at all events they live. They have some interest in life; they have a star about which they gravitate, a pole toward which they ardently extend their hands. They have something to long for; they can say to themselves: "If I reach that point, if I obtain that, I shall be happy."—They suffer frightful agony, but when they die, they can at least say to themselves: "I am dying for him."—To die thus is to be born again. The really unhappy, the only ones who are irreparably so, are they whose wild embrace takes in the whole universe, they

who want everything and nothing, and who would be embarrassed and speechless if an angel or fairy should descend to earth and say suddenly to them: "Express one wish and it shall be gratified."

ROSETTE.

If a fairy should come I know what I would ask her.

THÉODORE.

You know, Rosette, and therein you are happier than I, for I do not know. There are in my heart many vague longings, which become confounded with one another and give birth to others which eventually consume them. My desires are a cloud of birds that fly aimlessly this way and that; yours is an eagle that has its eyes on the sun and is prevented by lack of air from soaring upward on its outspread wings. Ah! if I could only know what I want; if the idea that haunts me would stand out clear and well-defined from the mist that envelops it; if the lucky or unlucky star would appear in the depths of my sky; if the light I am to follow would shine out through the darkness, a deceitful will-o'-the-wisp or a friendly beacon; if my column of fire would go on before me, even though it were through a desert without manna and without springs of water; if I knew where I am going, even though my path ends at a precipice!—I would prefer the wild flights of accursed huntsmen through bogs and thickets, to this absurd and monotonous stamping and pawing. To live thus is to follow a trade like that of the horses with bandages over their eyes, who turn the wheel of a well, and travel thousands of leagues without seeing anything or changing their position.—I have been turning a long while, and the bucket ought to be at the top.

ROSETTE.

You resemble D'Albert in many ways, and, when you speak, it seems to me sometimes as if he were speaking.—I have no doubt that, when you know him better, you will become much attached to him; you cannot fail to suit each

other.—He is tormented as you are, by these same aimless impulses; he is head over ears in love but does not know with what; he would like to ascend to Heaven, for the earth seems to him like a stool hardly fit for one of his feet to rest upon, and he has more pride than Lucifer before his fall.

THÉODORE.

I was afraid at first that he was one of those poets, of whom there are so many, who have driven poetry off the face of the earth, one of those stringers of false pearls who see nothing in the world but the last syllables of words, and who, when they have made ombre rhyme with sombre, flame with âme, and Dieu with lieu, fold their arms and legs conscientiously and permit the spheres to accomplish their revolutions.

ROSETTE.

He is not one of that kind. His verses are beneath him and do not contain his thought. You would form a very mistaken idea of his nature from what he has written; his real poem is himself, and I don't know if he will ever produce another. He has, in the depths of his mind, a seraglio of choice ideas which he surrounds with a triple wall, and of which he is more jealous than ever sultan was of his odalisques.—He puts in his poetry only those ideas that he holds in light esteem, or with which he has become disgusted; he makes his verse the door through which he expels them and the world receives only those for which he has no further use.

THÉODORE.

I can understand his jealousy and his modesty.—Just as many men do not care for the love they have had until they no longer have it, or for their mistresses until they are dead.

ROSETTE.

It is so hard for one to have anything to one's self in this world! every candle attracts so many moths, every treasure attracts so many thieves!—I love the silent men who

carry their ideas to the grave and do not choose to abandon them to the filthy kisses and shameless handling of the vulgar crowd. Those lovers please me best who do not carve their mistress's name on the bark of any tree, who confide it to no echo, and who, while they sleep, are haunted by the fear that they may utter it in a dream. I am one of that number; I have not divulged my thoughts and no one shall know my love.—But it is almost eleven o'clock, my dear Théodore, and I am preventing your taking rest that you must sadly need. When I am obliged to leave you I always have a feeling of oppression at my heart, and it seems to me as if it were the last time I should ever see you. I postpone it as long as I can; but I always have to go at last. Good-night, for I am afraid D'Albert may be looking for me; good-night, my dear friend.

Théodore put his arm around her waist and thus escorted her to the door; there he stopped and followed her a long time with his glance; the corridor was lighted at intervals by small windows with narrow panes, through which the moon shone, making alternate light and dark patches of fantastic shape. At each window Rosette's pure, white form gleamed like a silvery phantom; then it vanished to appear, even more brilliant, a little farther away; at last it disappeared altogether.

Théodore stood for some moments motionless, with folded arms, as if buried in profound meditation; then he passed his hand over his forehead and threw back his hair with a jerk of his head, returned to his room, and went to bed after kissing the brow of the page, who was still asleep.

VII

As soon as the daylight entered Rosette's room, D'Albert made his appearance, with an eagerness that was not usual with him.

"Here you are," said Rosette, "I would say very early, if you could ever arrive early.—To reward you for your gallantry I present you my hand to kiss."

And she drew from beneath the sheet of Flemish linen trimmed with lace the

prettiest little hand that was ever seen at the end of a plump, well-shaped arm.

D'Albert kissed it with compunction:—"And the other, little sister, are we not to kiss that too?"

"Mon Dieu, yes! nothing is easier. I am in my Sunday humor to-day; here."—And she extended her other hand with which she tapped him lightly on the lips.—"Am I not the most obliging woman on earth?"

"You are grace itself, and temples of white marble should be erected to you in thickets of myrtle.—Really, I am very much afraid that the same thing will happen to you that happened to Psyche, and that Venus will be jealous of you," said D'Albert, taking the fair one's hands in one of his and raising them together to his lips.

"How you say all that without taking breath! any one would think it was something you had learned by heart," said Rosette, with a delicious little pout.

"No; you deserve to have the phrase turned expressly for you, and you were made to pluck the virgin bloom from compliments," rejoined D'Albert.

"Oho! whatever is the matter with you to-day? are you ill that you are so gallant? I fear you are dying. Do you know that when one's character suddenly changes, and without any apparent reason, it is an evil omen? Now it is a well-known fact, to all the women who have taken the pains to love you, that you are usually as morose as a man can be, and it is no less certain that at this moment you are as charming as a man can be, and inexplicably amiable.—Really, I think you are pale, my poor D'Albert: give me your arm and let me feel your pulse;" and she pushed back his sleeve and counted the pulsations with mock gravity.—"No, you are perfectly well and you haven't the slightest symptom of fever. In that case I must be furiously pretty this morning! Go and find my mirror so that I can see how far your gallantry is justified."

D'Albert brought a small mirror from the toilet-table and placed it on the bed.

"In truth," said Rosette, "you are not altogether wrong. Why don't you write a sonnet on my eyes, Monsieur le Poète. You have no excuse for not doing it. Just see how unfortunate I am! to have eyes like these and a poet like this, and to be left without sonnets just as if I were one-eyed and had a water-carrier for a lover! You don't love me, monsieur; you have never written so much as an acrostic sonnet for me.—And my mouth, what do you think of that? I have kissed you with that mouth and perhaps I will kiss you with it again, my dark-browed beauty; and upon my word, it is a favor that you hardly deserve—I am not speaking of to-day, for to-day you deserve anything;—but, to talk about something beside myself, you are incomparably fresh and comely this morning, you look like a brother of Aurora, and, although it is hardly daylight, you are already arrayed in your best clothes as if for a ball. Can it be that you have designs upon me? and do you meditate dealing an unexpected and final blow to my virtue? do you propose to make a conquest of me? But I forget that you have already done that, and that it's ancient history."

"Don't joke like that, Rosette; you know that I love you."

"Why, that depends. I don't know it; and you?"

"I know it perfectly well, and from such symptoms that, if you should have the kindness to forbid me your door, I should try to prove it to you, and I venture to flatter myself that I should do it most triumphantly."

"Not that way: however anxious I may be to be convinced, my door will remain open; I am too pretty to be shut up behind closed doors; the sun shines for one and all, and my beauty shall be like the sun to-day, if you approve."

"Upon my honor I strongly disapprove; but act as if I approved as strongly. I am your very humble slave, and I lay my wishes at your feet."

"That is as jolly as can be; continue to entertain such sentiments and leave your key in your door to-night."

"Monsieur le Chevalier Théodore de Sérannes,"—said a huge negro, putting his

round, good-humored face between the wings of the folding-door, "desires to pay his respects to you and begs that you will deign to receive him."

"Admit Monsieur le Chevalier," said Rosette, pulling the sheet up to her chin.

Théodore went first to Rosette's bed and made a very low and graceful courtesy, which she returned with a friendly nod; then he turned to D'Albert, whom he also saluted in an off-hand, courteous manner.

"What were you talking about?" said Théodore. "It may be that I interrupted an interesting conversation: go on, I beg, and tell me in a few words what it is all about."

"Oh, no!" Rosette replied with a mischievous smile; "we were talking business."

Chapter VII — "Admit Monsieur le Chevalier," said Rosette, pulling the sheet up to her chin.

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Théodore seated himself at the foot of Rosette's bed, for D'Albert had taken his place at her pillow, by right of having arrived first. The conversation wandered for some time from subject to subject, very bright and gay and animated, and that is why we do not report it; we should be afraid that it would lose too much in being transcribed. The manner, the tone, the vivacity of speech and gesture, the countless ways of uttering a word, the effervescent wit, like the foam of champagne which sparkles and evaporates at once, are details that it is impossible to note down and reproduce. We leave that hiatus for the reader to fill, and he will certainly acquit himself of the task better than we could do. Let him imagine here five or six pages filled with whatever is most capricious, most refined, most curiously original, most ingenious and most sparkling in the way of conversation.

We are well aware that we are resorting to an artifice which reminds one a little of

that resorted to by Timanthes, who, in despair of ever being able to reproduce Agamemnon's face, threw some drapery over his head; but we prefer to be timid rather than imprudent.

It would not perhaps be amiss to inquire into the motives that had led D'Albert to rise so early, and what spur had impelled him to call upon Rosette at as unseasonable an hour as if he had still been in love.—It would appear as if it were a slight attack of secret, unconfessed jealousy. To be sure he cared but little for Rosette, indeed he would have been very glad to be rid of her,—but he preferred to leave her voluntarily and not to be left by her, a thing which always inflicts a deep wound on a man's pride, although his first flame may be utterly extinct.—Théodore was such a well-favored cavalier that it was difficult to view his appearance on the scene while a liaison was in progress without apprehending what had in fact happened many times, that is to say, that all eyes would turn in his direction and the hearts follow the eyes; and, strangely enough, although he had taken away many women, no lover had harbored the enduring resentment that men usually feel for those who have supplanted them. There was in his whole behavior such winning charm, such unaffected grace, a something so gentle and so dignified, that even men were touched by it. D'Albert, who had come to Rosette's room, intending to speak very sharply to Théodore, if he should meet him there, was greatly surprised to find that he did not feel the slightest sensation of anger in his presence, and that he was inclined to receive with warmth the advances he made. In half an hour's time, you would have said that they had been friends from boyhood, and yet D'Albert felt in his inmost heart, that if Rosette was destined ever to love, she would love that man, and he had every reason to be jealous, for the future at least, for he did not suspect anything at present. What would he have thought, had he seen the fair creature in a white peignoir gliding like a night-moth on a moonbeam into the handsome youth's room, and coming out three or four hours later with mysterious precautions? He might well, in very truth, have deemed himself more unfortunate than he really was,

for it is a thing rarely seen that a pretty, lovelorn young woman comes forth from the bedroom of a no less attractive young man, exactly the same as when she went in.

Rosette listened to Théodore with much attention and as one listens to a person one loves; but what he said was so entertaining and upon so many different subjects, that her attention was perfectly natural and easily explained. And so D'Albert took no offence at it. Théodore's manner toward Rosette was courteous and friendly, but nothing more.

"What shall we do to-day, Théodore?" said Rosette, "suppose we go for a row on the river? what do you think? or shall we hunt?"

"To hunt is less depressing than to glide over the water side by side with some tired swan and thrust the water-lily leaves aside to right and left,—don't you think so, D'Albert?"

"I think perhaps I should enjoy gliding down the river in the skiff quite as much as racing madly in the trail of some poor beast; but wherever you go, I will go; what we have to do now is to allow Madame Rosette to rise and don a suitable costume."

Rosette made a sign of assent and rang for her maid to come and dress her. The two young men left the room arm in arm, and it was easy to guess, from seeing them on such good terms, that one was the titular lover and the other the loved lover of the same person.

Soon everybody was ready. D'Albert and Théodore were already mounted in the first court-yard, when Rosette, in a riding-habit, appeared at the top of the steps. She had assumed with the costume, a sprightly, resolute air that was immensely becoming to her; she leaped into the saddle with her ordinary agility and gave her horse a smart blow with her crop, so that he darted away like an arrow. D'Albert spurred after her and soon overtook her. Théodore allowed them some little start, being sure of catching them up whenever he chose. He seemed to be waiting for something and turned back frequently toward the château.

"Théodore! Théodore! come on! are you riding a wooden horse?" cried Rosette.

Théodore urged his horse to a gallop and diminished the distance between him and Rosette, but did not join her.

He continued to look back at the château, which they were beginning to lose sight of; a little cloud of dust, in the centre of which something that they could not as yet distinguish was moving very rapidly, appeared at the end of the road. In a few moments the cloud reached Théodore's side, and, opening like the classic clouds of the Iliad, disclosed the fresh and rosy face of the mysterious page.

"Come, Théodore, come!" cried Rosette again; "give your tortoise the spur and join us."

Théodore gave his horse the rein, and in a second, the animal, who was pawing and rearing impatiently, had passed D'Albert and Rosette by several lengths.

"Who loves me follows me," said Théodore, leaping a fence four feet high. "Well, well, Monsieur le Poète," he said, when he was on the other side, "you don't jump? but they say your steed has wings."

"Faith, I prefer to ride around; I have only one head to break after all; if I had several I would try," D'Albert replied with a smile.

"No one loves me then, as no one follows me," said Théodore, bringing the arched corners of his mouth even lower than usual. The little page looked up at him reproachfully with his great blue eyes, and drove his heels into his horse's sides.

The horse gave a tremendous leap.

"Yes! some one," said the child from the other side of the fence.

Rosette cast a strange glance at the boy and blushed up to her eyes; then, with a furious blow of the crop on the mare's neck, she leaped the barrier of green apple wood that barred the path.

"Do you think that I don't love you, Théodore?"

The child darted an oblique, stealthy glance at her and rode up to Théodore.

D'Albert was in the middle of the path—and saw nothing of all this; for, from time immemorial, it has been the privilege of fathers, husbands and lovers to see nothing.

"Isnabel," said Théodore, "you are mad, and so are you, Rosette! You didn't take enough start for your jump, Isnabel, and you, Rosette, just missed catching your dress on the posts.—You might have killed yourself."

"What difference would it make?" rejoined Rosette, in such a melancholy, despairing tone that Isnabel forgave her for having leaped the barrier.

They rode on for some distance and reached the crossroads where the huntsmen and the pack were to meet them. Six arched paths, cut through the dense forest, met at a little stone tower with six sides, on each of which was carved the name of the road that ended there. The trees rose so high that they seemed to be trying to spin the woolly, fleecy clouds that a brisk breeze carried hither and thither over their towering tops; tall, thick grass and impenetrable thickets provided hiding-places and strongholds for the game, and the hunt promised to be a successful one. It was a true forest of an earlier age, with oaks more than a hundred years old, such trees as we never see, now that we no longer plant trees and have not the patience to wait for those that are planted to grow;—a hereditary forest, planted by great-grandfathers for fathers, by fathers for grandsons, with paths of enormous width, the obelisk surmounted by a ball, the rock-work fountain, the inevitable pool, and the keepers with powdered wigs, yellow leather breeches and sky-blue coats;—one of those dense, dark forests in which the white, glossy coats of Wouvermans' great horses stand out in bold relief, and the flaring mouths of the hunting horns à la Dampierre that Parrocel loves to paint on the backs of his huntsmen.—A multitude of dogs' tails, shaped like crescents or reaping-hooks, waved frantically about in a dusty cloud. The signal was given, the dogs, straining at their leashes, were uncoupled, and the hunt began.—We shall not undertake to describe with precision the detours

and doublings of the stag through the forest;—we do not even feel sure whether it was a stag seven years old, and, despite our investigations on that point, we have not been able to satisfy ourselves—which is really distressing.—Nevertheless we can but think that in such a forest, so venerable, so dark, so seignorial, there could be none but seven-year stags, and we do not see why the one after which the four principal characters in this romance were galloping on horses of different colors, and non passibus æquis, should not have been such a one.

The stag ran, like the true stag that he was, and some fifty dogs or more that followed at his heels were no slight spur to his natural swiftness of foot. The pace was so fleet that only an occasional bark could be heard.

Théodore, being the best mounted and the best rider, kept on the heels of the pack with incredible zeal. D'Albert was close behind him. Rosette and the little page Isnabel followed, falling farther and farther behind.

The interval was soon so great that they could not hope to join their companions.

"Suppose we stop for a moment and let our horses take breath," said Rosette. "The hunt is going toward the pond and I know a crossroad by which we can reach there as soon as they do."

Isnabel drew in his little mountain pony, who put down his head, shook his forelock down over his eyes and began to paw the gravel with his hoofs.

The little creature presented a most striking contrast to Rosette's mare; he was as black as night, she as white as white satin; his mane and tail were bristly and unkempt; her mane was tied with blue ribbons and her tail combed and curled. She looked like a unicorn, he like a spaniel.

There was the same marked difference between the riders as between their steeds.—Rosette's hair was as black as Isnabel's was fair; her eyebrows were very clearly marked and very prominent; those of the page were hardly darker than his skin and resembled the down on a peach.—The coloring of the one was as brilliant

and enduring as the light at noonday; the other had the transparent blushing hue of early dawn.

"Suppose we try now to overtake the hunt?" said Isnabel; "the horses have had time to recover their breath."

"Come on!" replied the pretty Amazon, and they galloped away through a narrow transverse path leading to the pool; the two horses ran neck and neck and filled the whole path.

On Isnabel's side, a gnarled and twisted tree stretched out a huge branch like an arm, and seemed to shake its fist at the riders.—The child did not see it.

"Look out!" cried Rosette, "lean forward on your saddle! you will be unhorsed."

The warning came too late; the branch struck Isnabel in the middle of the body. The violence of the blow caused him to lose his stirrups, and, as his horse galloped on and the branch was too stout to bend, he was brushed from his saddle and thrown rudely back.

The child fainted on the spot.—Rosette, terribly frightened, leaped from her horse and knelt beside the page, who gave no sign of life.

His cap had fallen off and his lovely, rippling fair hair lay spread about over the gravel in every direction.—His little open palms looked as if they were made of wax, they were so devoid of color. Rosette knelt beside him and tried to restore him to consciousness.—She had no salts or flask with her and her embarrassment was great. At last she discovered a deep rut in which the rain-water had collected and clarified; she dipped her fingers in it, to the great alarm of a little toad that was the naiad of that stream, and shook a few drops on the young page's blue-veined temples.—He did not seem to feel them, and the pearls of water rolled down his white cheeks as a sylph's tears roll down the leaf of a lily. Rosette, thinking that his clothes might distress him, unbuckled his belt, unbuttoned his doublet and opened his shirt to give his lungs freer play.—Thereupon Rosette saw something that would

have been the most agreeable of surprises to a man, but that seemed very far from affording her any pleasure—for her brows contracted and her upper lip trembled slightly;—she saw a snowy white breast, which was as yet undeveloped, but which made the fairest promises and already fulfilled many of them; a smooth and rounded breast, as white as ivory, and in the language of the Ronsardists, delicious to look at, more delicious to kiss.

Chapter VII — Rosette, thinking that his clothes might distress him, unbuckled his belt, unbuttoned his doublet and opened his shirt to give his lungs freer play.—Thereupon Rosette saw something that would have been the most agreeable of surprises to a man, but that seemed very far from affording her any pleasure——

"A woman!" she exclaimed, "a woman! ah! Théodore!"

Isnabel—for we will continue to call him by that name, although it was not his—began to show some signs of life and languidly raised his long eyelashes; he was not wounded in any way, he was simply stunned.—He soon sat up and, with Rosette's assistance, was able to stand and remount his horse, which had stopped as soon as he felt that his rider was gone.

They rode slowly to the pool, where they found the remainder of the hunting party. Rosette in a few words told Théodore what had happened.—He changed color several times during her recital, and throughout the rest of the ride he kept his horse close beside Isnabel's.

They returned to the château betimes; the day that had begun so joyously, had a decidedly melancholy ending.

Rosette was in a meditative mood and D'Albert seemed as deeply engrossed in his reflections. The reader will soon learn what had given rise to them.

VIII

No, my dear Silvio, I have not forgotten you; I am not one of those who go through life without a backward glance; my past follows me and encroaches upon my

present, and almost upon my future; your friendship is one of the sunlit spots that stand out most clearly on the blue horizon of my later years; often, from the peak on which I stand, I turn to gaze upon it with a feeling of ineffable melancholy.

Oh! what lovely weather it was!—how angelically pure we were!—Our feet hardly touched the ground, we had wings on our shoulders, as it were, our desires carried us away and the fair halo of youth around our foreheads trembled in the breeze of spring.

Do you remember the little island covered with poplars at the spot where the river forms a little arm?—To reach it we had to cross a long, very narrow plank that bent in the middle, with a strange sensation; an excellent bridge for goats and little used, in fact, except by them: it was a delightful spot.—Short, thick grass where the forget-me-not opened its pretty little blue twinkling eye, a path, as yellow as nankeen, that served as a belt for the green robe of the islet and encircled its waist, the constantly moving shadow of aspens and poplars, were not the least charms of that paradise;—there were great pieces of linen that the women stretched out to whiten in the dew;—one would have said they were square patches of snow.—And the little dark, sun-burned girl whose great wild eyes sparkled so brightly under her long locks, and who ran after the goats, threatening them with her osier switch when they were on the point of walking on the linen she was watching—do you remember her?—And the sulphur-colored butterflies, with their irregular, hesitating flight, and the kingfisher we tried so many times to catch, that had its nest in the clump of alders; and the banks sloping to the river, with the steps roughly hewn in the rock, with their posts and stakes, all green at the bottom and almost always closed by a hedge of plants and branches? How smooth and clear the water was! how the golden gravel glistened at the bottom! and how pleasant it was to sit on the bank and dabble our toes in the stream! The water-lily, with its golden flowers unfolding gracefully, seemed like green hairs floating on the gleaming back of some nymph in the bath.—The sky gazed at its reflection in that mirror with azure smiles and

transparent rifts of pearl-gray of most bewitching beauty, and at every hour in the day there were turquoise blues, golden yellows, fleecy whites and flickering shades in inexhaustible variety.—How I loved those flocks of ducks with the emerald necks that sailed incessantly from bank to bank and caused an occasional wrinkle on that glassy surface!

And how well adapted we were to be the figures in that landscape!—how attached we became to those sweet, restful scenes, and how easily we harmonized ourselves with them! Springtime without, youth within, the sun on the turf, a smile on the lips, snow-white blossoms on all the bushes, fair illusions blooming in our minds, a modest flush upon our cheeks and on the eglantine, poetry singing in our hearts, invisible birds humming among the trees, bright light, cooing doves, perfumes, a thousand confused murmurs, the beating of the heart, the water stirring a pebble, a wisp of grass or a thought springing up, a drop of water rolling down the side of a flower, a tear flowing from beneath an eyelid, a sigh of love, the rustling of a leaf;—what evenings we have passed there, walking slowly, so near the edge that we often had one foot in the water and the other on land!

Alas!—that lasted a very short time, in my case at least; for you, while acquiring the knowledge of a man, were able to retain the innocence of a child.—The seed of corruption that was within me developed very rapidly, and the gangrene pitilessly devoured all that was pure and saintlike about me. The only good that remained was my friendship for you.

I am accustomed to conceal nothing from you—neither acts nor thoughts. I have laid bare before you the most secret fibres of my heart; however strange, absurd, eccentric the movements of my mind, I must needs describe them to you; but, in truth, my sensations for some time past have been so strange that I hardly dare confess them to myself. I told you at some time that I was afraid that by dint of seeking the beautiful and straining every nerve to attain it, I should fall into the

impossible or the horrible.—I have almost reached that point; when, then, shall I get clear of all these currents that cross and recross one another and drag me to right and left; when will the deck of my vessel cease to tremble under my feet and to be swept by the waves of every storm? where shall I find a haven in which I can cast anchor, and an immovable rock out of reach of the waves, whereon I can dry myself and wring the spray from my hair?

You know how ardently I have sought physical beauty, what importance I attach to physical form, and what affection I have conceived for the visible world; it must be because I am too corrupt and too blasé to believe in moral beauty, and to pursue it with any constancy.—I have completely lost the power to distinguish between good and evil, and, by force of depravity, I have almost reverted to the ignorance of the savage and the child. In fact, nothing seems praiseworthy or blameworthy to me, and the most extraordinary actions surprise me but little. My conscience is a deaf mute. Adultery seems to me the most innocent thing in the world; I find it quite natural that a girl should prostitute her person; it seems to me that I would betray my friends without the slightest remorse, and I should not have the slightest scruple in kicking over a precipice people who annoyed me, if I were walking on the brink with them.—I could witness the most atrocious scenes with indifference, and there is something that is not unpleasant to me in the sufferings and woes of humanity.—I have the same sensation of acrimonious, bitter joy when some great disaster falls on the world, that one feels when one takes revenge for an old insult.

O world, what hast thou done to me that I should hate thee so? Who has so filled me with gall against thee? what did I expect from thee that I should bear thee such rancor for having deceived me? what high hope didst thou disappoint? what eaglet's wings didst thou clip?—What doors shouldst thou have opened that have remained closed, and which of us two has failed the other?

Nothing touches me, nothing moves me;—I no longer feel, when I hear the story of

a heroic action, the sublime shudder that used to run over me from head to foot.—Indeed, it all seems to me a little foolish.—No accent is deep enough to tighten the relaxed fibres of my heart and make them vibrate:—I look upon the tears of my fellow-mortals with the same eye that I look upon the rain, unless they are of a particularly beautiful water and the light is reflected prettily in them and they are flowing down a lovely cheek.—Dumb animals are almost the only creatures for which I have a slight remnant of compassion. I would allow a peasant or a servant to be soundly whipped, but I could not stand by and see the same treatment inflicted on a horse or dog in my presence; and yet I am not evil-minded, I have never injured anybody on earth and I probably never shall; but that is due rather to my nonchalance and my sovereign contempt for all those people whom I do not like, which does not permit me to interest myself even to the extent of injuring them.—I abhor the whole world in bulk, and there are only one or two in the whole lot whom I deem worthy to be hated specially.—To hate a person is to be as much disturbed about him as if you loved him;—it is to set him apart, to distinguish him from the common herd; it is to be in a state of violent excitement because of him; it is to think of him by day and dream of him by night; it is to bite at your pillow and gnash your teeth as you think that he exists; what more do you do for any one you love? Would you take the same amount of trouble to please a mistress that you take to ruin an enemy?—I doubt it—in order to hate one person intensely, one must be in love with some other person. Every great hatred serves as a counterpoise to a great love: and whom could I hate, when I love nobody?

My hatred is, like my love, a confused, general sentiment that seeks to apply itself to some object and cannot; I have within me a treasure of hatred and love which I don't know what to do with, and which weighs horribly upon me. If I can find no place to bestow one or the other or both of them, I shall burst and break apart, like a bag filled too full of money, which rips at the seams and spills its contents.—Oh! if I could detest some one, if one of the stupid men with whom I live would insult me in

such a way as to make my old viper's blood boil in my frozen veins, and force me out of this dull drowsiness in which I am stagnating; if thou, old witch with the palsied head, wouldst bite me in the cheek with thy rat's teeth and infect me with thy venom and thy madness; if some one's death could be my life;—if the last heart-beat of an enemy writhing under my foot could send a delicious thrill through my hair, and the odor of his blood smell sweeter to my thirsty nostrils than the aroma of flowers, oh! how gladly would I renounce love, and how happy I would deem myself!

Deadly embraces, tiger-bites, the hug of a boa-constrictor, an elephant's foot placed upon a breast that is crushed and flattened beneath it, the poisoned tail of the scorpion, the milky juice of the Euphorbia, the curved kris of the Javanese, blades that gleam at night and extinguish their gleam in blood—I call upon you now, it is you who shall replace for me the leafless roses, the moist kisses and the warm embrace of love!

I love nothing, as I have said, but alas! I am afraid of loving something.—It would be a hundred thousand times better to hate than to have such a love!—I have found the type of beauty that I have so long dreamed of.—I have found the body of my phantom; I have seen it, it has spoken to me, I have touched its hand, it exists; it is not a chimera. I knew that I could not be mistaken and that my presentiments never lied.—Yes, Silvio, lam living beside the dream of my life;—my chamber is here, its chamber is there; I can see from here the curtain trembling at its window, and the light of its lamp. Its shadow has just passed across the curtain: in an hour we shall sup together.

Those lovely Turkish eyelashes, that clear, profound gaze, that warm hue of pale amber, that long glossy black hair, that nose, of proud and delicate shape, those joints and extremities, supple and slender after the manner of Palmegiani, the graceful curves and the pure oval contour that give such an air of aristocratic

refinement to a face—all that I longed for and would have been overjoyed to find distributed among five or six persons, I have found united in a single person!

The thing that I adore most fervently among all earthly things is a lovely hand.—If you could see the hand of my dream! such perfection! such dazzling whiteness! such soft skin! such penetrating moisture! the ends of the fingers so admirably tapered! the half-moon of the nails so clearly marked! such polish and such brilliant color! you would say they were the inner petals of a rose;—Anne of Austria's hands, so vaunted and famous, were no more than the hands of a turkey-keeper or scullery-maid compared with these.—And then what grace, what art in the slightest movements of the hand! how gracefully the little finger bends and stays a little apart from its tall brothers!—The thought of that hand drives me mad and makes my lips quiver and burn.—I close my eyes to avoid looking at it; but with its delicate fingers it seizes my eyelashes and raises the lids, causing countless visions of ivory and snow to pass before me.

Ah! doubtless it is Satan's claw gloved in that satin skin; it is some mocking demon making sport of me; there is witchcraft in it.—It is too monstrously impossible.

That hand—I propose to go to Italy, to see the pictures of the great masters, to study, compare, draw, become a painter in short, in order to be able to reproduce it as it is, as I see it, as I feel it; it will perhaps serve the purpose of ridding me of this sort of obsession.

I longed for beauty; I did not know what I asked for.—It is like trying to look at the sun without eyelids, it is like trying to handle flames.—I suffer horribly.—To be unable to assimilate this perfection, to be unable to pass into it and to cause it to pass into me, to have no means of reproducing it and of making it feel!—When I see anything beautiful, I want to touch it with my whole self, everywhere and at the same time. I want to sing of it and paint it, to carve it and write of it, to be loved by it as I love it; I want what cannot be and never can be.

Your letter made me ill—very ill—forgive me for saying it.—All the pure, tranquil happiness that you enjoy, the walks in the reddening woods,—the long conversations, so affectionate and tender, that end with a chaste kiss on the forehead; the serene, isolated life; the days that pass so quickly that night seems to come before its time, make the constant internal agitation in which I live seem even more tempestuous.—So you are to be married in two months; all the obstacles are removed, you are sure now of belonging to each other forever. Your present felicity is augmented by all the happiness in store for you. You are happy and you are certain of being happier soon.—What a destiny is yours!—Your beloved is beautiful, but what you have loved in her is not the mortal, palpable beauty, material beauty, but the invisible, immortal beauty, the beauty that does not grow old, the beauty of the soul.—She is full of charm and innocence; she loves you as such souls know how to love.—You never looked to see if the golden shade of her hair resembled the golden hair painted by Rubens or Giorgione; but it pleased you because it was her hair. I will wager, happy lover that you are, that you have no idea whether your mistress is of the Grecian or Asiatic type, English or Italian.—O Silvio! how rare are the hearts that are content with pure and simple love and desire neither a hermitage in the forest nor a garden on an island in Lago Maggiore.

If I had the courage to tear myself away from here, I would go and pass a month with you; perhaps I should become purified in the air that you breathe, perhaps the shade of your avenues would bring a little coolness to my burning brow; but no, it is a paradise in which I must not set foot.—Hardly ought I to be allowed to gaze from afar, over the wall, at the two fair angels who are walking there, hand in hand, eyes fixed upon eyes. The devil can enter Eden only in the shape of a serpent, and, dear Adam, for all the happiness on earth, I would not be the serpent of your Eve.

What frightful upheaval has taken place in my soul of late! who has transformed my blood and changed it to venom? O monstrous thought, that puttest forth thy pale green twigs and umbels of hemlock in the glacial shadow of my heart, what

poisoned wind deposited there the seed from which thou didst spring? This, then, was what was in store for me, this is the end of all the roads that I so desperately attempted!—O fate, how thou dost mock at me!—All those upward flights of the eagle toward the sun, those pure flames aspiring to reach the sky, that divine melancholy, that profound, restrained passion, that worship of beauty, that refined and curious fancy, that unquenchable and ever-rising flood from the interior fountain, that ecstasy borne upon wings always spread, that reverie blooming brighter than the hawthorn in May—all the poesy of my youth, all those beautiful and rare gifts were destined to serve no other purpose than to place me beneath the lowest of mankind.

I longed to love.—I went about like a madman, calling and invoking love;—I writhed in frenzy because of my feeling of helplessness; I set my blood on fire, I dragged my body about in the gutters of debauchery;—I strained to my arid heart until I almost stifled her, a woman, young and beautiful, who loved me.—I ran after the passion that avoided me. I prostituted myself, and I acted like a virgin who should venture into an evil place, hoping to find a lover among those whom depravity led thither, instead of waiting patiently, in dignified, silent retirement, until the angel whom God has set aside for me should appear in a radiant penumbra, a heavenly flower in her hand. All these years that I have wasted in puerile agitation, in running hither and thither, in seeking to force nature and time, I should have passed in silence and meditation, in trying to make myself worthy to be loved;—that would have been wisely done;—but I had scales over my eyes and I marched straight to the precipice. I already have one foot suspended over the void, and I believe that I shall soon lift the other. It is useless for me to resist, I feel that I must roll to the bottom of this new abyss that has opened within me.

Yes, it was thus that I imagined love. I feel now what I had dreamed.—Yes, there are the delightful yet terrible sleepless nights when the roses were thistles and the thistles roses; there are the sweet misery and the miserable joy, the ineffable trouble

that encompasses you in a golden cloud and makes objects waver before your eyes as drunkenness does, the ringing in the ears in which you always hear the last syllable of the loved one's name, the pallor, the flushes, the sudden shivering, the burning and freezing perspiration;—all those are there; the poets do not lie.

When I am about to enter the salon where we usually meet, my heart beats so violently that you can see it through my clothes and I am obliged to hold it back with both hands for fear it will escape me.—If I see my dream at the end of a path and in the park, the distance vanishes at once and I have no idea what becomes of the road: it must be that the devil takes me or that I have wings.—Nothing can distract my thoughts: if I read, her image comes between the book and my eyes;—I mount my horse, I gallop over the country, and it always seems to me that I feel its long hair mingling with mine in the wind, hear its hurried respiration, and feel its warm breath upon my cheek. The image possesses me and follows me everywhere, and I never see it more clearly than when it is not before my eyes.

You pitied me for not being in love—pity me now because I am in love; and above all because I love what I love. What a misfortune, what a crushing blow upon my already blasted life!—what an insensate, guilty, hateful passion has taken possession of me!—It is a shameful thing for which I shall never cease to blush. It is the most deplorable of all my aberrations, I cannot imagine it, I cannot understand it, everything within me is in confusion and bewilderment; I have no idea who I am nor who others are, I doubt whether I am a man or a woman, I have a horror of myself, I feel strange, inexplicable impulses, and there are moments when it seems to me that my reason is going, and when the idea of my existence abandons me altogether. For a long time I have been unable to believe in anything; I have listened to myself and watched myself closely. I have tried to disentangle the skein that has become entangled in my soul. At last, through all the veils in which it was enveloped, I have discovered the ghastly truth—Silvio, I love—Oh! no, I can never tell you—I love a man!

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN, VOLUME 1 (OF 2) ***

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MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN

VOLUME TWO

BY

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

THE REALISTS

PRINTED BY GEORGE BARRIE & SONS, PHILADELPHIA 1897

Chapter XII — Her supple, yielding body shaped itself to mine like wax and took its whole exterior outline as exactly as possible:—water would not have found its way more scrupulously into every irregularity in the line.—Thus glued to my side, she produced the effect of the double stroke that painters give to the shadow side of their picture in laying on their color.

THIS EDITION OF

MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN

HAS BEEN COMPLETELY TRANSLATED

BY

I. G. BURNHAM

THE ETCHINGS ARE BY

FRANÇOIS-XAVIER LE SUEUR

AND DRAWINGS BY

ÉDOUARD TOUDOUZE

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS MADEMOISELLE DE MAUPIN — VOLUME II IN THE RUSTIC CABIN Fronts. D'ALBERT WATCHES THÉODORE AT THE HOTEL DU LION-ROUGE BEFORE THE REHEARSAL AN EMBARRASSING SITUATION AT THE WINDOW OF THE CHATEAU THE DUEL ARRIVAL IN THE TOWN OF C—— D'ALBERT'S SURPRISE THE REALIZATION

IX

That is the fact.—I love a man, Silvio.—I tried for a long while to deceive myself; I gave a different name to the sentiment I felt, I clothed it in the guise of pure, disinterested friendship; I believed that it was nothing more than the admiration I have for all beautiful persons and all beautiful things; I walked for several days through the deceitful, laughing paths that wander about every new-born passion; but I realize now in what a deep and terrible slough I have become involved. There is no way of concealing the truth from myself longer; I have examined myself carefully, I have coolly considered all the circumstances; I have gone to the bottom of the most trivial details; I have searched every corner of my heart with the assurance due to the habit of studying one's self; I blush to think it and to write it; but the fact, alas! is only too certain.—I love this young man, not with the affection of a friend, but with love;—yes, with love.

You, whom I have loved so dearly, Silvio, my dear, my only friend and companion, have never made me feel anything of the sort, and yet, if there ever was under heaven a close, warm friendship, if ever two hearts, although utterly different, understood each other perfectly, ours was that friendship and ours those two hearts. How many swiftly-flying hours have we passed together! what endless

conversations, always too soon ended! how many things we have said to each other that no one ever said before!—We had, each in the other's heart, the window that Momus would have opened in man's side. How proud I was to be your friend, although younger than you—I so foolish, you so sensible!

My feeling for this young man is really incredible; no woman ever disturbed my peace of mind so strangely. The sound of his clear, silvery voice acts upon my nerves and excites me in a most peculiar way; my soul hangs upon his lips, like a bee upon a flower, to drink the honey of his words.—I cannot brush against him as we pass without shivering from head to foot, and in the evening, when the time comes to say good-night and he gives me his soft, satiny hand, my whole life rushes to the place he has touched and I can feel the pressure of his fingers an hour after.

This morning I looked at him for a long while without his seeing me.—I was hidden behind my curtain.—He was at his window which is exactly opposite mine.—This part of the chateau was built toward the close of the reign of Henri IV.; it is half of brick, half of unhewn stone, according to the custom of the time; the window is long and narrow, with stone lintel and a stone balcony.—Théodore—for you have already guessed of course that he is the young man in question—was leaning in a melancholy attitude on the rail, and seemed to be deep in meditation.—Draperies of red damask with large flowers, half drawn aside, fell in broad folds behind him and served as a background.—How beautiful he was, and what a marvellous effect his dark, sallow face produced against the dark red! Two great bunches of hair, black and glossy, like the grape clusters of Erigone of old, fell gracefully along his cheeks and made a charming frame for the pure and delicate oval of his beautiful face. His round, plump neck was entirely bare and he wore a sort of dressing-gown with flowing sleeves not unlike a woman's robe. He held in his hand a yellow tulip, at which he plucked pitilessly in his reverie, throwing the pieces to the wind.

Chapter IX — This morning I looked at him for a long while without his seeing

me.—I was hidden behind my curtain.—He was at his window which is exactly opposite mine.—***Théodore—for you have already guessed of course that he is the young man in question—was leaning in a melancholy attitude on the rail, and seemed to be deep in meditation.

One of the shafts of light that the sun projected on the wall cast its reflection on the window, and the picture took on a warm golden tone that the most chatoyant of Giorgione's canvases might have envied.

With that long hair waving gently in the wind, that marble neck thus uncovered, that ample robe enveloping the form, those lovely hands protruding from the sleeves like the pistils of a flower peeping from among their petals, he seemed not the handsomest of men but the loveliest of women,—and I said to myself in my heart: "He is a woman, oh! he is a woman!"—Then I suddenly remembered an absurd thing I wrote to you long ago, you know, about my ideal and the way in which I was surely destined to meet her; the beautiful dame in the Louis XIII. park, the red and white chateau, the terrace, the avenues of old chestnuts and the interview at the window; I gave you all the details before.—And there it was—what I saw was the exact realization of my dream.—There was the style of architecture, the effect of light, the type of beauty, the coloring and the character I had longed for;—nothing was lacking, except that the lady was a man;—but I confess that at that moment I had entirely forgotten that.

It must be that Théodore is a woman in disguise; it cannot be otherwise. His excessive beauty, excessive even for a woman, is not the beauty of a man, were he Antinous, the friend of Adrian, or Alexis, the friend of Virgil.—He is a woman, parbleu! and I am a fool to have tormented myself so. In that way everything is explained as naturally as possible, and I am not such a monster as I thought.

Does God put such long, dark, silky fringes upon a man's coarse eyelids? Would he tinge our vile, thick-lipped, hairy mouths with that bright, delicate carmine? Our

bones, hewn with reaping-hooks and roughly jointed, do not deserve to be swathed in flesh so white and delicate; our battered skulls were not made to be bathed in waves of such lovely hair.

O beauty! we are made only to love thee and adore thee on our knees, if we have found thee—to seek thee incessantly throughout the world, if that happiness has not been vouchsafed us; but to possess thee, to be thou ourselves, is possible only for angels and women. Lovers, poets, painters and sculptors, we all seek to erect an altar to thee, the lover in his mistress, the poet in his song, the painter in his canvas, the sculptor in his marble; but the source of everlasting despair is the inability to give tangible form to the beauty one feels, and to be enveloped by a body which does not realize the idea of the body you understand to be yours.

I once saw a young man who had stolen the bodily form I ought to have had. The villain was just what I would have liked to be. He had the beauty of my ugliness, and beside him I looked like a rough drawing of him. He was of my height, but stronger and more slender; his figure resembled mine, but possessed a refinement and dignity that I have not. His eyes were of the same shade as mine, but they had a sparkle and an animation that mine will never have. His nose had been cast in the same mould as mine, but it seemed to have been retouched by the chisel of a skilful sculptor; the nostrils were more open and more passionate, the flat surfaces more sharply defined, and it had a heroic cast of which that respectable part of my countenance is entirely devoid. You would have said that nature had tried first to make that perfected myself in my person.—I seemed to be the blotted and unsightly rough draft of the thought of which he was the copy in fine type. When I saw him walk, stop, salute the ladies, sit down and lie down with the perfect grace that results from beautiful proportions, I was seized with such horrible melancholy and jealousy as the clay model must feel as it dries up and cracks in obscurity in a corner of the studio, while the haughty marble statue, which would not exist but for it, stands proudly erect on its carved pedestal and attracts the notice and the enthusiastic praise

of visitors. For after all that rascal was simply myself cast a little more successfully and with less unruly bronze that worked itself more carefully into the hollow places of the mould.—I consider him very insolent to strut about thus with my form, and to play the braggart as if he were an original type; at the best, he is simply a plagiarist from me, for I was born before him, and except for me nature would never have had the idea of making him as he is.—When women lauded his good manners and the charms of his person, I had a most intense longing to rise and say to them: "Fools that you are, praise me directly, for this gentleman is myself, and it is a useless circumlocution to send him what comes back to me."—At other times my fingers itched to strangle him and to turn his soul out of that body that belonged to me, and I hovered about him with clenched fists and compressed lips, like a nobleman hovering around his palace, in which a family of beggars have taken up their abode during his absence, perplexed as to the best means of casting them out.—The young man is a stupid creature, by the way, and succeeds so much the better on that account.—And sometimes I envy him his stupidity more than his beauty.—The dictum of the Gospel as to the poor in spirit is not complete: they shall inherit the kingdom of Heaven; I know nothing about that, nor do I care; but there is no doubt that they inherit the kingdom of earth—they have money and fair women, that is to say, the only two desirable things in the world.—Do you know a man of spirit who is rich, or a youth of courage and of any sort of merit who has a passable mistress?—Although Théodore is very beautiful, I have never desired his beauty, and I prefer that he should have it, rather than I.

Those strange passions of which the elegies of the ancient poets are full, which used to surprise us so and which we could not conceive, are therefore possible, nay, probable. In the translations we made of them, we used to substitute names of women for the names we found. Juventius was changed to Juventia, Alexis became Ianthe. The comely youths became lovely maidens, and thus we reconstituted the unnatural seraglio of Catullus, Tibullus, Martial, and the gentle Virgil. It was a very

gallant occupation, which proved simply how little we understood the genius of the ancients.

I am a man of the Homeric days;—the world in which I live is not mine, and I have no comprehension of the society that surrounds me. Christ did not come to earth for me; I am as great a pagan as Alcibiades and Phidias.—I have never been to Golgotha to pluck the passion-flowers, and the deep stream that flows from the side of the Crucified One and forms a red girdle around the world has not bathed me in its waves;—my rebellious body refuses to recognize the supremacy of the soul, and my flesh does not understand why it should be mortified.—To me the earth is as fair as heaven, and I think that the correction of physical form is virtue. Spiritual matters are not my forte, I like a statue better than a phantom and high noon better than twilight. Three things delight my soul: gold, marble, and purple,—brilliancy, solidity, color. My dreams are made of those, and all the palaces I build for my chimeras are constructed with those materials.—Sometimes I have other dreams—of long cavalcades of snow-white horses, without saddle or bridle, ridden by handsome, naked young men, who pass upon a band of deep blue as on the friezes of the Parthenon; or deputations of maidens crowned with fillets, with tunics with straight folds and ivory citterns, who seem to wind about an enormous vase.—There is never any mist or haze, anything indistinct or uncertain. My sky has no clouds, or, if it has any, they are solid clouds, carved with the sculptor's chisel, made from blocks of marble that have fallen from the statue of Jupiter. Mountains with sharply-outlined peaks rise abruptly along its edges, and the sun, leaning on one of the highest summits, opens wide its yellow lion's eye with the golden eyelids.—The grasshopper chirps and sings, and the corn bursts its sheath; the vanquished shadow, unable to withstand the heat, musters its platoons and takes refuge at the foot of the trees; everything is radiant and glowing and resplendent. The slightest detail acquires substance and becomes boldly accentuated; every object assumes robust shape and color. There is no place for the tameness and reverie of Christian

art.—That world is mine.—The brooks in my landscapes fall in carved streams from a carved urn; between those tall, green reeds, as resonant as those of Eurotas, you see the gleam of the rounded, silvery hip of some naiad with sea-green hair. In yonder dark oak forest Diana passes, her quiver on her back, with her flying scarf and her buskins with interlaced bands. She is followed by her pack and her nymphs with the melodious names.—My pictures are painted in four tones like those of the primitive painters, and often they are only colored bas-reliefs; for I love to put my finger on what I have seen and to follow the curve of the contours into its deepest recesses; I consider everything from every point of view and walk around it with a light in my hand.—I have contemplated love in the old-fashioned light, as a bit of sculpture more or less perfect. How is the arm? Not bad.—The hands do not lack delicacy.—What think you of that foot? I think that the ankle has no nobility, and that the heel is commonplace. But the neck is well placed and well shaped, the curved lines are wavy enough, the shoulders are plump and well modelled.—The woman would make a passable model and several portions of her would bear to be cast.—Let us love her.

I have always been like this. For women I have the glance of a sculptor, not that of a lover. I have been anxious all my life about the shape of the decanter, never about the quality of its contents. If I had had Pandora's box in my hands, I believe I never should have opened it. I said just now that Christ did not come to earth for me; nor did Mary, the star of the modern Heaven, the gentle mother of the glorious Babe.

Often and long have I stood beneath the stone foliage of cathedrals, in the uncertain light from the stained-glass windows, at the hour when the organ moaned of itself, when an invisible finger was placed upon the keys and the wind blew through the pipes,—and I have buried my eyes deep in the pale azure of the Madonna's sorrowful eyes. I have followed piously the emaciated outline of her face, the faintly-marked arch of her eyebrows; I have admired her smooth, luminous forehead, her chastely transparent temples, her cheek bones tinged with a dark,

maidenly flush, more delicate than the peach bloom; I have counted one by one the lovely golden lashes that cast their trembling shadow on her cheeks; I have distinguished, in the half-light in which she is bathed, the fleeting outlines of her slender, modestly bent neck; I have even, with audacious hand, raised the folds of her tunic and seen without a veil that virgin bosom, swollen with milk, that was never pressed by any save divine lips; I have followed the tiny blue veins in their most imperceptible ramifications, I have placed my finger upon them to force the celestial fluid to gush forth in white threads; I have brushed with my lips the bud of the mystic rose.

Ah well! I confess that all that immaterial beauty, so fleet-winged and so vaporous that one feels that it will soon take flight, made a very slight impression on me.—I like the Venus Anadyomene better, a thousand times better.—The antique eyes, turned up at the comers, the pure, sharply-cut lip, so amorous and so well adapted to be kissed, the full, low forehead, the hair, wavy as the sea, and knotted carelessly behind the head, the firm, lustrous shoulders, the back with its thousand charming sinuosities, the small, closely-united breasts, all the rounded, tense outlines, the broad hips, the delicate strength, the evident superhuman vigor in a body so adorably feminine, delight me and enchant me to a degree of which you, the Christian and the virtuous man, can form no idea.

Mary, despite the humble air that she affects, is much too haughty for me; the tip of her toes, swathed in white bands, hardly rests upon the globe, already turning blue in the distance, on which the ancient dragon writhes.—Her eyes are the loveliest on earth, but they are always looking up toward the sky or down at her feet; they never look you in the face,—they have never served as a mirror to a human form.—And then, I do not like the clouds of smiling cherubs who circle about her head in a light vapor. I am jealous of those tall virile angels, with floating hair and robes, who so amorously crowd about her in the pictures of the Assumption; the hands clasped together to support her, the wings fluttering to fan her, displease and annoy me.

Those dandies of heaven, coquettish, over-bearing youngsters, in tunics of light and wigs of gold thread, with their beautiful blue and green feathers, seem to me too gallant by far, and if I were God, I would be careful how I gave my mistress such pages.

Venus comes forth from the sea to visit the world—as befits a divinity who loves men—alone and naked.—She prefers the earth to Olympus, and has more men than gods for lovers; she does not envelop herself in the languorous veils of mysticism; she stands, her dauphin behind her, her foot upon her shell of mother-of-pearl; the sun strikes upon her gleaming breast, and with her white hand, she holds in the air the wavy masses of her lovely hair, in which old father Ocean has scattered his most perfect pearls.—You can see her; she conceals nothing, for modesty was invented only for the ugly, it is a modern invention, the offspring of Christian contempt for form and matter.

O old world! all that thou didst revere is despised; thy idols are overthrown in the dust; emaciated anchorites, dressed in rags and tatters, bleeding martyrs, their shoulders torn by the tigers of thy circuses, have perched upon the pedestals of thy beautiful, charming gods;—Christ has enveloped the world in His shroud. Beauty must needs blush for itself and put on a winding-sheet.—Ye comely youths with your limbs rubbed in oil, who struggle in the lyceum or the gymnasium, under the brilliant sky, in the sunlight of Attica, before the marvelling crowd; ye maidens of Sparta who dance the bibase, and who run naked to the summit of Taygetus, resume your tunics and chlamydes;—your reign is past. And ye, moulders of marble, Prometheuses in bronze, break your chisels:—there will be no more sculptors.—The palpable world is dead. A dark, lugubrious thought alone fills the immense void.—Cleomenes is going to the weavers' shops to see what folds the cloth or linen takes.

Virginity, thou bitter weed, born in soil drenched with blood, whose blanched and

sickly flower blossoms painfully in the damp shade of cloisters, beneath a cold shower of lustral water;—thou rose without perfume, bristling with thorns, thou hast replaced for us the lovely, joyous roses, bathed in spikenard and Falernian, of the dancing girls of Sybaris!

The ancient world knew naught of thee, unfruitful flower; thou didst never form a part of its wreaths whose perfume intoxicated;—in that lusty, healthy society thou wouldst have been disdainfully trodden under foot.—Virginity, mysticism, melancholy—three unknown words—three new diseases, brought to earth by Christ.—Ye pallid spectres, who inundate our world with your frozen tears, and who, with your elbows on a cloud and your hands on your breasts, can say nothing but "O death! O death!" ye could never have stepped foot upon that earth, peopled with indulgent, madcap gods!

I look upon woman, after the ancient fashion, as a beautiful slave destined to minister to our pleasures.—Christianity has not rehabilitated her in my eyes. To me she is still something dissimilar and inferior to us, whom we adore and with whom we toy, a plaything more intelligent than if it were made of ivory or gold, and having the power to pick itself up if it is dropped on the ground.—I have been told, because of that, that I have a low opinion of women; it seems to me, on the contrary, to show that I have a very high opinion of them.

Upon my word I cannot see why women are so eager to be looked upon as men.—I can understand that they might long to be boa-constrictors, lions or elephants, but that they should long to be men passes my comprehension. If I had been at the Council of Trent when this important question was discussed, namely, whether woman is a man, I should most certainly have given my opinion in the negative.

I have in the course of my life written some amorous verses, or at all events some that claimed to be so considered.—I have just read over a part of them. The modern idea of love is absolutely lacking.—If they were written in Latin distiches instead of

in French rhymes, they might be taken for the work of a wretched poet of Augustus's time. And I am amazed that the women, for whom they were written, did not take serious offence at them instead of being charmed with them.—To be sure, women understand no more about poetry than cabbages and roses, which is very natural and simple, they being themselves poetry, or at least the best instruments of poetry: the flute does not hear or understand the tune that you play upon it.

In these poems I speak of nothing but golden or ebon locks, the miraculous fineness of the skin, the roundness of the arm, the small size of the feet and the refined shape of the hand, and they all end with an humble entreaty to the divinity to accord as speedily as possible the enjoyment of all those beautiful things.—In the finest passages, there is naught but garlands suspended at the door, showers of roses, incense, a succession of Catullian kisses, delicious, sleepless nights, quarrels with Aurora coupled with injunctions to the aforesaid Aurora to withdraw behind old Tithonus's saffron-colored curtains;—there is splendor without heat, resonance without vibration.—They are rhythmical, polished, written with sustained interest; but, through all the refinements and veils of expression, you can feel the sharp, stern voice of the master trying to assume a softer tone in speaking to the slave.—Not, as in the erotic poems written since the Christian era, does a heart ask another heart to love it, because it loves; there is no smiling, azure lake inviting a brook to plunge into its bosom that they may reflect together the stars of heaven; no pair of doves spreading their wings at the same time to fly to the same nest.

Cynthia, you are fair; make haste. Who knows if you will be alive to-morrow?—Your hair is blacker than the lustrous flesh of an Ethiopian maiden. Make haste; in a few years slender silvery threads will glide in among its dense masses;—these roses smell sweet to-day, to-morrow they will have the odor of death and will be only the dead bodies of roses.—Let us inhale your roses so long as they resemble your cheeks; let us kiss your cheeks so long as they resemble your roses.—When you are old, Cynthia, no one will care aught for you, not even the

lictor's assistants if you should pay them, and you will run after me whom you repulse to-day. Wait until Saturn has furrowed with his nail that pure and gleaming brow, and you will see how your threshold, now so besieged, so implored, so covered with flowers and so wet with tears, will be avoided, accursed and covered with weeds and nettles.—Make haste, Cynthia; the smallest wrinkle may serve as a grave for the greatest love.

That brutal, imperious formula summarizes the ancient elegy; it constantly comes back to that; that is its main argument, the strongest, the Achilles of its arguments. After that it hasn't very much to say, and when it has promised a robe of byssus of two colors and a string of pearls of equal size, it is at the end of its tether.—It also includes almost all of what I find most conclusive under such circumstances.—I do not, however, always confine myself to this somewhat restricted programme, and I embroider my poor canvas with a few threads of silk of different colors, picked up here and there. But these threads are short or knotted together twenty times and do not cling firmly to the woof. I speak politely of love because I have read many beautiful things on the subject. Only an actor's talent is needed for that. With many women this external appearance is enough; the habit of writing and using the imagination prevents me from falling short in such matters, and every mind at all experienced, by applying itself to the task, can readily attain that result; but I do not feel a word of what I say, and I keep repeating, in an undertone, with the poet of old: "Cynthia, make haste."

I have often been accused of being a knave and a pretender.—No one on earth would like so well as I to speak freely and to empty his heart!—but as I have no idea or sentiment in common with the people about me,—as there would be a hurrah and a general hue and cry at the first true word I spoke, I have preferred to keep silent, or, if I speak, to give utterance only to idiotic remarks that are received everywhere and entitled to privilege of citizenship.—I should receive a warm welcome if I said to women such things as I have just written to you! I fancy that they wouldn't much

relish my way of looking at things or the view I take of love.—As for the men, I cannot tell them to their faces that they are wrong not to walk on four legs; and in truth I have a more favorable opinion of them.—I have no desire to quarrel at every word. What difference does it make after all what I think or what I don't think? that I am sad when I seem cheerful, cheerful when I have an air of melancholy! No-body is inclined to cry out at me because I don't go about naked; may I not dress my face as well as my body? Why should a mask be more reprehensible than a pair of breeches, and a lie than a corset?

Alas! the earth revolves about the sun, roasted on one side, frozen on the other. There is a battle in which six hundred thousand men cut and slash at one another; it is the loveliest day imaginable; the flowers are coquettish beyond words and boldly throw open their gorgeous breasts even under the horses' feet. To-day a fabulous number of worthy deeds are done; it rains in torrents, there is snow and thunder and lightning and hail; one would say that the world was coming to an end. The benefactors of humanity are covered with mud up to their middle like dogs, unless they have a carriage. Creation mocks pitilessly at the creature and lets fly stinging sarcasms at every turn. Everybody is indifferent to everybody else, and everything lives or vegetates according to its own law. Whether I do this or that, whether I live or die, whether I suffer or enjoy, whether I dissemble or speak frankly, what matters it to the sun or the turnips or even to mankind? A wisp of straw fell on an ant and broke his third leg at the second joint; a rock fell upon a village and crushed it; I do not believe that one of those disasters brings more tears than the other to the golden eyes of the stars. You are my best friend, if that word is not as hollow as a bell; if I should die, it is perfectly certain that, however distressed you might be, you wouldn't go without your dinner even for two days, and that, notwithstanding that terrible catastrophe, you would continue to enjoy your game of backgammon.—Who of my friends, who of my mistresses will remember my names and baptismal names twenty years hence, and who would recognize me in the street, if I should pass by

with a coat that was out at the elbows?—Oblivion and annihilation, that is the end of man.

I feel as utterly alone as possible, and all the threads that lead from me to external things and from them to me have broken one by one. There have been few instances where a man who has retained the power to judge his impulses has reached such a degree of brutishness. I resemble a decanter of liquor which has been left uncorked and from which the spirit has evaporated completely. The liquid has the same appearance and the same color; taste it, you will find it as insipid as water.

When I think of it I stand aghast at the rapidity of this decomposition; if this continues I must pickle myself or I shall inevitably rot, and the worms will attack me, as I no longer have a soul, and that alone marks the distinction between a body and a corpse.—Not more than a year ago I still had something human about me;—I moved about and sought enlightenment. I had one thought that I cherished more than all the rest, a sort of goal, an ideal; I longed to be loved, I dreamed the dreams common to youths of that age,—less vague, less chaste, to be sure, than those of ordinary young men, but contained nevertheless within reasonable bounds. Gradually all the incorporeal part of me became detached and faded away and naught remained at the bottom but a thick layer of coarse slime. The dream became a nightmare and the chimera a succubus;—the world of the soul closed its ivory doors in my face; I no longer understand anything except what I touch with my hands; I have dreams of stone; everything condenses and hardens about me, nothing wavers, nothing vacillates, there is no air or breath; matter weighs me down, takes possession of me, crushes me; I am like a pilgrim who should fall asleep on a summer's day with his feet in the water, and wake in winter with his legs caught and embedded in the ice. I no longer desire the love or friendship of any one; even glory, that resplendent halo that I so craved for my brow, no longer arouses the slightest desire in my mind. There is but one thing, alas! that stirs my pulses now, and that is the horrible desire that draws me toward Théodore.—This is the sum of all my

moral notions. Whatever is physically beautiful is good, whatever is ugly is bad.—If I should see a lovely woman whom I knew to be the wickedest creature on earth, adulteress and poisoner, I confess that it would make no difference to me and would in no wise interfere with my taking delight in her, if I found the shape of her nose what it should be.

This is my idea of supreme happiness:—A large square building with no outside windows: a large court-yard, surrounded by a colonnade of white marble, a crystal fountain in the centre with a jet of quicksilver after the Arabian fashion, orange-trees and pomegranates in boxes, arranged alternately; overhead a deep blue sky and a bright yellow sun;—tall greyhounds with pointed muzzles would lie sleeping here and there; from time to time barefooted negroes with gold ringlets about their legs, and beautiful, slender white maid-servants, dressed in rich and fanciful costumes, would pass in and out under the arches, baskets on their arms or jugs on their heads. And I should be seated, silent and motionless, beneath a magnificent canopy, surrounded by piles of cushions, a great tame lion under my elbow, the bare breast of a young female slave under my foot by way of hassock, and smoking opium in a long jade pipe.

I cannot imagine paradise in any other form; and if God wills that I shall go there after my death, he will build me a little kiosk on that plan in the corner of some star.—Paradise as it is commonly described seems to me far too musical, and I confess in all humility that I am absolutely incapable of sitting through a sonata that should last only ten thousand years.

You see what my Eldorado is, my promised land; it is as good a dream as another; but it has this special peculiarity, that I never introduce any known face into it; that no one of my friends ever crossed the threshold of that imaginary palace; that no one of the women I have had has ever been seated beside me on the velvet cushions: I am always alone there in the midst of apparitions. I have never had an idea of loving

all the female figures, all the lovely shades of young girls with which I people it; I have never fancied one of them in love with me.—In that seraglio of my fantasy, I have created no favorite sultana. There are negresses there, mulattresses, Jewesses with blue skin and red hair, Greeks and Circassians, Spaniards and Englishwomen; but they are to me simply symbols of coloring and feature, and I have them as one has all sorts of wine in his cellar and all species of humming-birds in his collection. They are pleasure machines, pictures that need no frame, statues that come to you when you have a fancy to look at them nearer at hand and call them. A woman has this incontestable advantage over a statue, that she turns of herself in whatever direction you choose, whereas you must make the circuit of the statue and station yourself where the best view is to be had—which is tiresome.

You must see that with such ideas I cannot remain in these times or in this world; for one cannot exist thus without regard to time and space. I must find something else.

Such a conclusion is the simple and logical result of such thoughts.—When one seeks only the gratification of the eye, symmetry of figure and purity of feature, one accepts them wherever he finds them. This explains the extraordinary aberrations of love among the ancients.

Since the days of Christ there has not been a single statue of man in which youthful beauty was idealized and reproduced with the care that characterizes the ancient sculptors.—Woman has become the symbol of moral and physical beauty: man has really been dethroned since the day the child was born at Bethlehem. Woman is the queen of creation; the stars join to form a crown for her head, the crescent moon deems it an honor to form a cradle for her foot, the sun gives her his purest gold to make trinkets, painters who wish to flatter the angels give them the features of women, and far be it from me to blame them for it.—Before the coming of the sweet-tempered, courteous dealer in parables, it was very different; men did not feminize the gods or heroes whom they wished to make seductive; they had their

type, at once sturdy and delicate, but always masculine, however amorous the outlines, however smooth and devoid of muscles and veins the workmen may have made their divine legs and arms. They readily made the special beauties of women consistent with this type. They broadened the shoulders, they lessened the size of the hips, they gave more prominence to the breast, they accentuated more strongly the joints of the arms and thighs.—There is almost no difference between Paris and Helen. Wherefore the hermaphrodite was one of the most ardently-cherished chimeras of the ancient idolatry.

That son of Hermes and Aphrodite is, in very truth, one of the most attractive creations of pagan genius. It is impossible to imagine anything more ravishingly beautiful than those two bodies, both perfect, harmoniously melted together, those two types of beauty, so equal yet so different, which unite to form one that is superior to either, because they mutually soften each other and bring out each the other's good points: to one who adores form exclusively, can there be a more pleasing uncertainty than that due to the sight of that back, those doubtful loins, those legs, so strong and slender that you are in doubt whether they should be attributed to Mercury on the point of taking flight or Diana coming from the bath? The trunk is a combination of the most charming singularities; above the full round chest of the lusty youth rises with strange grace the swelling breast of a young virgin. Beneath the sides, well wrapped in flesh and feminine in their softness, you divine the muscles and the ribs, as in the sides of a young man; the stomach is a little flat for a woman, a little round for a man, and there is something vague and indecisive about the whole character of the body, which it is impossible to describe and which has a charm all its own.—Théodore would surely be a most excellent model of that kind of beauty; it seems to me, however, that in him the feminine element carries the day and that he has retained more of Salmacis than the Hermaphrodite of the Metamorphoses.

The strange part of it all is that I hardly think of his sex now, and that I love him

with a sense of perfect security. Sometimes I try to persuade myself that this love is an abomination, and I tell myself so in the harshest possible way; but it comes only from the lips, it is an argument that I urge upon myself and fail to appreciate; it really seems to me that it is the simplest thing in the world and that any other in my place would do the same.

I look at him, I listen to him talk or sing—for he sings admirably—and I take an indescribable pleasure in it.—He seems to me so much like a woman that one day, in the heat of conversation, I called him madame inadvertently, whereat he laughed, and it seemed to me a decidedly forced laugh.

But if he is a woman, what can be his motive for masquerading thus? I cannot answer the question in any way. That a very young, very handsome and perfectly beardless youth should disguise himself as a woman might be conceived; in that way he would open a thousand doors that would otherwise remain obstinately closed to him, and the jest might lead him into a complication of adventures thoroughly Dædalian and enjoyable. In that way one can gain access to a woman who is closely guarded or carry a citadel by storm under cover of a surprise. But I cannot understand what advantage can accrue to a young and beautiful woman from travelling around the country in male attire: she can only lose by it. A woman is not likely to renounce thus the pleasure of being courted, flattered and adored; she would renounce life rather, and she would do wisely, for what is a woman's life without all that?—Nothing—or something worse than death. And I always wonder that women who are thirty years old, or have the small-pox, don't jump from the top of a steeple.

Notwithstanding all that, something stronger than all arguments cries out to me that he is a woman, and that she is the woman I have dreamed of, whom alone I am to love, and who is to love me alone;—yes, it is she, the goddess with the eagle glance, with the fair royal hands, who smiled condescendingly upon me from her seat on her

throne of clouds. She has presented herself to me in this disguise to put me to the test, to see if I would recognize her, if my amorous gaze would penetrate the veils in which she has enveloped herself, as in the marvellous tales where fairies appear at first in the guise of beggars, then suddenly stand forth resplendent in gold and jewels.

I have recognized you, oh! my love! At sight of you my heart leaped in my breast as Saint-Jean leaped in the breast of Sainte-Anne, when she was visited by the Virgin; the air was filled with a blaze of light; I smelt the odor of divine ambrosia; I saw the train of fire at your feet, and I understood at once that you were not an ordinary mortal.

The melodious notes of Sainte-Cecilia's viol, to which the angels listened with delight, are hoarse and discordant compared with the pearly cadences that issue from your ruby lips; the youthful, smiling Graces dance incessantly about you; the birds, when you pass through the woods, murmur as they bend their little feathered heads in order to see you more clearly, and whistle their sweetest refrains to you; the amorous moon rises earlier to kiss you with her pale silver lips, for she has abandoned her shepherd for you; the wind is careful not to efface the delicate print of your dainty foot upon the sand; the fountain, when you lean over it, becomes smoother than crystal, for fear of wrinkling and disturbing the reflection of your celestial face; even the modest violets open their little hearts to you, and play countless little coquettish tricks from before you; the jealous strawberry is stung to emulation and strives to equal the divine carnation of your lips; the infinitesimal gnat hums joyously and applauds you by flapping his wings;—all nature loves and admires you, its loveliest work!

Ah! now I live!—hitherto I had been no better than a dead man: now I have thrown off my shroud, and I stretch out my two thin hands from the grave toward the sun; my blue spectre-like color has left me. My blood flows swiftly through my veins.

The ghastly silence that reigned about me is broken at last. The black, opaque arch that weighed upon my brow is lighted up. A thousand mysterious voices whisper in my ear; lovely stars sparkle above me and carpet the windings of my path with their gold spangles; the marguerites smile sweetly on me and the bells tinkle my name with their little twisted tongues. I understand a multitude of things that I used not to understand, I discover marvellous affinities and sympathies, I know the language of the roses and the nightingales, and I can read fluently the book I could not even spell. I have discovered that I have a friend in yonder respectable old oak, covered with mistletoe and parasitic plants, and that the frail and languorous periwinkle, whose great blue eye is always overflowing with tears, has long cherished a secret, discreet passion for me:—it is love, it is love that has unsealed my eyes and given me the key to the enigma.—Love descended into the depths of the cavern where my cowering, drowsy soul was freezing to death; he took it by the hand and led it up the steep and narrow stairway to the outer world. All the doors of the prison were burst open and for the first time the poor Psyche came forth from the me in which she was confined.

Another life has become mine. I breathe through another's lungs, and the blow that should wound him would kill me.—Before this happy day I was like those stupid Japanese idols who are forever looking at their stomach. I was the spectator of myself, the pit at the comedy. I was acting; I watched myself live and listened to the beating of my heart as to the oscillations of a pendulum. That is the whole story. Images were reproduced in my distraught eyes; sounds fell upon my unheeding ear, but nothing from the outer world reached my soul. Nobody's existence was essential to me; indeed I doubted if there were any other existence than mine, nor was I quite sure even of that. It seemed to me that I was alone in the midst of the universe, and that all the rest was only smoke, images, vain illusions, fleeting apparitions destined to people that void.—What a difference!

And yet, what if my presentiment had misled me, if Théodore should prove to be in

truth a man, as everybody believes him to be! Such marvellous beauty has sometimes been seen in man; extreme youth may assist the illusion.—It is something I will not think about, for it would drive me mad; the grain that fell yesterday into my sterile heart has already penetrated it, in every direction, with its thousand filaments; it has taken a strong hold there and it would be impossible for me to tear it out. It has already become a green and flourishing tree and its knotted roots have struck deep.—If I should be convinced beyond a doubt that Théodore is not a woman, alas! I cannot say that I should not love him still.

X

You were very wise, my sweet friend, to try and dissuade me from the plan I had conceived of seeing men near at hand, of studying them closely, before giving my heart to any one of them.—I have extinguished love, yes, even the possibility of love, within me forever.

What poor creatures we girls are; brought up with so much care, surrounded by a triple wall of virginal precautions and reticence;—allowed to hear nothing, to suspect nothing, our principal knowledge being to know nothing, in what strange misconceptions do we pass our lives and what deceitful chimeras lull us to sleep in their arms!

Ah! Graciosa, thrice accursed be the moment when the idea of this travesty first occurred to me; what horrors, what infamous vulgarity I have been compelled to witness or to listen to! what a treasure of chaste and priceless ignorance I have squandered in a short time!

It was a lovely moonlight night, do you remember? when we walked together at the foot of the garden, in that gloomy, unfrequented path, terminated at one end by a statue of a Faun playing the flute, a Faun without a nose and covered with a thick leprosy of greenish-black moss—and at the other end by an imitation vista drawn on the wall and half washed away by the rain.—Through the still sparse foliage of the

elms we could see the twinkling stars and the curve of the silver sickle. The odor of young shoots and fresh flowers came to our nostrils from the flower-beds, borne upon the languid breath of a faint breeze; an invisible bird warbled a strange, languorous tune; we, like true girls, talked of love and lovers, of the handsome cavalier we had seen at mass; we shared the few notions of the world and of things that we had in our heads; we twisted and turned in a hundred ways a phrase we had heard by chance, the meaning of which seemed to us obscure and strange; we asked each other a thousand of the silly questions that the most perfect innocence alone can imagine.—What primitive poesy, what adorable nonsense in those furtive interviews of two little fools fresh from boarding-school!

You wanted for your lover a gallant, proud young man, with black hair and moustaches, long spurs, long plumes, and a long sword—a sort of amorous Hector—and you were all for the heroic and triumphant; you dreamed of nothing but duels and escalades, and marvellous devotion, and you would readily have thrown your glove in among the lions so that your Esplandian might go and pick it up. It was very comical to see a little girl as you were then, fair-haired and blushing, bending in the slightest breeze, declaim those noble tirades without taking breath, and with the most martial air imaginable.

I, although I was only six months older than you, was six years less romantic; the thing that interested me most was to know what men said among themselves and what they did when they went away from salons and theatres:—I felt that there were many dark, unsavory corners in their lives, carefully concealed from our eyes, which it was most important for us to know about. Sometimes, hiding behind a curtain, I watched from a distance the young gentlemen who came to the house, and it seemed to me at such times that I could detect something cynical and mean in their bearing, vulgar indifference or discourteous preoccupation which I no longer noticed when they had been admitted, and which they seemed to lay aside as if by enchantment at the threshold of the salon. All of them, young and old alike, seemed to me to have

adopted a uniform conventional mask, conventional sentiments, and a conventional mode of speech, when they were in the presence of women.—From the corner of the salon where I sat up straight as a doll, my back not touching the back of my chair, pulling my bouquet to pieces in my fingers, I looked and listened; my eyes were cast down, and yet I saw everything to right and left, before and behind me:—like the fabulous eyes of the lynx, my eyes looked through walls, and I could have told what was taking place in the adjoining room.

I had also noticed a notable difference in the way they spoke to married women; there were none of the discreet, polite, playfully-childish sentences such as they addressed to me or my companions, but a more flippant sportiveness, less grave and more familiar manners, the significant reticence and circumlocutions that follow quickly from a corrupt nature that knows it has one similarly corrupt before it; I felt that there was an element of union between them that did not exist between us, and I would have given everything to know what that element was.

With what anxiety and frenzied curiosity did I follow with eye and ear the buzzing, laughing groups of young men who, after breaking through the circle at a few points, resumed their promenade, talking together and casting ambiguous glances as they passed. Incredulous sneering smiles flickered about their full lips; they had the appearance of laughing at what they had said and of retracting the compliments and words of adoration with which they had overwhelmed us. I did not hear their words; but I understood, from the movement of their lips, that they were talking a language that was unknown to me and that no one had ever used before me. Even those who had the most humble and submissive manner tossed their heads with very perceptible indications of ennui and rebellion;—a panting sound, like that made by an actor when he reaches the end of a long speech, escaped from their lungs in spite of them, and they would half turn on their heels as they left us, in an eager, hurried way that denoted inward satisfaction at being relieved from the severe task of being courteous and gallant.

I would have given a year of my life to listen, unseen, to one hour of their conversation. I frequently understood from certain attitudes, from an occasional gesture or an oblique glance in my direction, that I was the subject of conversation among them and that they were discussing either my age or my face. At such times I was on burning coals; the few indistinct words, the fragments of phrases that reached my ears at intervals, excited my curiosity to the highest pitch but could not satisfy it, and I fell into strange doubts and perplexities.

Generally what they said seemed to be favorable, and it was not that that disturbed me: I cared very little whether they thought I was beautiful; but the brief remarks whispered in the ear and almost always followed by long laughter and significant winks—those were what I would have liked to know about; and for one of those sentences spoken in an undertone behind a curtain or in the angle of a door, I would without regret have interrupted the sweetest and most delightful conversation in the world.

If I had had a lover, I would have liked much to know how he would have spoken of me to another man, and in what terms he would have boasted of his good fortune to his boon companions, with a little wine in his head and both elbows on the table.

I know now and in truth I am very sorry to know.—It is always so.

My idea was a mad one, but what is done is done and one cannot unlearn what one has learned. I did not listen to you, my dear Graciosa, and I am sorry for it; but one doesn't always listen to reason, especially when it issues from such a pretty mouth as yours, for, I don't know why it is, but one cannot believe that advice is good unless it is given by some old bald or gray head, as if having been a fool for sixty years could make you wise.

But all this tormented me too much, and I couldn't stand it; I was broiling in my little skin like a chestnut on the stove. The fatal apple was ripening in the foliage above my head, and I must needs bite into it at last, being at liberty to throw it away

afterwards, if it seemed to me to have a bitter taste.

I did like fair-haired Eve, my dearest grandmother—I bit.

The death of my uncle, my only remaining kinsman, leaving me in control of my actions, I carried out the plan I had so long dreamed of.—My precautions were taken with the greatest care so that no one should suspect my sex: I had learned to use the sword and pistol; I was a perfect horsewoman and daring to a point that few equerries could equal; I made a careful study of the proper way of wearing a cloak and brandishing a crop, and in the course of a few months I succeeded in transforming a girl who was considered very pretty, into a youth who was much prettier and who lacked almost nothing except a moustache,—I turned what property I had into cash, and left the town, resolved not to return until I had acquired thorough experience.

It was the only way of solving my doubts: to have lovers would have taught me nothing, or at least it would only have afforded me incomplete information, and I wanted to study man thoroughly, to dissect him fibre by fibre with an inexorable scalpel, and to watch him, alive and palpitating, on my dissecting-table; for that, it was necessary to see him alone in his own house, off his guard, to go with him to walk, to the tavern and elsewhere.—With my disguise I could go everywhere without being noticed; no one would conceal his true character before me, all constraint and reserve would be laid aside, I should receive confidences—I would make false ones in order to receive true ones in return. Alas! women have read only the romance of man, never his history.

It is a terrifying thing to think of—a thing we do not think of—how profoundly ignorant we are of the life and conduct of those who seem to love us and whom we marry. Their real existence is as absolutely unknown to us as if they were inhabitants of Saturn or some other planet a hundred million leagues from our sublunary ball; you would say that they were of another species, and that there is not

the least intellectual bond between the two sexes;—the virtues of one make the vices of the other, and the things that a man admires make a woman blush.

Our lives are transparent and may be penetrated at a glance.—It is easy to follow us from the house to the boarding-school, from the boarding-school back to the house;—what we do is a mystery to no one; every one can see our wretched crayon drawings, our bouquets in water-color, consisting of a pansy and a rose of the size of a cabbage, sweetly tied together by the stems with a bow of delicate-hued ribbon; the slippers we embroider for our father's or grandfather's birthday have nothing in themselves very occult or very disquieting.—Our sonatas and our romanzas are executed with all desirable lack of warmth. We are well and duly tied to our mother's apron-strings, and at nine o'clock, or ten at the latest, we go to our little white beds in our clean and virtuous little cells, where we are scrupulously bolted and padlocked in until the next morning. The most alert and most jealous sensitiveness could find nothing objectionable in that.

The clearest crystal is not so transparent as such a life.

The man who takes us knows what we have done from the moment we were weaned and even before, if he cares to carry his investigations so far.—Our life is not life, it is a sort of vegetating existence like that of moss and flowers; the freezing shadow of the maternal stalk hovers around us, poor, dwarfed rose-buds, who dare not open. Our principal business is to sit very straight, tightly laced and whaleboned, with our eyes properly downcast, and to outdo, in immobility and stiffness, mannikins and dolls on springs.

We are forbidden to speak, to join in the conversation farther than to answer yes and no if we are questioned. As soon as anything interesting is to be said we are sent away to practise on the harp or spinet, and our music masters are always at least sixty years old and take snuff disgustingly. The models hung in our rooms are anatomically very vague and evasive. The Greek gods, before making their

appearance in young ladies' boarding-schools, take care to purchase very full box-coats at a second-hand clothing shop, and to be engraved in stipple, which makes them look like porters or cab-drivers and renders them but ill-adapted to excite our imaginations.

By dint of seeking to prevent us from becoming romantic, they make us idiots. The time when we are being educated is passed, not in teaching us something, but in preventing us from learning anything.

We are really prisoners, in body and mind; but a young man, free to do what he will, who goes out in the morning not to return until the next morning, who has money, who can earn money and dispose of it as he pleases—how could he justify his method of employing his time?—who is the man who would be willing to tell his beloved what he has done during the day and night?—Not one, even of those who are reputed the purest.

I sent my horse and my clothes to a little farm that I own at some distance from the town. I dressed myself, mounted and rode away, not without a strange oppression at the heart.—I regretted nothing, I left nothing behind, neither relatives nor friends, not a dog, not a cat, and yet I was sad, I almost had tears in my eyes; the farm, which I had never visited more than five or six times, had no sentimental attraction for me, and there was none of the fondness you sometimes feel for certain spots, which saddens you when you are obliged to leave them; but I turned two or three times to watch the spiral column of bluish smoke rising among the trees.

There I had left my title of woman, with my skirts and petticoats; in the chamber in which I had dressed were confined twenty years of my life, which were no longer to count and no longer concerned me. On the door might have been written:—"Here lies Madelaine de Maupin;"—for I was no longer Madelaine de Maupin, but Théodore de Sérannes,—and no one was to call me again by the sweet name of Madelaine.

The drawer in which my dresses, useless thenceforth, were placed, seemed to me like the coffin of my maidenly illusions;—I was a man, or at least I had the appearance of one; the maiden was dead.

When I had altogether lost sight of the tops of the chestnut-trees that surrounded the farm, it seemed to me that I was no longer myself but another, and I remembered my former acts as those of a stranger whom I had watched, or as the beginning of a novel which I had not finished reading.

I recalled complacently a thousand little details, whose childish innocence brought to my lips an indulgent smile, sometimes a little mocking, like that of a young rake listening to the Arcadian, pastoral confidences of a school-boy of thirteen; and, at the moment I was parting from them forever, all my girlish and young-womanish follies flocked to the roadside, making friendly gestures to me and sending me kisses with the tips of their white, tapering fingers.

I put spurs to my horse to fly from this enervating emotion; the trees flew swiftly by on the right hand and the left; but the madcap swarm, buzzing louder than a swarm of bees, rushed along the paths beside the road, calling: "Madelaine! Madelaine!"

I struck my horse a sharp blow on the neck which made him double his speed. My hair stood out almost straight behind my head, my cloak was in a horizontal position, as if the folds had been carved out of stone, our pace was so swift; I looked back once and saw, like a tiny white cloud far away on the horizon, the dust that my horse's feet had raised.

I stopped a moment.

In an eglantine bush, on the edge of the road, I saw something white moving, and a voice, clear and soft as silver, struck my ear:—"Madelaine, Madelaine, where are you going so far from home, Madelaine? I am your virginity, my dear child; that is why I have a white dress, a white crown and a white skin. But why do you wear boots, Madelaine? I thought that you had a very pretty foot. Boots and short-clothes

and a great plumed hat like a cavalier going to the war! Why that long sword that strikes and bruises your thigh? You have a strange outfit, Madelaine, and I am not sure if I ought to accompany you."

"If you are afraid, my dear, go back to the house, water my flowers and take care of my doves. But really you are wrong, you would be safer in these garments of stout cloth than in your gauze and fine linen. My boots prevent any one from seeing if I have a pretty foot; this sword is to defend myself and the plume waving in my hat is to frighten away the nightingales that come to sing false songs of love in my ear."

I continued my journey; in the sighs of the wind I thought I could recognize the last bar of the sonata I had learned for my uncle's birthday, and in a great rose that showed its full-blown head above a low wall, the model of the rose I had painted so often in water-colors; as I rode by a house I saw the phantoms of my curtains waving at a window. My whole past seemed to be clinging to me to prevent my going forward and arriving at a new future.

I hesitated two or three times, and I turned my horse's head the other way.

But the little blue snake, curiosity, softly hissed insidious words into my ear, and said to me:—"Go on, go on, Théodore; it is a good opportunity to learn; if you don't learn to-day, you will never know.—And will you bestow your noble heart, at random, on the first honest and passionate exterior?—Men conceal some very extraordinary secrets from us, Théodore!"

I started off at a gallop.

The short-clothes were on my body and not in my mind; I had a very unpleasant feeling, a sort of shiver of fear, to call it by its right name, at a dark place in the forest; a gunshot, fired by a poacher, almost made me faint. If it had been a highwayman, the pistols in my holsters and my long sword would certainly have been of small use to me. But gradually I recovered and paid no farther attention to it.

The sun sank slowly beneath the horizon like the lights in a theatre which are turned

down when the performance is at an end. Rabbits and pheasants crossed the road from time to time; the shadows lengthened and all distant objects were tinged with red. Certain parts of the sky were of a most soft, deep lilac, others of a pale lemon or orange; the birds of night began to sing, and a multitude of curious sounds arose from the woods: the little remaining light faded away, and it became quite dark,—darker because of the shadow cast by the trees. And I, who had never been out alone at night, was in the midst of a great forest at eight o'clock! Can you imagine it, my Graciosa,—I who used almost to die of fear at the foot of the garden? My fright returned with ten-fold force and my heart beat terribly fast; it was with great satisfaction, I confess, that I saw the lights of the town for which I was bound gleaming and twinkling on a hillside. As soon as I saw those bright specks—like little earthly stars they were—my fright passed away completely. It seemed to me that those unthinking lights were the open eyes of so many friends watching for me.

My horse was no less content than I, and, scenting the sweet odors of a stable, more agreeable to him than the perfume of all the marguerites and wood strawberries on earth, he trotted straight to the Hôtel du Lion-Rouge.

Chapter X — The inn-keeper approached to ask me what I wanted for supper.

He was a pot-bellied man, with a red nose, wall-eyes, and a smile that made the circuit of his head. At every word he uttered he showed a double row of pointed teeth with spaces between, like an ogre's.

A bright light shone through the leaded windows of the hotel, whose tin sign swung from right to left and moaned like an old woman, for the north wind was beginning to freshen.—I turned my horse over to a groom and entered the kitchen.

An enormous fire-place at the end of the room swallowed in its black and red maw a bundle of fagots at every mouthful, and on each side of the andirons, two dogs, almost as large as men, sat on their hind-quarters, roasting themselves with all imaginable phlegm, content to raise their paws a little and heave a sort of sigh when

the heat became more intense; but they certainly would have preferred to be reduced to charcoal rather than move back an inch.

My arrival did not seem to please them, and I tried in vain to make their acquaintance by patting them on the head several times; they cast stealthy glances at me that boded no good.—That astonished me, for animals generally take to me.

The inn-keeper approached to ask me what I wanted for supper.

He was a pot-bellied man, with a red nose, wall-eyes, and a smile that made the circuit of his head. At every word he uttered he showed a double row of pointed teeth with spaces between, like an ogre's. The huge kitchen-knife that hung at his side had a doubtful look, as if it might serve several different purposes. When I had told him what I wanted, he went up to one of the dogs and kicked him. The dog got up and walked toward a sort of wheel and went inside with a piteous, complaining air and a reproachful glance at me. At last, seeing that there was no hope for him, he began to turn the wheel and thereby the spit on which the chicken was impaled that was to furnish my supper.—I resolved to throw him the scraps as a reward for his trouble, and looked about the kitchen while the repast was preparing.

The ceiling was formed of huge oaken beams, all discolored and blackened by the smoke from the fire-place and the candles. On the sideboards pewter plates more highly polished than silver shone in the darkness, and white crockery with blue flowers.—The numerous rows of well-scoured saucepans along the walls reminded one not a little of the antique bucklers that we see hung in rows along the sides of Greek or Roman triremes—forgive me, Graciosa, the epic magnificence of that simile. One or two buxom servant-maids were moving around a great table, arranging plates and forks, music more agreeable than any other when one is hungry, for the hearing of the stomach then becomes keener than that of the ear. Take it for all in all, despite the landlord's Christmas-box mouth and saw teeth, the inn had a very honest and pleasing appearance; and even had his smile extended a

fathom farther and his teeth been three times as long and white, the rain began to patter against the window-panes and the wind to howl in a fashion to take away all desire to depart, for I know nothing more depressing than the groaning of the wind on a dark and rainy night.

An idea came to me that made me smile—it was that no one in the world would have come to look for me where I was.

Indeed, who would have dreamed that little Madelaine, instead of being tucked away in her warm little bed, with her alabaster night-light beside her, a novel under her pillow, her maid in the adjoining closet, ready to run to her at the least nocturnal fright, was rocking to and fro in a straw chair in a country inn twenty leagues from her home, her booted feet resting on the andirons and her little hands buried jauntily in her pockets?

Yes, Madelinette has not remained like her companions, her elbows lazily resting on the balcony rail, between the window jasmine and volubilis, watching the violet fringe of the horizon across the plain or some little rose-colored cloud moving gently in the May breeze. She has not carpeted mother-of-pearl palaces with lily leaves, to furnish quarters for her chimeras; she has not, like you, lovely dreamers, arrayed some hollow phantom in all imaginable perfections; she has sought to compare the illusions of her heart with the reality; she has chosen to know men before giving herself to a man; she has left everything, her lovely dresses of bright-colored silks and velvets, her necklaces, her bracelets, her birds and her flowers; she has voluntarily renounced humble adoration, gallant speeches, bouquets and madrigals, the pleasure of being considered lovelier and better adorned than you, the sweet name of woman, everything that was part of her, and has started all alone, the brave girl, to travel the world over to learn the great science of life.

If people knew that, they would say that Madelaine was mad.—You said so yourself, my dear Graciosa;—but the real mad women are they who toss their hearts

to the wind and sow their love at random on the stones and on the rocks, without knowing if a single seed will germinate.

O Graciosa! that is a thought I have never had without dismay: to have loved some one who was not worthy! to have shown one's heart all naked to impure eyes and allowed a profane creature to enter its sanctuary! to have mingled its limpid stream for some time with a muddy stream!—However perfectly they may be separated, some trace of the slime always remains, and the stream can never recover its original transparency.

To think that a man has kissed you and touched you; that he has seen your body; that he can say: "She is thus and so; she has such a mark in such a place; her mind runs upon this or that theme; she laughs for this thing and weeps for that; her dreams are like this; I have in my portfolio a feather from the wings of her chimera; this ring is made from her hair; a bit of her heart is folded into this letter; she caressed me so, and these are her usual words of endearment."

Ah! Cleopatra, I understand now why you always had the lover with whom you had passed the night killed in the morning.—Sublime cruelty, for which, formerly, I could find no imprecations strong enough! Great voluptuary, how well you understood human nature, and what deep purpose there was in that savagery! You did not choose that any living man should divulge the mysteries of your bed; the words of love that flew from your lips were not to be repeated.—Thus you retained your pure illusion. Experience did not tear away, bit by bit, the charming phantom you had cradled in your arms. You chose to be separated from him by a sudden blow of the axe rather than by slow distaste.—What torture, in very truth, to see the man one has chosen belying every moment the idea one has conceived of him; to discover in his character a thousand pettinesses you did not suspect; to discover that what had seemed to you so beautiful through the prism of love is really very ugly, and that he whom you had taken for a true hero of romance is, after all, only a

prosaic bourgeois, who wears slippers and a dressing-gown!

I have not Cleopatra's power, and if I had it, I certainly should not have the strength to use it. And so, being neither able nor desirous to cut off my lovers' heads upon getting up in the morning, and being no more inclined to endure what other women endure, I must needs look twice before taking a lover; and that is what I propose to do three times rather than twice, if I should have any desire for one, which I very much doubt after what I have seen and heard; unless, however, I should meet in some blessed unknown country a heart like my own, as the novels say—a pure, virgin heart which has never loved and which is capable of loving, in the true sense of the word; which is not, by any manner of means, an easy thing to find.

Several cavaliers entered the inn; the storm and the darkness had prevented them from continuing their journey.—They were all young, the oldest certainly not more than thirty; their clothes indicated that they belonged to the upper classes, and, even without their clothes, their insolent familiarity and their manners would have made it sufficiently evident. There were one or two who had interesting faces; all the others had, in a greater or less degree, that sort of jovial brutality and careless good-humor which men display among themselves, and which they lay aside completely when they are in our presence.

If they could have suspected that the slender youth half-asleep on his chair in the chimney-corner was by no means what he appeared to be, but a young girl, a morsel for a king, as they say, certainly they would very soon have changed their tone, and you would have seen them swell out and spread their feathers on the instant. They would have approached me with repeated reverences, legs straight, elbows out, a smile in their eyes and mouth and nose and hair and their whole attitude; they would have emasculated the words they used and would have spoken only in velvet and satin phrases; at my slightest movement they would have acted as if they were going to stretch themselves out on the floor by way of carpet, for fear that my tender feet

might be bruised by its inequalities; every hand would have been held out to support me; the softest chair would have been placed in the most desirable position;—but I had the outward appearance of a pretty boy and not of a pretty girl.

I confess that I was almost on the point of regretting my petticoats, when I saw how little attention they paid me.—I was deeply mortified for a moment; for from time to time I forgot that I was now wearing man's clothes, and I had to remind myself of it in order to avoid an attack of bad temper.

I sat there, not saying a word, with folded arms, apparently watching with close attention the chicken on the spit, which was turning browner and browner, and the unfortunate dog whose rest I had so unluckily disturbed, who was struggling away in his wheel like several devils in the same holy-water vessel.

The youngest of the party brought his hand down on my shoulder with a force that made me wince, on my word, and extorted from me a little involuntary shriek, and asked me if I would not prefer to sup with them rather than all alone, as several could drink better than one.—I answered that it was a pleasure I should not have dared to hope for, and that I would be very glad to do it. Our places were laid together and we took our seats at the table.

The panting dog, after swallowing an enormous dipperful of water with three laps of his tongue, resumed his post opposite the other dog, who had not stirred any more than if he had been made of porcelain,—the new-comers, by a special dispensation of Providence, not having ordered chicken.

I learned, from some sentences that escaped them, that they were on their way to the court, which was then at—, where they expected to meet other friends. I told them that I was a young gentleman just from the University, on my way to visit my kins-men in the provinces by the true student's road, that is to say the longest he can find. That made them laugh, and after some comments on my innocent and artless appearance, they asked me if I had a mistress. I answered that I knew nothing about

mistresses, whereat they laughed still louder. Bottle succeeded bottle with great rapidity; although I was careful almost always to leave my glass full, my head was a little heated, and, not losing sight of my idea, I managed to turn the conversation upon women. It was no difficult task; for, after theology and æsthetics, it is the subject upon which men talk most freely when they are drunk.

My companions were not exactly drunk, they carried their wine too well for that; but they began to enter upon moral discussions that had no end and to rest their elbows unceremoniously on the table.—One of them had gone so far as to put his arm about the extensive waist of one of the maid-servants, and was nodding his head most amorously; another swore that he should burst on the spot, like a toad that has been made to take snuff, unless Jeannette would let him give her a kiss on each of the great red apples that served her as cheeks. And Jeannette, not wishing that he should burst like a toad, gave him permission with very good grace and did not even check a hand that stole audaciously between the folds of her neckerchief into the moist valley of her breast, very insecurely guarded by a little golden cross, and not until he had exchanged some words with her in an undertone did he allow her to remove the dishes.

And yet they were habitués of the court and young men of refined manners, and unless I had seen it myself I should never have thought of accusing them of such familiarity with servants at an inn.—It is probable that they had just left charming mistresses, to whom they had sworn the mightiest oaths known to man: upon my word, it would never have occurred to me to request my lover not to sully lips on which I had placed mine, by contact with the cheeks of a clumsy wench.

The rascal seemed to take as much pleasure in that kiss as if he had kissed Phyllis or Oriana; it was a loud kiss, solidly and honestly bestowed, and left two little white marks on the fiery cheek of the damsel, who wiped them away with the back of the hand that had just been washing the dishes.—I do not believe that he had ever

bestowed one so naturally affectionate on the chaste deity of his heart.—That was his thought apparently, for he said in an undertone and with a disdainful shrug:

"To the devil with thin women and high-flown sentiments!"

That moral maxim seemed to suit the party, and all nodded their heads approvingly.

"Faith," said another, following out the same line of thought, "I am unlucky in everything. Messieurs, allow me to inform you, under seal of the most profound secrecy, that I, who speak to you, have a passion at this moment."

"Oho!" exclaimed the others. "A passion! That is depressing to the last degree. What are you doing with a passion?"

"She's a virtuous woman, messieurs; you must not laugh, messieurs; for, after all, why shouldn't I have a virtuous woman? Have I said anything ridiculous?—I say, you over there, I'll throw the house at your head, if you don't have done."

"Well! what then?"

"She is mad over me:—she's the dearest soul in the world; speaking of souls, I know what I'm talking about, I know at least as much about 'em as I do about horses, and I give you my word that hers is the first quality. She is all exaltation, ecstasy, devotion, self-sacrifice, refinements of tenderness, everything that you can imagine that is most transcendent; but she has hardly any breast, indeed she has none at all, like a girl of fifteen at the outside.—She's pretty enough; has a well-shaped hand and pretty foot; she has too much mind and not enough flesh, and sometimes I long to drop her. Damnation! a man doesn't lie with a mind. I'm very unlucky; pity me, my dear friends."—And, made maudlin by the wine he had drunk, he began to weep hot tears.

"Jeannette will console you for the misfortune of lying with sylphs," said his neighbor, pouring him out a bumper; "her soul's so thick that you could make other women's bodies out of it, and she has flesh enough to cover the carcasses of three elephants."

O pure and noble woman! if you knew what is said of you, in wine-shops, regardless of everything, before people he does not know, by the man you love best in the world and for whom you have sacrificed everything! how shamelessly he undresses you, and with base effrontery abandons you all naked to the vinous gaze of his companions, while you sit sadly at your window, your chin resting in your hand, watching the road by which he should return to you!

If any one had told you that your lover, less than twenty-four hours perhaps after leaving you, was making love to a low-born servant, and that he had made arrangements to pass the night with her, you would have insisted that it was not possible, and you would have refused to believe it; you would hardly have trusted your own eyes and ears; but it was so, nevertheless.

The conversation lasted some time longer, extravagant and coarse to the last degree; but through all the exaggerated buffoonery and the jests, which were often obscene, one could distinguish a deep and genuine feeling of profound contempt for woman, and I learned more that evening than by reading twenty cart-loads of moral essays.

The monstrous, incredible things I heard gave to my features a tinge of melancholy and sternness which the other guests noticed and upon which they good-naturedly rallied me; but my cheerfulness refused to return.—I had shrewdly suspected that men were not as they appeared to be before us, but I did not think that they were so entirely different from their masks, and my surprise equalled my disgust.

I would ask no more than half an hour of such conversation to cure a romantic girl forever; it would be more effective than all the maternal remonstrances.

Some boasted of having as many women as they pleased, and that they had only to say a word to procure them; others exchanged receipts for procuring mistresses or lectured upon the tactics to be followed in laying siege to virtue; some ridiculed the women whose lovers they were and proclaimed themselves the most simple fools on earth for trifling away their time with such hussies.—All of them held love very

cheap.

Such, then, are the thoughts they conceal from us under such attractive exteriors! Who would dream of it to see them so humble and cringing, so ready for everything?—Ah! after the victory how boldly they raise their heads and how insolently place their heels on the brow they adored from afar and on their knees! how they avenge themselves for their temporary abasement! how dearly they make us pay for their courtesies! and with what bitter insults do they seek a change from the compliments they have paid us! What fierce brutality of language and thought! what boorish manners and bearing!—It is a complete change and certainly not to their advantage. Far as my previsions had gone, they fell a long way short of the reality.

O ideal, thou blue flower with the golden heart, that bloomest, dew-empearled, beneath the spring sky, in the perfumed breath of sweet reveries, and whose fibrous roots, a thousand times finer than the silken tresses of the fairies, burrow to the depths of our soul with their countless hairy heads, to drink its purest substance; thou flower, so sweet and yet so bitter, we cannot uproot thee without making the heart bleed at every pore, and from thy broken stalk ooze great red drops, which, falling one by one into the lake of our tears, serve to measure the halting hours of our death-watch beside the bed of moribund Love!

Ah! accursed flower, how thou hast taken root in my soul! thy branches have multiplied faster than nettles in a ruin. The young nightingales came to drink from thy cup and to sing in thy shade; diamond butterflies, with emerald wings and ruby eyes, fluttered and danced around thy slender pistils, covered with golden dust; swarms of white bees sucked unsuspiciously thy poisoned honey; chimeras folded their swan wings and crossed their lion paws beneath their lovely breasts to rest beside thee. The tree of the Hesperides was no better guarded; sylphs collected the tears of the stars in lily urns, and watered thee every night with their magic

watering-pots.—O plant of the ideal, more poisonous than the manchineel or the deadly upas-tree, how bitter the pang, despite thy treacherous flowers and the poison one inhales with thy perfume, of uprooting thee from my soul! Neither the cedar of Lebanon, nor the gigantic baobab, nor the palm-tree a hundred cubits high, could together fill the place thou alone dost occupy, thou little blue flower with the heart of gold!

The supper came to an end at last, and the subject of going to bed was broached; but as the number of guests was twice the number of beds, it naturally followed that it was necessary either to go to bed by detachments or for two to sleep together. It was a very simple matter for the rest of the party, but it was much less simple for me—having in view certain protuberances which the waistcoat and doublet concealed well enough, but which a simple shirt would have revealed in all their damning roundness; and certainly I was little inclined to betray my incognito in favor of any one of these gentlemen, who at that moment seemed to me genuine, self-confessed monsters, but whom I have since recognized as very good fellows and at least as estimable as the rest of their sex.

He whose bed I was to share was comfortably drunk. He threw himself on the mattress with one leg and one arm hanging out, and fell asleep instantly, not as the just man sleeps, but so soundly that, if the angel of the last judgment had come and blown his trumpet in his ear, he would not have waked for that.—That sleep of his simplified the difficulty very much; I took off nothing but my doublet and my boots, climbed over the sleeper's body and lay down outside the clothes on the side next the wall.

So there I was in bed with a man! It was not a bad beginning!—I confess that, despite all my assurance, I was strangely moved and disturbed. It was so extraordinary, so novel a situation, that I could hardly convince myself that it was not a dream.—The other slept on and on, but I could not close an eye all night.

He was a young man of about twenty-four, with a by no means ugly face, black eyelashes and light moustache; his long hair flowed about his head like waves from the overturned urn of a river, a slight flush passed over his pale cheeks like a cloud under the surface of the water, his lips were partly open and smiling a vague, languid smile.

I raised myself upon my elbow and so remained a long while gazing at him by the flickering light of a candle, of which almost all the tallow had rolled down in great drops and the wick was all covered with black thieves.

We lay some distance apart. He was on the extreme edge of the bed; I, with superabundant precaution, had taken my place on the other edge.

Assuredly what I had heard was not calculated to dispose me to tenderness and the lusts of the flesh;—I held men in horror.—And yet I was more restless and agitated than I should have been: my body did not share the repugnance of my mind as fully as it ought.—My heart beat fast, I was very warm, and, twist and turn as I would, I could find no rest.

The most profound silence reigned in the inn; there was not a sound to be heard save now and then the dull thud made by a horse's foot on the stable floor, or the dropping of the rain down the chimney upon the ashes on the hearth. The candle, having reached the end of the wick, smoked and went out.

Black darkness came down between us like a curtain.—You cannot imagine the effect produced upon me by the sudden disappearance of the light.—It seemed to me that it was all at an end, and that I could no longer see my way clearly.—For an instant I was inclined to leave the bed; but what could I have done? It was only two o'clock, all the lights were out, and I could not wander about like a phantom in a strange house. I had no choice but to remain where I was and wait for daylight.

I lay there on my back; with my hands folded on my breast, trying to fix my thoughts upon something and always falling back on this, namely, that I was in bed

with a man. I went so far as to wish he would wake up and find out that I was a woman.—Doubtless the wine I had taken, although it was a very small quantity, had something to do with that extravagant idea, but I could not help returning to it.—I was on the point of putting out my hand to wake him and tell him what I was.—A fold in the bedclothes, which caught my arm, was all that withheld me from carrying out my plan: it gave me time for reflection; and while I was extricating my arm, my reason, which I had totally lost, returned, if not entirely, at least enough to keep me within bounds.

Wouldn't it have been very curious if a disdainful charmer like myself, who had resolved to try a man's life ten years before giving him my hand to kiss, had surrendered to the first comer on a wretched bed in an inn! and, upon my word, I was not far from it.

Can a sudden effervescence, a sudden boiling of the blood, checkmate so effectually the most superb resolutions? and does the voice of the body speak louder than the voice of the mind?—Whenever my pride soars too high, I place the memory of that night before its eyes in order to recall it to earth.—I am beginning to share the opinion of most men: what a poor weak thing is female virtue! and upon how small a thing does it depend, Mon Dieu!

Ah! we seek in vain to spread our wings; there is too much slime upon them; the body is an anchor that holds the soul fast to earth; in vain does it spread its sails to the breeze of the loftiest ideas, the vessel remains immovable, as if all the sucking-fishes in the ocean were clinging to its keel. Nature takes delight in hurling such sarcasms at us. When she sees a mind standing on its pride as upon a high pillar and almost touching the sky with its head, she whispers to the red fluid to make haste and hurry to the doors of the arteries; she orders the temples to throb, the ears to ring, and lo, the lofty idea is attacked with vertigo: all its images become confused and indistinguishable, the earth seems to rise and fall like a ship's deck in a

storm, the sky goes round and the stars dance a saraband; the lips which emitted naught but austere moral maxims, close and put themselves forward as if for a kiss; the arms, so strong to repel, relax and become more supple and entwining than scarfs. Add to this the contact of an epidermis, a breath blowing through your hair, and all is lost.—Often, indeed, so much is not needed;—the odor of fresh foliage coming from the fields through your open window, the sight of two birds pecking at each other, a marguerite blooming, an old love-song which persists in coming to your mind, do what you will, and which you repeat without understanding its meaning, a warm breeze that disturbs and excites you, the wooing softness of your bed or your couch—any one of these circumstances is enough; even the solitude of your chamber makes you think that two might be very comfortable there, and that no one could find a more delightful nest for a brood of pleasures. The drawn curtains, the half-light, the silence, everything brings you back to the fatal thought that brushes you with its insidious, dovelike wings, and coos softly about your head. The soft stuffs that touch you seem to caress you and their folds cling amorously to your body.—Thereupon the maiden opens her arms to the first footman with whom she happens to be left alone; the philosopher leaves his page unfinished, and, with his head in his cloak, rushes away in hot haste to the nearest courtesan.

I certainly was not in love with the man who caused me such strange agitation.—He had no other charm than that he was not a woman, and in the state in which I then was, that was enough! A man! that mysterious creature who is concealed from us so carefully, the strange animal of whose history we know so little, the demon or the god who alone can realize all the vague dreams of pleasure whose springtime cradles our sleep, the only thought that we have from the time we are fifteen years old.

A man!—The idea of pleasure floated confusedly in my heavy head. The little that I knew of it made my desire burn the brighter. Ardent curiosity urged me to solve once for all the doubts that troubled me and recurred incessantly to my mind. The

solution of the problem was on the other side of the leaf; I had but to turn it, the book was beside me.—Such a comely youth, such a narrow bed, such a dark night!—a girl with a few glasses of champagne in her brain! what a suspicious gathering!—Ah well! the result of it all was a most virtuous void.

I began to be able to distinguish the position of the window in the wall on which my eyes were fixed, by favor of the lessening darkness; the panes of glass became less opaque and the gray light of the morning, slipping behind them, restored their transparency; the sky lighted up little by little: it was day.—You cannot conceive the pleasure it gave me to see that pale gleam on the green hangings of Aumale serge which surrounded the glorious battlefield whereon my virtue had triumphed over my desires! It seemed to me that it was my crown of victory.

As for my bedfellow, he had fallen out onto the floor.

I rose, made my toilet rapidly, ran to the window and threw it open; the morning air did me good. I stood in front of the mirror to comb my hair, and I was amazed at the pallor of my face which I imagined was purple.

The others came in to see if we were still asleep, and kicked their friend, who did not seem greatly surprised to find where he was.

The horses were saddled and we resumed our journey.

But this is enough for to-day: my quill refuses to make a mark and I am disinclined to mend it; another time I will tell you the rest of my adventures; meanwhile love me as I love you, Graciosa the well-named, and do not form too poor an opinion of my virtue from what I have just told you.

XI

Many things are bores: it is a bore to return the money you have borrowed and have become accustomed to look upon as your own; it is a bore to-day to caress the woman you loved yesterday; it is a bore to call at a friend's house about dinner-time and find that the master and mistress have been in the country a month; it is a bore to

write a novel and even more so to read one; it is a bore to have a pimple on your nose and chapped lips on the day you go to call on the idol of your heart; it is a bore to have to wear jocose boots that smile at the pavement through all their seams, and above all things to have an empty void behind the spider's web in your pocket; it is a bore to be a concierge; it is a bore to be an emperor; it is a bore to be one's self or even to be somebody else; it is a bore to go on foot because it hurts your corns, to ride because it rubs the skin off the antithesis of your front, to drive because some fat man inevitably makes a pillow of your shoulder, or to travel on a packet-boat because you are seasick and turn yourself inside out;—it is a bore to live in winter because you shiver and in summer because you perspire; but the greatest bore on earth, in hell, or in heaven, is beyond all question a tragedy, unless it be a melodrama or a comedy.

It really makes me sick at heart.—What can be more idiotic and more stupid? The great tyrants with voices like bulls, who pace across the stage from wing to wing, waving their hairy arms like the sails of a windmill, imprisoned in flesh-colored tights, are nothing more than wretched counterfeits of Bluebeard or the Bogey. Their rodomontades would make any one who could keep awake burst with laughter.

The unfortunate lovers are no less ridiculous.—It is a most diverting thing to see them come forward, dressed in black or white, with hair weeping on their shoulders, sleeves weeping on their hands, and their bodies ready to burst from their corsets like a nut when you squeeze it between your fingers; walking as if they meant to sweep the boards with the soles of their satin shoes, and in great outbursts of passion throwing back their trains with a little twist of the heel.—The dialogue, being exclusively composed of oh! and ah! which they roll about under their tongues as they spread their plumage, is pleasant pasturage surely and readily digested.—Their princes are very charming, too; only they are a bit gloomy and melancholy, which does not prevent their being the best companions in the world or elsewhere.

As for the comedy which is intended to correct our morals, and which luckily performs its duty with only moderate success, I consider that the fathers' sermons and the uncles' everlasting repetitions of the same things are as crushing on the stage as in real life.—I am not of the opinion that you double the number of fools by representing them on the stage; there are already quite enough of them, thank God, and the race is not nearly extinct.—What is the necessity of drawing the portrait of a man with a pig's snout or the muzzle of an ox and collecting the foolish talk of a clown whom you would throw out of the window if he came to your house? The image of a pedant is as uninteresting as the pedant himself, and he is no less a pedant because you look at him in a mirror.—An actor who should succeed in imitating perfectly the manner and attitudes of a cobbler would not be much more entertaining than a real cobbler.

But there is a stage that I love, the fanciful, extravagant, impossible stage, where the virtuous public would hiss pitilessly from the first scene, for lack of understanding a word.

That is a strange stage indeed.—Glow-worms instead of lamps; a beetle beating time with its antennæ is stationed in the conductor's box. The cricket plays in the orchestra; the nightingale is first flute; little sylphs, coming from sweet-pea blossoms, hold bass-viols made of lemon peel between their pretty ivory-white legs, and with an ample supply of arms draw bows made from Titania's eyelashes over spider's web strings; the little wig with three horns worn by the beetle who leads the orchestra trembles with pleasures, and showers a luminous dust about; the harmony is sweet and the overture so well executed!

A curtain of butterflies' wings, thinner than the interior pellicle of an egg, rises slowly after the regulation three blows. The hall is filled with the souls of poets sitting in stalls of mother-of-pearl, and watching the play through drops of dew mounted upon the golden pistils of lilies.—They are their opera-glasses.

The scenery resembles no known scenery; the country it represents is more unknown than America before its discovery.—The palette of the richest painter has not the half of the colors in which it is painted: the tones are all striking and unusual: ash-green, ash-blue, ultramarine, red and yellow lacquer are used lavishly.

The sky, of a greenish blue, is striped with broad light and faun-colored bands; little slender trees wave in the middle distance their sparse foliage of the color of dried rose-leaves; the background, instead of swimming in azure vapor, is of the most beautiful apple-green, and spiral columns of golden smoke float up-ward here and there. A stray beam catches upon the pediment of a ruined temple or the spire of a tower.—Cities full of steeples, pyramids, domes, arches, and balustrades are perched on hillsides and reflected in crystal lakes; tall trees with great leaves, cut deep on the edges by fairy scissors, entwine their trunks and branches inextricably to form the wings. The clouds in the sky pile up above their heads like snow-balls, you see the eyes of dwarfs and gnomes shining through their interstices and their tortuous roots bury themselves in the ground like the fingers of a giant hand. The woodpecker taps rhythmically on them with its beak of horn, and emerald-green lizards warm themselves in the sun on the moss about their feet.

The mushroom watches the play with his hat on his head, like the insolent rascal he is: the delicate violet stands on the tips of its tiny toes between two wisps of grass, and opens its blue eyes wide to see the hero pass. The bullfinch and the linnet swing on the ends of twigs to prompt the actors in their parts.

Amid the tall grass, the purple thistles and the burdocks with velvet leaves, brooks made by the tears of stags at bay wander like silver snakes; here and there anemones gleam on the turf like drops of blood and marguerites swell with pride, their heads laden with wreaths of pearls like veritable duchesses.

The characters are of no time and no country; they come and go no one knows how or why; they neither eat nor drink, they live nowhere and have no trade; they possess

neither estates nor houses nor consols; sometimes they carry under their arms a little casket full of diamonds as large as pigeons' eggs; when they walk they do not brush a single drop of dew from the petals of the flowers or raise a single atom of dust from the roads.

Their clothes are the most fantastic and extravagant clothes imaginable. Pointed, steeple-shaped hats with brims as broad as a Chinese parasol and plumes of inordinate length taken from the tail of the bird of paradise and the phœnix: striped capes of brilliant colors, velvet and brocade doublets, showing their lining of satin or cloth of silver through their gold-laced slashes; full short-clothes, swelling like balloons; scarlet stockings with embroidered clocks, shoes with high heels and broad rosettes; fragile swords, point up, hilt down, all covered with cords and ribands;—so much for the men.

The women are no less curiously apparelled.—The drawings of Della Bella and Romain de Hooge may serve to indicate the general character of their attire; dresses of heavy, undulating stuffs, with broad folds which change color like the breasts of pigeons, and display all the varying hues of the iris, ample sleeves from which other sleeves issue, ruffs of open-slashed lace that rise higher than the heads for which they serve as frames, corsages covered with bows and embroidery, brooches,—strange trinkets, tufts of heron's feathers, necklaces of huge pearls, peacock's tail fans with mirrors in the centre, little slippers and pattens, wreaths of artificial flowers, spangles, striped gauze, paint, patches and everything that can add zest and piquancy to a stage costume.

It is a style that is not precisely English or German or French or Turkish or Spanish or Tartar, although it partakes a little of them all and has taken from each country, its most graceful and characteristic features.—Actors thus arrayed can say whatever they choose without offending one's ideas of probability. The fancy can run in all directions, style uncoil its variegated rings at its pleasure, like a snake warming itself

in the sun; the most exotic conceits open fearlessly their strangely-shaped calyxes and spread their perfume of amber and musk around.—There is nothing to offer any obstacle, either places or names or costumes.

How fascinating and entertaining what they say! Fine actors that they are, they do not strut about, like our howlers of melodrama, twisting their mouths and forcing the eyes out of their heads to deliver their tirades with effect;—at all events they haven't the appearance of workmen at a task, of oxen harnessed to the plot and in a hurry to have done with it; they are not plastered with chalk and rouge half an inch thick; they don't wear tin daggers and keep in reserve under their waistcoats a pig's bladder filled with chicken's blood; they don't drag the same oil-spotted rag about through whole acts.

They speak without hurry, without shrieking, like people of good breeding who attach no great importance to what they are doing; the lover makes his declaration to his sweetheart in the most nonchalant manner imaginable; as he speaks he taps his thigh with the ends of his gloved fingers or adjusts the leg of his trousers. The lady carelessly shakes the dew from her bouquet and jokes with her maid; the lover cares but little about touching his cruel enslaver's heart: his principal business is to let fall bunches of pearls from his mouth and clusters of roses, and to sow poetic precious stones like a true prodigal;—often he effaces himself altogether and allows the author to pay court to his mistress for him. Jealousy is not one of his defects and his disposition is most accommodating. With his eyes raised toward the sky, and the frieze of the theatre, he waits patiently for the poet to finish saying what passed through his mind, before resuming his rôle and returning to his knees.

The whole plot is tangled and untangled with admirable indifference; effects have no cause and causes have no effect: the brightest character is he who says the greatest number of foolish things; the greatest fool says the brightest things; the maidens make speeches that would make harlots blush; harlots declaim moral maxims. The

most incredible adventures follow one another in rapid succession and are never explained; the noble father arrives post-haste from China in a little bamboo junk to identify a little kidnapped girl; the gods and fairies do nothing but ascend and descend in their machines. The plot plunges into the sea under the topaz dome of the waves and walks on the bottom of the ocean, through the forests of coral and madrepore, or rises skyward on the wings of the skylark or the griffin.—The dialogue is shared by all; the lion contributes to it with an oh! oh! in a vigorous roar; the wall speaks through its fissures and every one is at liberty to interrupt the most amusing scene provided that he has an epigram, a rebus or a pun to interject: Bottom's ass's head is as welcome among them as Ariel's blond locks;—the author's wit is displayed in every conceivable form; and all the contradictions are like so many facets, as it were, which reflect its different aspects, adding the colors of the prism thereto.

This apparent pell-mell and confusion are found, when all is said, to render real life more accurately under their fantastic guise than the most painstaking drama of manners.—Every man embodies all humanity in himself, and by writing what comes into his head, he succeeds better than by copying outside objects by means of a magnifying-glass.

O what a fine family!—romantic young lovers, wandering damsels, accommodating ladies' maids, sarcastic clowns, valets and innocent peasants, free-and-easy kings, whose names are unknown to the historian, and the kingdom of the geographer; parti-colored clowns with miraculous capers and biting repartees; oh! ye, who give free speech to caprice through your smiling mouths, I love you and adore you above all the world!—Perdita, Rosalind, Celia, Pandarus, Parolles, Silvio, Leander and the rest, all the charming types, so false and yet so true, who rise above vulgar reality on the bespangled wings of folly, and in whom the poet personifies his joy, his melancholy, his love and his most secret dreams under the most frivolous and most unconventional appearances.

There is one play, written for the fairies and properly to be played by moonlight, that delights me more than any other in the repertory of this theatre;—it is such a vagabond, wandering play, with such a vague plot and such strange characters, that the author himself, not knowing what title to give it, called it Comme il vous plaira,[1] an elastic name, which answers all purposes.

While reading that strange play, you seem to be transported into an unfamiliar world of which you have nevertheless some vague reminiscence; you are not sure whether you are dead or alive, awake or dreaming; gracious faces smile sweetly upon you and toss you an affable greeting as they pass; you feel strangely moved and disturbed at sight of them as if you should suddenly meet your ideal at an angle in the road, or the forgotten phantom of your first mistress should rise suddenly before you. Springs bubble up from the ground, murmuring half-stifled plaints; the wind stirs the foliage of the venerable trees over the exiled duke's head with compassionate sighs; and when the melancholy Jaques confides his philosophic lamentations to the stream, with the leaves of the willow, it seems to you that you yourself are speaking and that the most secret and most obscure thoughts of your heart come forth into the light.

O youthful son of the gallant Sir Rowland de Bois, so maltreated by fate! I cannot help being jealous of you; you still have a faithful servant, honest Adam, whose old age is still green under his snow-white locks.—You are banished, but not until you have at least struggled and triumphed; your wicked brother takes all your property from you, but Rosalind gives you the chain from her neck; you are poor, but you are beloved; you leave your country, but your persecutor's daughter follows you beyond the sea.

The dark forest of Arden opens wide its great arms of foliage to welcome and conceal you; the kindly forest heaps up its silkiest moss in the depths of its grottoes for your bed; it bends its leafy arches over your brow to protect you from the rain

and sun; it pities you with the tears of its springs and the sighs of its bleating fawns and deer; its rocks afford convenient desks on which to write your amorous epistles; it lends you the brambles from its bushes with which to attach them, and orders the satiny bark of its aspens to yield to the point of your stiletto when you wish to carve Rosalind's initials thereon.

If only I could have, like you, young Orlando, a vast cool forest to which to retire and live alone in my sorrow, and if, at a turning in a path, I could meet her whom I seek, recognizable, although disguised!—But, alas! the world of the soul has no verdant Arden, and only in the garden of poesy do the capricious little wild-flowers bloom whose perfumes make one oblivious of everything. In vain do we shed tears, they do not form those lovely silvery cascades; in vain do we sigh, no obliging echo takes the trouble to send back our lamentations embellished with imperfect rhymes and gay conceits.—In vain do we hang sonnets to the sharp points of all the brambles, Rosalind never picks them off, and we carve amorous ciphers on the bark of trees gratuitously.

Birds of heaven, lend me each a feather, swallow and eagle, humming-bird and roc, that I may make of them a pair of wings to soar aloft and swiftly through unknown regions, where I shall find nothing to recall to my mind the city of the living, where I can forget that I am myself and live a strange, new life, farther than America, farther than Africa, farther than Asia, farther than the farthest island in the world, through the ocean of ice, beyond the pole where the Aurora Borealis flickers, in the impalpable kingdom to which the divine creations of poets and the types of supreme beauty take flight.

How can one endure the ordinary conversation at clubs and salons when one has heard you speak, sparkling Mercutio, whose every sentence bursts in a shower of gold and silver, like a pyrotechnic bomb beneath a star-studded sky? Pale Desdemona, what pleasure, think you, one can take in any earthly music, after the

ballad of the Willow? What women do not seem ugly beside your Venuses, ye ancient sculptors, poets who wrote strophes in marble?

Ah! despite the fierce embrace with which I have sought to enlace the material world in default of the other, I feel that my birth was a mistake, that life was not made for me and that it spurns me; I can no longer take part in anything; whatever road I follow, I go astray; the smooth avenue, the stony path, alike lead me to the abyss. If I attempt to take my flight, the air condenses around me and I am caught, with out-stretched wings, unable to close them.—I can neither walk nor fly; the sky attracts me when I am on the earth, the earth when I am in the sky; aloft, the north wind pulls out my feathers; below, the stones wound my feet. My soles are too tender to walk on the broken glass of reality; the spread of my wings is too narrow to enable me to soar above earthly things, and to rise from circle to circle to the deep azure of mysticism, to the inaccessible summits of everlasting love; I am the most wretched hippogriff, the most miserable collection of heterogeneous odds and ends that has ever existed since the ocean first loved the moon and women deceived men: the monstrous Chimera put to death by Bellerophon, with his maiden's head, his lion's claws, his goat's body and his dragon's tail, was an animal of a simple make-up beside me.

In my frail breast the violet-strewn reveries of the modest maiden and the insensate ardor of courtesans on a debauch live side by side; my desires go about like lions, sharpening their claws in the dark and seeking something to devour; my thoughts, more restless and uneasy than goats, cling to the most dangerous peaks; my hatred, swollen with poison, twists its scaly folds into inextricable knots, and crawls along in ruts and ravines.

My soul is a strange country, in appearance flourishing and splendid, but more reeking with fetid, deleterious miasmas than Batavia itself; the faintest sunbeam on the slime causes reptiles and venomous insects to breed;—the great yellow tulips,

the nagassaris and angsoka with their gorgeous flowers conceal the heaps of disgusting carrion. The amorous rose opens her scarlet lips in a smile and discloses her tiny dew-drop teeth to the gallant nightingales who sing sonnets and madrigals to her: nothing can be more charming; but it is a hundred to one that a dropsical toad is crawling along on her clumsy feet in the grass at the foot of the bush, whitening his path with his slaver.

There are springs clearer and more transparent than the purest diamond; but it would be better for you to drink the stagnant water of the swamp under its cloak of rotting shrubs and drowned dogs than to dip your cup in that basin.—A serpent lies hidden at the bottom, and twists and turns with frightful rapidity, disgorging his venom.

You have planted wheat; your crop is asphodel, henbane, tares and pale hemlock with twigs covered with verdigris. Instead of the root you set out, you are surprised to see the hairy, twisted limbs of the black mandragora coming up out of the earth.

If you leave a memory there and go to take it up again some time after, you will find it more covered with moss and more swarming with palmer-worms and vile insects than a stone laid on the damp floor of a cavern.

Do not try to pass through its dark forests; they are more impassable than the virgin forests of America and the jungles of Java; creepers strong as cables run from tree to tree; all the paths are obstructed by bristling plants as sharp as lance-heads; the very turf is covered with a stinging down like that of the nettle. From the arches of the foliage, gigantic bats of the vampire species hang by their nails; beetles of enormous size wave their horns threateningly, and thrash the air with their four-footed wings; monstrous, fantastic beasts, like those we see in nightmares, come clumsily forward, crushing the reeds before them. There are troops of elephants, who crush flies in the wrinkles of their flabby skin and rub their sides against the rocks and trees, rhinoceroses with their rough, uneven hides, hippopotami with their swollen snouts bristling with hair, who knead the mud and the débris of the forest with their huge

feet.

In the clearings, where the sun insinuates a luminous beam like a wedge of gold through the damp atmosphere, you will always find, on the spot where you propose to sit, a family of tigers lying at their ease, sniffing the air, winking their sea-green eyes, and polishing their velvet coats with their blood-red, papilæ-covered tongues; or else it is a tangled knot of boas, half asleep, digesting the last bull they have devoured.

Be suspicious of everything; grass, fruit, water, air, shade, sunlight, all are deadly.

Close your ears to the chattering of the little paroquets with golden beaks and emerald necks, that fly down from the trees and perch on your finger, with fluttering wings; for the little paroquets with the emerald necks will end by gently pecking your eyes out with their pretty golden beaks, just as you bend to kiss them.—So it is.

The world will have none of me; it spurns me like a spectre escaped from the tombs; I am almost as pale as one; my blood refuses to believe that I am alive and will not tinge my flesh; it crawls sluggishly through my veins like stagnant water in obstructed canals.—My heart beats for none of those things that make men's hearts beat.—My sorrows and my joys are not those of my fellow-creatures.—I have fiercely desired what no one desires; I have disdained what others wildly long for.—I have loved women who did not love me, and I have been loved when I would have liked to be hated; always too soon or too late, too much or too little, too far or not far enough; never just what was needed; either I have not arrived or I have gone beyond.—I have thrown my life out of the window, or I have concentrated it too exclusively upon a single point, and from the restless activity of the busybody I have passed to the deathlike somnolence of the teriaki or the Stylite on his pillar.

What I do seems always to be done in a dream; my actions seem rather the result of somnambulism than of free will; there is something within me, which I feel vaguely at a great depth, which makes me act without my own initiative, and always outside

of ordinary laws; the simple and natural side of things is never revealed to me until after all the others, and I lay hold first of all that is eccentric and unusual; however straight the line, I will soon make it more winding and tortuous than a serpent; contours, unless they are marked in the most precise way, become confused and distorted. Faces take on a supernatural expression and gaze at me with awe-inspiring eyes.

Thus, by virtue of a sort of instinctive reaction, I have always clung desperately to matter, to the exterior outline of things, and I have awarded a great share of my esteem to the plastic in art.—I understand a statue perfectly, I do not understand a man; where life begins, I stop and recoil in dismay as if I had seen the head of Medusa. The phenomenon of life causes me an astonishment from which I cannot recover.—I shall make an excellent corpse, I doubt not, for I am an extremely poor living man, and the meaning of my existence escapes me completely. The sound of my voice surprises me beyond measure, and I am tempted sometimes to take it for somebody else's voice. When I choose to put out my arm and my arm obeys me, it seems to me a most prodigious thing, and I fall into the most profound stupefaction.

By way of compensation, Silvio, I perfectly understand the unintelligible; the most extravagant motifs seem perfectly natural to me and I enter into them with extraordinary facility. I readily find the sequel of the most capricious and most incomprehensible nightmare.—That is why the class of plays I described to you just now pleases me above all others.

Théodore and Rosette and I have great discussions on this subject: Rosette has but little relish for my system, she is for true truth; Théodore would give the poet more latitude, and would not exclude conventional, optical truth.—For my part, I maintain that the field must be left absolutely free for the author and that the imagination must hold sovereign sway.

Many of the guests based their arguments on the ground that plays of this sort were

as a general rule outside of the ordinary stage conditions and could not be acted; I answered that that was true in one sense and false in another, just like everything else that people say, and that their ideas as to the possibilities and impossibilities of the stage seemed to me to lack exactness and to be based upon prejudices rather than arguments; and I said among other things that the play of As You Like It was certainly capable of being performed, especially for society people who were not accustomed to other parts.

That suggested the idea of acting it. The season is drawing on and all other forms of amusement are exhausted; we are weary of hunting, of riding and boating parties; the chances of boston, varied though they be, are not exciting enough to fill up the evening, and the proposition was received with universal enthusiasm.

A young man who knows how to paint offered his services to paint the scenery; he is working at it now with much zeal, and in a few days it will be finished.—The stage is erected in the orangery, which is the largest apartment in the chateau, and I think everything will go off well. I am to play Orlando; Rosette was to be the Rosalind, as it was proper that she should be; as my mistress and the mistress of the house, the rôle was hers as of right; but she has refused to masquerade as a man, through some whim most extraordinary for her, for prudery certainly is not one of her faults. If I had not been sure of the contrary, I should have thought that her legs are not well formed. Actually not one of the ladies in the party would consent to seem less scrupulous than Rosette, and the play was very near falling through; but Théodore, who was to take the part of the melancholy Jaques, offered to take her place, inasmuch as Rosalind is a man, almost all the time, except in the first act, when she is a woman, and with a little paint, a pair of corsets and a dress, he could carry out the deception well enough, having no beard as yet and being very slender in figure.

We are now learning our parts and it is a curious thing to see us.—In every solitary nook in the park you are sure of finding some one, with a roll of paper in his hand,

mumbling to himself, looking up at the sky, then suddenly lowering his eyes, and making the same gesture seven or eight times. Any one who didn't know that we were going to give a play would certainly take us for inmates of a lunatic asylum, or poets—which is almost a pleonasm.

I think we shall soon know our parts well enough to have a rehearsal.—I expect something very interesting. Perhaps I am wrong.—I was afraid for a moment that our actors, instead of acting by inspiration, would strive to reproduce the gestures and intonation of some fashionable comedian; but luckily they have not followed the stage closely enough to make that mistake, and it is to be hoped that, amid the natural awkwardness of people who have never stood on the boards, they will show some precious gleams of nature and a charming naïveté that the most consummate talent cannot equal.

Our young painter has really done marvels:—it is impossible to give a stranger look to the old tree-trunks and the ivies that enlace them; he has taken the trees in the park for his models, accentuating and exaggerating them, as should properly be done for stage scenery. The whole thing is done with admirable spirit and fancy; the rocks, the cliffs, the clouds are of mysterious, fantastic shapes; reflections play upon the surface of the water, more trembling and shimmering than quicksilver, and the ordinary coldness of the foliage is wonderfully relieved by the saffron tints laid on by the brush of autumn; the forest varies from emerald green to purple; the warmest and coldest tints blend harmoniously and the very sky changes from a delicate blue to the most glowing colors.

He has designed all the costumes in accordance with my suggestions; they are of the most beautiful type. There was an outcry at first that they could not be translated in silk and velvet or any known material, and there was a moment when the troubadour costume was on the point of being generally adopted. The ladies said that the brilliant colors would put out their eyes. To which we replied that their eyes were

inextinguishable stars, and that they, on the other hand, would put out the colors, as well as the Argand lamps, the candles and the sun, if they had the chance.—They had no reply to make to that; but there were other objections that sprung up in crowds and bristled with heads like the Lernean hydra; no sooner was one head cut off than two others appeared even more stupid and obstinate.

"How do you suppose that can be done?—Everything looks all right on paper, but it's a different matter on your back; I can never get into that!—My skirt's at least four inches too short; I shall never dare to appear that way!—That ruff is too high; I look as if I were hunchbacked and hadn't any neck.—That wig ages me intolerably."

"With starch and pins and good-will anything can be done.—You're joking! a figure like yours, slenderer than a wasp's waist and quite capable of going through the ring on my little finger! I will bet twenty-five louis against a kiss that that waist will have to be pulled in.—Your skirt is very far from being too short, and if you could see what an adorable leg you have you would certainly be of my opinion.—On the contrary, your neck stands out admirably in its halo of lace.—That wig doesn't make you look a day older, and even if it should seem to add a few years, you look so exceedingly young that it ought to be a matter of perfect indifference to you; really, you would arouse strange suspicions in our minds if we didn't know where the pieces of your last doll are,"—et cetera.

You cannot imagine the prodigious quantity of compliments we have been obliged to squander, to compel our ladies to don charming costumes which are becoming to them beyond words.

We have also had much trouble to make them adjust their patches properly. What devilish taste women have! and of what titanic obstinacy a capricious dainty creature is capable, who thinks that straw-yellow is more becoming to her than jonquil-yellow or bright pink! I am sure that if I had applied to public affairs one-half the ruses and scheming I have employed to induce a woman to wear a red

feather on the left side and not on the right, I should be Minister of State or Emperor at the very least.

What a pandemonium! what a vast, inextricable tangle a real theatre must be!

Since the suggestion of giving a play was first made, everything here has been in the most complete disorder. All the drawers are open, all the wardrobes emptied; it is a genuine case of pillage. Tables, chairs, consoles, all are covered, and we have no place to put our feet; enormous quantities of dresses, mantles, veils, petticoats, capes, caps, hats, are scattered about the house; and when you reflect that they are all to go on the bodies of seven or eight people, you involuntarily think of the jugglers at a fair who wear eight or ten coats one over the other, and you cannot realize that from all that mass only one costume for each will emerge.

The servants are constantly coming and going;—there are always two or three on the road between the chateau and the town, and if this goes on all the horses will be broken-winded.

A theatrical manager has no time to be melancholy, and I have been in that condition hardly at all for some days. I am so benumbed and bewildered that I am beginning to lose all comprehension of the play. As I play the part of impresario in addition to the part of Orlando, my task is twofold. When any difficulty arises, I am the one to whom they all run, and as my decisions are not listened to like oracles, interminable disputes are the result.

If what is called living is to be always on one's legs, to answer twenty people at once, to go up and down stairs, not to think for a minute during the day, I have never lived so hard as I have this week; and yet I do not take so much part in this constant movement as you might think.—The excitement extends a very short distance below the surface, and a few fathoms down you would find dead water, without any current; life does not penetrate me so easily as that; indeed, at such times I am least alive, although I seem to act and to mingle in what is going on; action stupefies and

tires me to an inconceivable degree;—when I am not acting, I am thinking or dreaming, and that is one manner of living;—I have it no longer since I have laid aside my porcelain-image repose.

Thus far I have done nothing, and I doubt if I ever shall do anything. I do not know how to stop my brain, therein lies all the difference between a man of talent and a man of genius; there is a constant effervescence, wave pushing wave; I cannot master this sort of waterspout that rises from my heart to my head, and drowns all my thoughts because they have no means of exit.—I can produce nothing, not from sterility but from superabundance; my ideas sprout in such dense, serried masses that they choke one another and cannot ripen.—However swift and impetuous the execution, it can never attain such velocity:—when I write a sentence the thought that it expresses is already as far from me as if a century had passed instead of a second, and it often happens, in spite of myself, that some part of the thought that succeeded it in my brain is mingled with it.

That is why I cannot live,—either as poet or as lover.—I can express only the ideas that I no longer have;—I have women only when I have forgotten them and love others;—how can I, a man, make my will known, when, however much I hasten, I no longer feel what I am doing and act only in accordance with a faint memory.

To take a thought from some one of my brain-cells, in the rough, like a block of marble just from the quarry, to place it before me, and from morning to night, a chisel in one hand and a hammer in the other, hew and pound and chip, and carry away a pinch of dust at night to dry my writing,—that is what I never shall be able to do.

I can distinguish clearly enough in my mind the slender figure from the unhewn block, and I have a very distinct idea of it; but there are so many angles to smooth, so many protuberances to hew away, so many blows of rasp and hammer to be given to approximate the shape and catch the true curve of the outline, that my hands

blister and the chisel drops to the ground.

If I persist, my fatigue reaches such a point that my sight is totally obscured and I can no longer see through the marble cloud the white divinity concealed within it. Thereupon I follow it at random, feeling my way; I bite too deep in one place, I do not go far enough in another; I hack away what should be a leg or an arm, and I leave a compact mass where there should be a hollow; instead of a goddess I make a monkey, sometimes less than a monkey, and the magnificent block, taken at such great expense of money and labor from the bowels of the earth, hammered and hewn on every side, has rather the appearance of having been gnawed and bored by polypi to make a bee-hive, than fashioned by a sculptor according to a preconceived plan.

How were you able, Michael Angelo, to cut marble in slices as a child carves a chestnut? of what steel were your unconquerable chisels made? and from whose robust loins did ye come forth, ye fruitful, hard-working artists, whom no form of matter can resist, and who describe your dream from beginning to end in color and in bronze?

It is innocent and justifiable vanity in a certain sense, after the cruel remarks I have made concerning myself—and you surely will not blame me for it, O Silvio!—but, although the world is unlikely ever to know it, and my name is predestined to oblivion, I am a poet and a painter!—I have as beautiful ideas as any poet on earth; I have created types as pure, as divine as those that are most admired among the masters.—I see them before me as clear, as distinct as if they were really painted, and if I could open a hole in my head and put a window in so that people could look, there would be the most marvellous gallery of pictures the world has ever seen. No king on earth can boast of possessing such a one.—There are Rubenses as flaring, as brilliantly lighted as the purest examples at Antwerp; my Raphaels are in a most excellent state of preservation and his Madonnas have no more winning smiles; Buonarotti does not twist a muscle with more spirit and more appalling force; the

sun of Venice shines upon yonder canvas as if it were signed: Paulus Cagliari; the shadows of Rembrandt himself are heaped up in this picture, with a pale star of light glimmering in the distance; the pictures that are in my own manner would certainly not be despised by any one.

I am well aware that it seems strange for me to say this and that I shall seem to be suffering from the vulgar intoxication of the most idiotic pride;—but it is a fact and nothing will shake my conviction in that respect. No one will share it probably; but what am I to do? Every one is born marked with a black or white stamp. Apparently mine is black.

Sometimes I have difficulty in concealing my thoughts on this subject; it has happened not unfrequently that I have spoken too familiarly of the exalted geniuses whose footprints we should adore and upon whose statues we should gaze from afar on our knees. Once, I forgot myself so far as to say: We.—Luckily it was in the presence of a person who took no notice of it, otherwise I should undoubtedly have been looked upon as the most conceited puppy that ever was.

Am I not a poet and a painter, Silvio?

It is a mistake to think that all people who have been supposed to possess genius were really greater men than others. No one knows how much the pupils and obscure artists employed by Raphael contributed to his reputation; he gave his signature to the product of the mind and talent of several,—that is all.

A great writer and a great painter are in themselves enough to people a whole epoch: they must first of all attack all styles of work at once, so that, if any rivals should rise up, they can instantly accuse them of plagiarism and check them at the first step in their career; those are familiar tactics and succeed none the less every day, even though they are not new.

It may be that a man already famous has precisely the same sort of talent that you have; under penalty of being considered an imitator of him, you are obliged to divert

your natural inspiration and make it flow in another channel. You were born to blow with all your lungs into the heroic clarion, or to evoke pale phantoms of the times that are no more; but you must move your fingers up and down the flute with seven holes, or tie knots on a sofa in some boudoir, all because monsieur your father did not take the trouble to throw you into the mould eight or ten years earlier, and because the world cannot conceive of such a thing as two men tilling the same field.

Thus it is that many noble intellects are compelled knowingly to take a road that is not theirs, and constantly to skirt their own domain from which they are banished, happy to cast a stealthy glance over the hedge, and to see on the other side, blooming in the sunlight, the lovely bright-colored flowers which they possess in the form of seed, but cannot sow for lack of soil.

For my own part, except for the greater or less opportunity afforded by circumstances, the difference in air and light, a door which has remained closed and should have been thrown open, a meeting missed, some one I ought to have known but have not known,—I cannot say whether I should ever have succeeded in anything.

I have not the necessary degree of stupidity to become what is called a genius pure and simple, nor the prodigious obstinacy which is eventually deified under the high-sounding name of will, when the great man has reached the radiant summit of the mountain, and which is indispensable to attain that height;—I know too well how hollow all things are and that they contain only putrefying matter, to attach myself for very long to anything and follow it ardently and exclusively through everything.

Men of genius are very shallow, and that is why they are men of genius. Lack of intelligence prevents them from perceiving the obstacles that separate them from the end they wish to attain; they go ahead, and in two or three strides devour the intervening spaces.—As their mind remains obstinately closed to certain currents,

and as they see only the things that are most closely connected with their ends, they expend much less thought and action; nothing diverts them, nothing turns them aside, they act more by instinct than otherwise, and some of them, when removed from their special sphere, exhibit a nullity hard to understand.

Assuredly it is a rare and charming gift to write poetry well; few people take more pleasure than I in poetical matters;—but I do not choose to limit and circumscribe my life within the twelve feet of an alexandrine; there are a thousand things that interest me as much as a hemistich:—the state of society and the reforms that must be undertaken are not among those things; I care extremely little whether the peasants know how to read and write or whether men eat bread or browse on grass; but there pass through my brain, in an hour, more than a hundred thousand visions which have not the slightest connection with rhyme or the cæsura, and that is why I actually do so little, although I have more ideas than some poets who could be burned alive with their own works.

I adore beauty and I feel it; I can describe it as well as the most amorous sculptors can understand it,—and yet I am no sculptor. The ugliness and imperfections of the rough sketch disgust me; I cannot wait until the work reaches perfection by dint of polishing and repolishing; if I could make up my mind to omit certain things in what I do, whether in versifying or in painting, I should end perhaps by writing a poem or painting a picture which would make me famous, and they who love me—if there be any one on earth who takes that trouble—would not be compelled to believe me on my word alone and would have a triumphant retort for the sardonic sneers of the detractors of that great unknown genius, myself.

I see many who take a palette and brushes and cover their canvas, paying no further attention to what caprice produces at the end of the bristles, and others who write a hundred lines at a time without an erasure and without once stopping to look up at the ceiling.—I always admire them, even if sometimes I do not admire their

productions; I envy with all my heart the fascinating intrepidity and fortunate blindness that prevent them from seeing even their most palpable defects. As soon as I have drawn anything out of line I notice it instantly and am concerned beyond measure by it; and, as I am much more learned in theory than in practice, it often happens that I cannot correct an error of which I am conscious; thereupon I turn the canvas with its face to the wall and never go back to it.

I have my ideal of perfection so constantly present in my mind, that disgust with my work seizes me at once and prevents me from continuing.

Ah! when I compare with the sweet smile of my thought the ugly pout it makes on the canvas or the paper, when I see a hideous bat fly by in place of the lovely dream that opened its long wings of light in the bosom of my nights; a thistle spring up in response to the idea of a rose; and when I hear a donkey bray as I am expecting the sweetest melodies of the nightingale, I am so horribly disappointed, so angry with myself, so furious at my impotence, that I resolve never to write again or say a single word of my life, rather than commit thus the crime of high treason against my thoughts.

I cannot succeed even in writing a letter as I would like to do; I often say something entirely different; certain portions develop immeasurably, others dwindle away till they become imperceptible, and very often the idea I had it in my mind to express is not there at all, or is in a postscript.

When I began to write you I certainly did not intend to say the half of what I have said.—I simply intended to inform you that we were going to give a play; but one word leads to a sentence; parentheses are big with other little parentheses, which in their turn have others in their wombs all ready to be born. There is no reason why this should end, why it should not go on to two hundred folio volumes—which would certainly be too much.

As soon as I take up a pen, there is a great humming and rustling of wings in my

brain, as if millions of June-bugs had been let loose inside. They bump against the walls of my skull and turn and fly up and down with a horrible uproar; they are my thoughts, trying to fly away and seeking an outlet;—all of them struggle to get free at once; more than one of them breaks his paws and tears the down from his wings; sometimes the door is so blocked that not one succeeds in crossing the threshold and reaching the paper.

That is the way I am made: it is not what can be called well made, I agree, but what would you have? the fault is with the gods and not with me, a poor devil who cannot help himself. I do not need to ask your indulgence, my dear Silvio; it is accorded me in advance, and you are kind enough to read my undecipherable scrawls to the end, my headless and tailless musings; however disjointed and absurd they may be, they always interest you, because they come from me, and anything that is a part of me, even when it is worthless, is not without some value to you.

I can let you see the thing that most offends the common herd: honest pride.—But let us cry truce for a while to all these exalted topics, and as I am writing on the subject of the play we are to give, let us return to it and talk about it a little.

The rehearsal took place to-day:—never in my life have I been so upset,—not because of the embarrassment that one always feels in reciting anything before a number of people, but from an entirely different cause. We were in costume and ready to begin; Théodore alone had not appeared; we sent to his room to see what delayed him; he replied that he was almost ready and would come down in a moment.

He came; I heard his step in the corridor long before he appeared, and yet no one on earth has a lighter step than Théodore; but my feeling of sympathy for him is so strong that I divine his movements through the walls, and when I felt that he was about to put his hand on the door-knob, I began to tremble and my heart beat with horrible force. It seemed to me that something of importance in my life was about to

be decided, and that I had reached a solemn, long-expected moment.

The folding-doors slowly opened and closed.

There was a general cry of admiration.—The men applauded, the women turned scarlet. Rosette alone became extremely pale and leaned against the wall, as if a sudden revelation were passing through her brain; she went through the same experience as myself in the opposite direction.—I have always suspected her of loving Théodore.

I have no doubt that, at that moment, she believed as I did that the pretended Rosalind was nothing less than a young and lovely woman, and the fragile card-house of her hope suddenly collapsed, while mine rose on its ruins; at least that is what I thought; I may be mistaken, for I was hardly in a condition to make accurate observations.

Aside from Rosette, there were three or four pretty women present; they looked disgustingly ugly.—Beside that sun, the star of their beauty was suddenly eclipsed, and every one wondered how he could ever have thought them passable. Men who, before that moment, would have deemed themselves very fortunate to have them for mistresses, would hardly have taken them for servants.

The image which hitherto had been drawn only faintly and with vague outlines, the adored, vainly-pursued phantom was there, before my eyes, living, palpable, no longer in half light and haze, but bathed in floods of white light; not in a fruitless disguise, but in her true costume; not in the mocking guise of a young man, but with the features of the loveliest of women.

I experienced a sensation of unbounded well-being, as if a mountain or two had been lifted off my chest.—I felt my horror of myself vanish and I was delivered from the tiresome duty of regarding myself as a monster. I began to form an altogether pastoral opinion of myself and all the violets of spring bloomed anew in my heart.

He, or rather she—for I wish to forget that I was stupid enough to take her for a

man—remained a moment motionless on the threshold, as if to give the assemblage time to utter its first exclamation. A brilliant light shone upon her from head to foot, and against the dark background of the corridor that stretched away behind her, the carved doorway serving as a frame, she glowed as if the light emanated from herself instead of being reflected simply, and you would have taken her for a marvellous product of the brush rather than a human creature made of flesh and blood.

Chapter XI — The folding-doors slowly opened and closed.

There was a general cry of admiration.—The men applauded, the women turned scarlet. Rosette alone became extremely pale and leaned against the wall, as if a sudden revelation were passing through her brain; * * * I have always suspected her of loving Théodore.

Her long dark hair, mingled with ropes of huge pearls, fell in natural ringlets beside her lovely cheeks! her shoulders and her breast were bare, and I never saw anything so beautiful in the world; the finest marble would not compare with that exquisite perfection.—How the life rushes beneath that dark transparent skin! how white the flesh and at the same time how richly colored! and how happily the changing golden tints soften the transition from the skin to the hair! what a fascinating poem in the graceful undulations of those contours, more supple and velvety than a swan's neck!—If there were words to express what I feel, I would write you a description fifty pages long; but languages were made by some donkeys or other who had never looked closely at a woman's back or breast, and we haven't half enough of the most indispensable terms.

I really think that I must become a sculptor; for to have seen such beauty and to be unable to reproduce it in one form or another is enough to make one a raving maniac. I have written twenty sonnets on those shoulders, but that is not enough: I would like something exactly similar which I could touch with my finger; verses reproduce only the phantom of beauty and not beauty itself. The painter produces a

more exact likeness, but it is only a likeness. Sculpture has all the reality that a thing absolutely false can have; it can be looked at on every side, it casts a shadow, and you can touch it. Your carved mistress differs from the genuine only in that she is a little harder and cannot speak, two very trifling drawbacks.

Her dress was made of some material of changing color, azure in the light, golden in the shadow; a close-fitting buskin was tightly laced about a foot that needed not that to make it too small, and scarlet silk stockings clung amorously about the most perfectly moulded and most tempting of legs; her arms were bare to the elbows, where they emerged from a mass of lace, round and plump and white, gleaming like polished silver and of unimaginable fineness of texture; her hands, laden with rings, languorously waved a great fan of fantastically-colored feathers, like a little pocket rainbow.

She walked into the room, her cheeks slightly flushed with a color that was not paint, and every one went into ecstasies and exclaimed and wondered if it was possible that it was really he, Théodore de Sérannes, the daring horseman, the consummate duellist, the determined hunter, and if they could be perfectly sure that it was not his twin sister.

"Why, you would have said he had never worn any other costume in his life! he is not in the least embarrassed in his movements, he walks very well and doesn't stumble over his train; he plays with his eyes and fan to perfection; and such a slender figure he has!—you could clasp it with your fingers!—It's a most extraordinary thing! it's unconceivable!—The illusion is as complete as possible: one would almost say that he has a bosom, his neck is so fat and well filled out; and not a single hair of beard, not one; and how soft his voice is! Oh! what a lovely Rosalind! who would not be her Orlando?"

Aye—who would not be Orlando to such a Rosalind, even at the price of the torments I suffered?—To love as I loved with a monstrous, unavowable passion,

which, however, one cannot uproot from his heart; to be condemned to maintain the most profound silence and not to dare to say what the most prudent and respectful lover would say without fear to the most prudish and rigid of women; to feel one's self consumed by an insensate flame, unjustifiable even in the eyes of the most confirmed libertines;—what are ordinary passions beside that—a passion which is shameful in itself and hopeless, and, which, even in the improbable event of its success, would be a crime and would kill you with shame? To be reduced to hope for failure, to dread favorable chances and opportunities, and to avoid them as another would seek them—such was my fate.

The most profound discouragement had taken possession of me; I viewed myself with horror mingled with surprise and curiosity. The thing that shocked me most was the thought that I had never loved before, and that this was the first effervescence of my youth, the first daisy of my springtime of love.

In my case this monstrosity replaced the refreshing, modest illusions of adolescence; my dreams of tender affection, so fondly cherished as I walked at evening on the edge of the woods, through the narrow blushing paths, or along the white marble terraces beside the lake in the park, were to be metamorphosed into this deceitful sphinx with the equivocal smile, the ambiguous voice, before whom I stood speechless, afraid to undertake the solution of the enigma! To interpret it falsely would have caused my death; for alas! it is the only bond that attaches me to the world; when it is broken, all will be over. Take that gleam of light away from me and I shall be more silent and inanimate than the embalmed mummy of the first of the Pharaohs. At the moments when I felt most violently drawn toward Théodore, I threw myself back in dismay into Rosette's arms, although I had an indescribable feeling of repulsion for her; I tried to place her between Théodore and myself as a shield and barrier—and when I lay beside her, I felt a secret satisfaction in the thought that she at all events was unquestionably a woman, and that, even if I did not love her, she still loved me enough to prevent our liaison from degenerating into

intrigue and debauchery.

I felt in my heart, however, through it all, a sort of regret at being thus unfaithful to the idea of my impossible passion; I blamed myself for it as for an act of treachery, and although I was well aware that I should never possess the object of my love, I was displeased with myself, and was cold to Rosette once more.

The rehearsal was much more successful than I hoped; Théodore, especially, was admirable; the others thought that I, too, acted extremely well.—It is not that I have the essential qualities of a good actor, and it would be a very great mistake to think that I am capable of taking other parts in the same way; but, by a strange chance, the words I had to say fitted in so well with my situation, that it seemed to me as if I had written them rather than learned them by heart from a book.—If my memory had failed me for a moment, I certainly should not have hesitated before filling the void with an improvised phrase. Orlando was myself quite as much as I was Orlando, and it is impossible to imagine a more extraordinary coincidence.

In the scene with the wrestler, when Théodore took the chain from his neck and gave it to me, as the play requires, he bestowed a glance on me so soft and languorous, so full of promise, and he pronounced with such grace and nobility of utterance the phrase: "Gentleman, wear this for me; one out of suits with fortune; that could give more but that her hand lacks means,"—that I was really confused, and was hardly able to say: "What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue? I cannot speak to her, yet she urged conference. O poor Orlando!"

In the third act Rosalind, dressed as a man, reappeared under the name of Ganymede, with her cousin Celia, who has changed her name to Aliena.

That disguise made an unpleasant impression on me;—I was so accustomed already to the female costume which allowed my desires to hope, and which encouraged me, in a treacherous but seductive error! One becomes accustomed very quickly to regard his desires as realities on the strength of the most fleeting appearances, and I

became very sombre when Théodore appeared in his male costume, more sombre than I had been before; for joy serves only to make grief more bitter, the sun shines only to make us more fully appreciate the horrors of darkness, and the cheerful aspect of white has no other object than to bring out all the melancholy of black.

His coat was the most coquettish and fascinating garment in the world, of a dainty, fanciful cut, all decked out with knots and ribbons, very much in the style reflected by the dandies of the court of Louis XIII.; a pointed hat, with a long curled feather, shaded the curls of his beautiful hair, and a damascened sword raised the hem of his travelling cloak.

He was dressed, however, in a way to make one feel that the virile garments had a feminine lining; something broader at the hips and fuller at the breast, an indefinable undulation that we do not see in cloth fitted to a man's body, left but faint doubts as to the sex of the individual.

His demeanor was half deliberate, half timid, and entertaining to the last degree, and with infinite skill he made himself appear as ill at ease in a costume to which he was accustomed, as he had seemed to be at home in clothes that were not his.

My serenity gradually returned, and I convinced myself anew that he was really a woman.—I recovered sufficient self-possession to carry out my rôle properly.

Do you know the play? perhaps not. As I have done nothing but read and declaim it for a fortnight I know it by heart from beginning to end, and I cannot realize that everybody is not as familiar as myself with the plot and the intrigue; it is an error into which I am very apt to fall, to think that, when I am drunk, everybody else is drunk and trying to knock down the walls, and if I knew Hebrew, I certainly should ask my valet for my dressing-gown and slippers in that tongue, and should be very much surprised if he did not understand me.—You can read it if you choose; I assume that you have read it and touch only on those passages that have some connection with my position.

Rosalind, walking in the forest with her cousin, is greatly surprised to find that the bushes bear, instead of blackberries and wild plums, madrigals in her praise; strange fruits which luckily are not accustomed to grow on bramble bushes; for when one is thirsty it is more satisfactory to find good berries on the branches than bad sonnets. She is much disturbed to know who has spoiled the bark of the young trees by carving her initials on them.—Celia, who has already met Orlando, tells her, after long urging, that the rhymer is no other than the young man who vanquished Charles the wrestler, the duke's athlete.

Soon Orlando himself appears and Rosalind enters into conversation with him by asking him the time.—Surely an extremely simple beginning; one can imagine nothing more commonplace.—But have no fear; from that trite, commonplace phrase you will see an unlooked-for crop spring up of witty conceits, overflowing with curious flowers and comparisons, as if from the richest and most thoroughly fertilized soil.

After a few lines of sparkling dialogue in which each word, as it falls upon the phrase, sends out to right and left millions of dancing sparks, like a hammer falling upon a red hot bar of iron, Rosalind asks Orlando if by chance he knows the man who hangs odes on hawthorn bushes and elegies on brambles, and who seems to be afflicted with the quotidian of love, which she knows how to cure. Orlando confesses that he is the man who is tortured by love, and as she has boasted of having several infallible remedies for that disease, begs her to do him the favor of telling him one.—"You in love?" replies Rosalind, "you have none of the marks whereby a lover is recognized; you have neither a lean cheek nor a sunken eye, your hose is not ungartered nor your sleeve unbuttoned, and your shoe is tied with much grace; if you are in love with any one, it is certainly with yourself, and you have need of none of my remedies."

It was not without genuine emotion that I replied in these exact words:

"Fair youth, I would I could make thee believe I love thee."[2]

This reply, so unexpected, so strange, to which nothing leads up and which seemed to have been written expressly for me as if by a sort of prevision on the part of the poet, produced a great effect upon me when I repeated it before Théodore, whose divine lips were still slightly curled with the ironical expression of the passage he had just repeated, while his eyes smiled with inexpressible sweetness, and a bright beam of kindliness gilded all the upper part of his young and lovely face.

"Me believe it! you may as soon make her that you love believe it; which, I warrant, she is apter to do than to confess she does; that is one of the points in which women still give the lie to their consciences. But, in good sooth, are you he that hangs the verses on the trees, wherein Rosalind is so admired, and do you truly need remedies for your madness?"

When she is fully persuaded that it is Orlando himself and no other who has written the beautiful lines that walk upon so many feet, the fair Rosalind consents to tell him her remedy. This is the gist of it: she has pretended to be the lovesick swain's beloved, and compelled him to pay court to her as to his own mistress; and, to sicken him of his passion, she gave full sway to the most extravagant caprices; sometimes she laughed, sometimes she wept; one day she received him kindly, another day cruelly; she scratched him, she spat in his face; she was not herself for a single moment; affected, inconstant, prudish, languorous, she was everything by turns, and whatever ennui, the vapors and the blue devils can instil in the way of extraordinary whims in the hollow head of a silly woman, the poor devil must needs endure and carry out.—An imp, a monkey, and an attorney in conjunction could have invented no more mischievous tricks.—This miraculous treatment did not fail to produce its effect;—the patient was driven from his "mad humor of love to a living humor of madness; which was, to forswear the full stream of the world, and to live in a nook merely monastic;" a most satisfactory result and one which might readily be

anticipated, by the way.

Orlando, as you may believe, is little disposed to recover his health by such means; but Rosalind insists and wishes to undertake the cure.—And she uttered these words: "I would cure you, if you would but call me Rosalind, and come every day to my cote and woo me," with such significant, palpable meaning, and accompanied with such a strange glance, that it was impossible for me not to attach to them a more extended significance than that of the words themselves and not to see therein an indirect warning to declare my real sentiments.—And when Orlando replied: "With all my heart, good youth," she exclaimed, with even more significance, and as if annoyed at her failure to make herself understood: "Nay, you must call me Rosalind."

Perhaps I was mistaken and imagined that I saw what did not really exist, but it seemed to me that Théodore had noticed my passion, although you may be sure I have never lisped a word of it, and that, through the veil of those borrowed expressions, behind that stage-mask, in those hermaphroditic words, he was alluding to his real sex and to our reciprocal positions. It is impossible that so bright a woman as she is, who knows so much of the world as she, should not have detected from the very first what was going on in my heart:—in default of my tongue, my eyes and my mental disturbance have spoken loud enough, and the veil of warm friendship which I had thrown over my love was not so impenetrable that a watchful and interested observer could not easily look through it.—The most innocent and least experienced girl on earth would not have been deceived by it for one moment.

Some important motive, doubtless, which I may not know, compels the beauty to adopt this infernal disguise, which has been the cause of all my suffering and has been on the verge of making me a strange sort of lover: except for that, everything would have run as smoothly and easily as a carriage whose wheels are well greased, over a level road covered with fine gravel; I could have abandoned myself in sweet

security to the most amorously vagabond reveries and have taken my divinity's little soft white hand in mine without shuddering with horror and recoiling twenty paces as if I had been touched with a red-hot iron, or felt the claws of Beelzebub in person.

Instead of falling into despair and raging inwardly like a genuine maniac, of beating my breast because I could not escape remorse, and lamenting because I had none, I should have said to myself with a feeling of duty well done and conscience satisfied:—"I am in love!"—a sentence as agreeable to say to one's self in the morning, under nice warm bedclothes with your head on a soft pillow, as any other conceivable sentence of the same length—always excepting this: "I have money."

After leaving my bed I could have taken my place in front of my mirror, and there, looking at myself with a sort of respect, I should have been touched, as I combed my hair, by my poetic pallor, promising myself that I would turn it to good advantage and make the most of it, for nothing is so low as to make love with a scarlet face; and when one has the ill-luck to be red-faced and in love, as may happen, I am of the opinion that he should have his face powdered every day or else renounce all idea of gentility in his appearance and turn his attention to the Margots and Toinons.

Then I could have breakfasted with suitable gravity, in order to nourish this dear body, this precious casket of passion, to manufacture with the juice of meats and game, good, amorous chyle and warm, quick blood, and to maintain it in a condition to give pleasure to charitable souls.

And after breakfast, as I picked my teeth, I would have tossed together a few irregular rhymes, by way of sonnet, all in honor of my mistress; I would have invented a thousand similes, each more novel than the last, and infinitely gallant; in the first quatrain there would have been a dance of suns, and in the second a minuet of the cardinal virtues; the two triplets would have been in equally good taste; Helen would have been treated as a bar-maid and Paris as an idiot; the magnificence of the metaphors would have left the Orient nothing to desire; the last line would have

been particularly admirable and would have contained at least two witty conceits per syllable; for the poison of the scorpion is in his tail and the merit of the sonnet is in its last line.—The sonnet completed and well and duly transcribed upon laid and perfumed paper, I would have gone forth from my house a hundred cubits tall, bending my head for fear of striking against the sky and catching on the clouds—a wise precaution—and I would have declaimed my new production to all my friends and all my enemies, then to children at the breast and their nurses, then to the horses and donkeys, then to the walls and trees, to ascertain the opinion of all creation as to this last product of my vein.

In society I would have talked with women with a dogmatic air, and upheld sentimental theories in a solemn, measured voice, like a man who knows much more than he cares to say about the subject in hand, and who did not learn what he knows from books;—which inevitably produces a most prodigious effect, and makes all the women in the company who don't tell their ages and the few young girls who haven't been asked to dance, gasp for breath like carp stranded on the beach.

I might have led the happiest life imaginable, trodden on the poodle's tail without too great an outcry from his mistress, overturned small tables covered with porcelain, and eaten the best bits at table, leaving none for the rest of the company; it would all have been forgiven in view of the well-known absentmindedness of lovers; and when they saw me thus swallowing everything with a terrified mien, everybody would have clasped his hands and said; "Poor fellow!"

And then, the dreaming, mournful air, the hair in tears, the untidy stockings, the loose cravat, the long hanging arms I should have had! how I should have walked about the avenues in the park, now with great strides, now with short steps, after the manner of a man whose reason has gone completely astray! How I should have gazed at the moon between her two eyes, and made circles in the water with the utmost tranquillity!

But the gods ordered otherwise.

I have fallen in love with a beauty in doublet and boots, a haughty Bradamante who disdains the garments of her sex and leaves you at times in the most disquieting uncertainty and perplexity;—her features and body are the features and body of a woman, but her mind is incontestably the mind of a man.

My mistress is most expert with the sword and could give lessons to the most experienced fencing-master; she has fought I know not how many duels, and killed or wounded three or four persons; in the saddle she leaps ditches ten feet wide and hunts like an old country squire:—strange qualities for a mistress! such things never happen to anybody but me.

I jest, but there certainly is no reason for it, for I have never suffered so much, and these last two months have seemed to me like two years, two centuries rather. There has been an inflow and outflow of uncertainties in my head, well adapted to confuse the strongest brain; I have been so violently agitated and pulled in every direction, I have had such frenzied impulses, such deathly prostration, such extravagant hopes, and such profound despair that I really do not know why it has not killed me. That idea has engrossed me and filled my thoughts so completely that I have wondered that it could not be seen clearly through my body, like a candle in a lantern, and I have been in mortal fear that some one would discover who was the object of this insensate passion.—However, Rosette, who is the one person in the world who has the most interest in watching the movements of my heart, has not seemed to notice anything; I think that she has been too much absorbed herself in her love for Théodore to observe my coldness to her; or else I must be a past-master in the art of dissimulation and I am not conceited enough to think that.—Théodore himself has never shown until to-day that he had the slightest suspicion of the state of my mind, and he has always talked with me in a friendly, familiar way, as a well-bred young man talks with a young man of his own age—nothing more.—His conversation with

me has touched indifferently upon all sorts of subjects, art, poetry and other kindred matters; but nothing private or with a direct reference to him or myself.

Perhaps the motives that forced him to adopt this disguise no longer exist and he proposes soon to resume his proper attire: that I cannot say; it is a fact, however, that Rosalind delivered certain sentences with a significant intonation and emphasized in a very marked way all those passages in her part which were of ambiguous meaning and could be twisted in that direction.

In the scene of the rendezvous, from the moment when she reproaches Orlando for not having arrived two hours earlier, as becomes a genuine lover, but two hours after, to the dolorous sigh she utters, terrified at the extent of her passion, as she throws herself into Aliena's arms: "O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathoms deep I am in love!" she displayed miraculous talent. There was an irresistible mixture of tenderness, melancholy, and love; her voice trembled with emotion, and behind the laugh one could feel that the most violent love was ready to explode; add to this all the piquancy and peculiarity of the transposition, and the novelty of seeing a young man pay court to his mistress, whom he takes for a man and who has every appearance of being one.

Expressions which would have seemed ordinary and commonplace enough under other circumstances, assumed peculiar significance then, and all the small change of similes and amorous protestations, which is current on the stage, seemed to have been recoined with new dies; indeed if the thoughts, instead of being unique and charming as they are, had been as threadbare as a judge's gown or the saddle-cloth of a hired donkey, the way in which they were expressed would have made them seem wonderfully keen and bright and in the best possible taste.

I have forgotten to tell you that Rosette, after declining the rôle of Rosalind, had good-humoredly undertaken the secondary rôle of Phœbe; Phœbe is a shepherdess in the forest of Arden, madly loved by the shepherd Sylvius, whom she cannot endure

and whom she treats with consistent and crushing cruelty. Phœbe is as cold as the moon for whom she is named; she has a heart of snow that does not melt in the fire of the most ardent sighs, but whose frozen crust grows thicker and thicker and becomes as hard as the diamond; but she has no sooner seen Rosalind in the costume of the comely page, Ganymede, than all that ice dissolves in tears and the diamond becomes softer than wax. The haughty Phœbe, who laughed at love, is in love herself; she suffers now the torments she had inflicted on others. Her pride humbles itself so far as to make all the advances, and she sends to Rosalind, by poor Sylvius, a burning letter which contains a declaration of her passion in most humble and suppliant terms. Rosalind, moved to pity for Sylvius, and having, moreover, most excellent reasons for not responding to Phœbe's love, subjects her to the most cruel treatment and makes sport of her with unparalleled mercilessness and ferocity. Phœbe prefers these insults, however, to the most touching and most passionate flattery of her unhappy shepherd; she follows the fair stranger everywhere and with all her importunity succeeds in extorting from him nothing but the promise that if he ever marries a woman she shall surely be the one; meanwhile he urges her to treat Sylvius kindly and not depend upon a too flattering hope.

Rosette acted her part with a melancholy and caressing grace, a sorrowful, resigned tone that went to the heart;—and when Rosalind said to her: "I would love you, if I could," the tears were ready to overflow, and she could hardly hold them back, for Phœbe's story is her own, as Orlando's is mine, with this difference, that everything turns out happily for Orlando, and that Phœbe, disappointed in her love, is compelled to marry Sylvius instead of the charming ideal she longed to embrace. Such is life: that which affords happiness to one necessarily causes another unhappiness. It is very fortunate for me that Théodore is a woman, it is very unfortunate for Rosette that he is not a man, and she is now wallowing in the slough of amorous impossibilities in which I recently went astray.

At the end of the play Rosalind lays aside the doublet of the page Ganymede for the

garments of her own sex, is recognized by her father as his daughter, by Orlando as his mistress: the god Hymen arrives with his saffron-colored livery and his legitimate torches.—Three weddings take place.—Orlando marries Rosalind, Phœbe Sylvius, and the clown Touchstone the artless Audrey.—Then the epilogue has its say and the curtain falls.

All this has interested us exceedingly and engrossed our minds; there was, in a certain sense, a play within the play, a drama invisible to the other spectators and unsuspected by them, which we played for ourselves alone, and which, in symbolic phrases, summed up our whole lives and expressed our most secret desires.—Except for Rosalind's strange prescription I should be sicker than ever, having not even a distant hope of cure, and I should have continued to wander sadly through the winding paths of the dark forest.

And yet I have only a moral certainty; I lack proofs and I can remain no longer in this state of uncertainty; I absolutely must speak to Théodore in more definite terms. I have approached him twenty times with a sentence ready on my lips, but have not succeeded in saying it to him—I dare not; I have many opportunities to speak to him alone, either in the park or in my room, or in his, for he comes to see me and I go to see him, but I let them pass without profiting by them, although the next moment I feel a mortal regret and fly into a terrible rage with myself. I open my mouth, and in spite of all I can do, other words take the places of the words I intended to say; instead of declaring my love, I discourse upon the rain, the fine weather or some other similarly stupid subject. And the season is drawing to a close and soon we shall return to the town; the facilities which present themselves according to my wishes here will be renewed nowhere else:—perhaps we shall lose sight of each other and opposite currents will carry us in opposite directions, I doubt not.

The free and easy life of the country is such a delightful and convenient thing! the trees, even though the foliage is not quite so dense in the autumn, afford such

delicious shade for the reveries of nascent love! it is difficult to resist the lovely natural surroundings! the birds sing so languorously, the flowers give forth such intoxicating odors, the turf is so soft and so golden on the hillsides! Solitude inspires countless voluptuous thoughts which the hurly-burly of the world would have scattered here and there, and the instinctive impulse of two creatures who hear their hearts beat in the silence of a deserted country-side, is to entwine their arms more tightly and to cleave to each other as if they were in truth the only living creatures in the world.

I took a walk this morning; the air was soft and damp, not the slightest particle of blue sky could be seen, and yet it was neither dark nor threatening. Two or three different shades of pearl-gray, harmoniously blended, enveloped the sky from horizon to horizon, and against that vaporous background fleecy clouds floated slowly like great pieces of wadding; they were impelled by the dying breath of a light breeze, hardly strong enough to move the tops of the most restless aspens: patches of mist rose between the tall chestnuts and indicated the course of the stream in the distance. When the breeze took breath once more, a few dry red leaves blew excitedly about and ran along the path before me like swarms of timid sparrows; then as the breeze fell, they subsided a few steps farther on: a true image of those winds that one mistakes for birds flying freely with wings outspread, but which are, after all, naught but leaves withered by the morning frost, which the slightest passing breeze takes for its plaything and its sport.

Distant points were so blurred by vapors, and the fringes of the horizon tapered away so on the edges, that it was hardly possible to tell where the sky began and the earth ended: a little darker gray, a little denser haze, indicated vaguely the separation and dividing line between the two. Through that curtain, the willows with their ashen heads seemed more like spectral trees than real trees; the irregularities of the hills resembled rather the undulations of a mass of heaped-up clouds than the lay of solid ground. The outlines of objects trembled as you looked at them, and a sort of

gray woof of indescribable fineness, like a spider's web, stretched between the foreground of the landscape and the receding depths of the atmosphere; in shaded places the lines stood out much more clearly, and allowed the meshes of the net to be seen; where the light was brighter, the streak of mist was imperceptible and lost itself in a diffused light. There was in the air something drowsy, something warm and soft and dull that predisposed one strangely to melancholy.

As I walked I reflected that autumn had come for me also, and that the radiant summer had passed, never to return; the tree of my mind was even more stripped of its leaves perhaps than the trees in the forest; hardly one tiny green leaf remained on the topmost branch, swaying to and fro and trembling, all sad to see its sisters leave it one by one.

Remain upon the tree, O little leaf of the color of hope, cling to the branch with all the strength of thy nerves and fibres; be not alarmed by the whistling of the wind, O dear little leaf! for when thou hast left me, who will be able to distinguish whether I am a dead or living tree, and who will prevent the wood-cutter from cutting through my foot with his axe and making firewood of my branches?—It is not yet the time when the trees shed all their leaves, and the sun may still throw off the swaddling-clothes of mist that surround it.

The spectacles of the dying season made a deep impression upon me. I reflected that time was passing swiftly and that I might die without having pressed my ideal to my heart.

When I returned to my room I had formed a resolution.—As I cannot make up my mind to speak, I wrote my whole destiny upon a slip of paper.—It is absurd perhaps to write to a person who is living in the same house with yourself, whom you can see every day, at any hour; but I am beyond caring whether it is absurd or not.

I sealed my letter, not without trembling and changing color; then, selecting a moment when Théodore had gone out, I placed it in the middle of his table and fled,

as disturbed as if I had committed a most outrageous act.

[1] As You Like It.

[2] The last word in this quotation, which justifies the succeeding epithets, is not in the English version of the play.

XII

I promised you the sequel of my adventures; but really I am so sluggish about writing that I must love you as the apple of my eye and know you to be more curious than Eve or Psyche, to place myself in front of a table with a huge sheet of white paper which I must make black, and an inkstand deeper than the sea, each drop in which is destined to turn into thoughts, or at least into something resembling thoughts, without forming a sudden resolution to mount my horse and ride at full speed the eighty endless leagues that lie between us, in order to tell you viva voce what I propose to write in imperceptible fly-tracks, so that I may not be dismayed myself by the prodigious volume of my picaresque odyssey.

Eighty leagues! to think that there is all that space between myself and the person I love best in the world!—I have an intense longing to tear up my letter and order my horse to be saddled.—But I will think no more of it—with the clothes I am wearing, I could not approach you and resume the familiar life we led together when we were very artless and innocent little girls; if ever I go back to my petticoats it will certainly be for that purpose.

I left you, I believe, as we were leaving the inn where I passed such an amusing night and where my virtue thought it was going to be shipwrecked upon leaving the harbor.—We rode away together, going in the same direction.—My companions went into ecstasies over the beauty of my horse, which is a thoroughbred and one of the fastest horses in the world;—that fact increased my stature at least half a cubit in their estimation, and they added the merits of my steed to my own merits.—They seemed to be afraid, however, that he was too frisky and high-spirited for me.—I

told them they need have no fear, and to show them that there was no danger I made him prance and curvet—then I jumped a wall of considerable height and put him at a gallop.

The party tried in vain to overtake me; I turned when I was some distance ahead of them and rode back at full speed; just before I met them, I checked my horse when all four feet were in the air and stopped him short: which is, as you may or may not know, a genuine feat.

From esteem they passed without transition to the most profound respect. They did not suspect that a young student, recently graduated from the University, was so accomplished a horseman as that. That discovery served me better than if they had discovered in me all the cardinal virtues; instead of treating me as a boy, they addressed in a tone of obsequious familiarity that pleased me.

In laying aside my clothing, I had not laid aside my pride:—being a woman no longer, I determined to be a thorough man and not to be content to have simply the external appearance of one.—I had determined to achieve as a cavalier, the triumphs I could no longer aspire to as a woman. What disturbed me most was to ascertain how I should set about procuring a stock of courage; for courage and skill in bodily exercises are the means by which a man most easily establishes a reputation. It is not that I am timid for a woman, and I have not the idiotic pusillanimity that we see in some women; but it is a long distance to the reckless, fierce brutality that is the glory of the men, and it was my intention to become a young blood, a swash-buckler, like my gentlemen of the upper circles, in order to secure a good footing in society and to enjoy all the advantages of my metamorphosis.

But I saw in the sequel that nothing was easier and that the receipt was of the simplest.

I will not tell you, according to the custom of travellers, that I made so many leagues on such a day, that I went from this place to another place, that the roast meat I ate at

the Cheval-Blanc or Croix-de-Fer inn was raw or burned; that the wine was sour and the bed I slept in had curtains with flowered or figured designs: those are very important details which should be preserved for posterity; but posterity will have to do without them this time, and you must resign yourself to be left in ignorance of the number of dishes of which my dinner was composed, and whether I slept well or ill during my wanderings. Nor shall I give you an accurate description of the different landscapes, the fields of grain, the forests, the various crops and the hillsides covered with villages which have passed successively before my eyes; those things are easily imagined; take a little earth, plant a few trees and a few blades of grass, daub behind it all a bit of gray or pale-blue sky, and you will have a very adequate idea of the changing background against which our little caravan moved on.—If I went into some details of this nature in my first letter, pray excuse me, I will not fall into the same error again: as I had never been abroad before, the most trivial things seemed to me of vast importance.

One of the party, my bedfellow, he whose sleeve I came so near pulling on the memorable night whose agonies I have described to you at length, conceived an ardent passion for me and kept his horse beside mine all the time.

With the exception that I would not have taken him for a lover even if he had brought me the fairest crown on earth, I did not find him particularly disagreeable; he was well-informed and lacked neither wit nor good-humor: but, when he spoke of women, it was in a disdainful, ironical tone, for which I could readily have torn the eyes out of his head, especially as there were many things in what he said that were cruelly true, although exaggerated, and my male costume compelled me to acknowledge their accuracy.

He asked me so urgently and so persistently to go with him to see one of his sisters, who was just at the end of her mourning for her husband, and was at that moment living with an aunt in an old chateau, that I could not refuse.—I made some

objections for form's sake, for in reality I was as ready to go there as anywhere, and I could attain my object in that way as well as any other; and as he told me that he should take it very ill of me if I did not give him at least a fortnight, I answered that I would gladly do so, and that it was a bargain.

At a fork in the road, my friend said to me, pointing to the right arm of the natural Y: "That is our road."—The others shook hands with us and went in the other direction.

After riding for some hours we reached our destination.

A ditch of considerable width, but filled with dense and abundant vegetation instead of water, separated the park from the high road; the walls were of a hewn stone and, at the angles, bristled with gigantic iron artichokes and thistles which seemed to have grown like natural plants between the disjointed blocks of the wall; a small bridge of a single arch crossed this dry canal and led to the park gate.

An avenue of tall elms, rounded like a cradle-top and trimmed in the old style, was the first thing I saw; and after following it for some time, we came to a sort of circular clearing.

The trees had the appearance of being old-fashioned rather than old; they seemed to wear wigs and to be powdered; only a little circle of foliage had been preserved at the top of their heads; all the rest was carefully pruned, so that you might have taken them for plumes of abnormal size stuck in the ground at regular intervals.

Having crossed the clearing, which was covered with fine grass carefully rolled, we had to pass under another curious arrangement of foliage adorned with pots of fire, pyramids, and columns of a rustic order, all done by skilful handling of scissors and sickles in a great clump of boxwood.—Through different vistas you could see, at the right and left, a half-ruined chateau, the moss-covered stairway of a dry cascade, or it might be a vase or a statue of a nymph or a shepherd with nose and fingers broken and with doves perching on the head and shoulders.

A large flower-garden on the French plan was laid out in front of the chateau; all the squares were marked out with holly and box with absolute symmetry; it had quite as much the appearance of a carpet as of a garden: huge flowers in ball-dresses with majestic carriage and serene expression, like duchesses preparing to dance a minuet, bent their heads slightly as you passed. Others, apparently less courteous, stood straight and stiff, like dowagers embroidering. Shrubs of all possible shapes, excepting always their natural shape, round, square, pointed, triangular, in green and gray boxes, seemed to march in procession along the broad avenue and to lead you by the hand to the first steps of the entrance.

A few turrets, half surrounded by more recent buildings, towered above the roof-line of the main structure to the height of their slate-covered, extinguisher-like peaks, and their zinc vanes, cut in the shape of swallows' tails, bore witness to an honorable antiquity. The windows of the central building all opened upon a common balcony with an iron balustrade of elaborate workmanship and great beauty, and the other windows were set in stone frames with carved ciphers and figures.

Four or five huge dogs ran out, barking at the top of their lungs and leaping wildly about. They gambolled around the horses and jumped at their noses: they paid especial attention to my companion's horse, which they probably visited frequently in the stable or accompanied on the road.

All this uproar finally called out a sort of valet, half laborer, half groom, who took our horses by the reins and led them away.—I had not as yet seen a living being except a little peasant girl, timid and wild as a deer, who ran away at sight of us and crouched in a furrow behind some hemp, although we called her several times and did everything in our power to reassure her.

No one appeared at the windows; you would have said the chateau was uninhabited, or that its only occupants were spirits; for not the slightest sound could be heard outside.

We were beginning to ascend the steps, making considerable noise with our spurs, for our legs were a little tired, when we heard a sound as of doors opening and shutting within, as if some one were hurrying to meet us.

In a moment a young woman appeared at the top of the steps, rushed down to my companion and threw herself on his neck. He kissed her very affectionately and, putting his arm about her waist, lifted her up and carried her so to the landing.

"Do you know that you are very amiable and gallant for a brother, my dear Alcibiades?—Surely, monsieur, it is altogether useless for me to tell you that he's my brother, for he really does not stand on ceremony?" said the young woman, turning to me.

To which I replied that it was possible to misinterpret his actions, and that it was in a certain sense a misfortune to be her brother and thus to be excluded from the category of her adorers; that, as for myself, if I were her brother, I should be at once the unhappiest and the happiest cavalier on earth."—Whereat she smiled sweetly.

Conversing thus we entered a hall, the walls of which were hung with high warp Flemish tapestry.—Tall trees with pointed leaves were covered with flocks of fanciful birds; the colors, faded by time, presented strange transpositions of shades; the sky was green, the trees royal blue with yellow streaks, and in the draperies of the figures the shadow was often of a directly opposite color to that of the background of the material;—the flesh resembled wood, and the nymphs walking under the faded shadows of the forest looked like unswathed mummies; their mouths alone, which had retained their original purple tint, smiled with an appearance of life. In the foreground were tall plants of a strange shade of green with great striped flowers, whose pistils resembled a peacock's crest. Sober-faced, pensive herons, their heads buried in their shoulders, their long beaks resting on their swollen crops, stood philosophically on one of their slim legs, in stagnant, black water, streaked with lines of tarnished silver; through the vistas in the foliage, one could see in the

distance small chateaux with turrets like pepper-boxes and balconies crowded with lovely women in grand attire, watching processions or hunting-parties pass.

Fantastically-jagged rocks, over which foamed torrents of white wool, blended insensibly with fleecy clouds at the horizon line.

One of the things that impressed me most was the figure of a huntress shooting a bird.—Her open fingers had just released the string, and the arrow had flown; but as that part of the tapestry was in a corner, the arrow was on the other wall, having described a great curve; as for the bird, he was flying away on motionless wings and seemed to be headed for a neighboring branch.

That feathered arrow, armed with a golden tip, always in the air and never reaching its destination, had a most curious effect; it was like a melancholy, sorrowful symbol of human destiny, and the more I looked at it the more mysterious and sinister meanings I discovered in it.—The huntress stood there, her foot put forward, her leg bent, her eye with its silken lid wide open, and yet unable to see her arrow which had deviated from its path; she seemed to be looking anxiously for the flamingo with the gorgeous plumage, that she desired to bring down and expected to see fall at her feet, pierced through and through.—I do not know whether it is an error on the part of my imagination, but I detected upon that face an expression as forlorn and desperate as that of a poet who dies without having written the work upon which he expected to found his reputation, and who is seized with the pitiless death-rattle just as he is trying to dictate it.

I have written at great length about this tapestry, at greater length certainly than it deserves;—but the fanciful world created by those who work on the high warp has always had a strange fascination for me.

I am passionately fond of the imaginary vegetation, the flowers and plants that have no real existence, the forests of strange trees peopled with unicorns, caprimulgæ. and snow-white stags with a golden crucifix between their horns, generally pursued

by red-bearded huntsmen in the costumes of Saracens.

When I was small I hardly ever entered a room hung with tapestry without a sort of shudder, and I hardly dared move.

All those figures standing against the wall, to which the undulation of the material and the play of the light imparted a sort of fantastic life, seemed to me like so many spies watching my actions in order to report them at the proper time and place, and I would not have eaten a stolen apple or cake in their presence.

What tales those solemn creatures would have to tell if they could open their red silk lips, and if sounds could penetrate the drum of their embroidered ears. Of how many murders, treasons, infamous adulteries and monstrous deeds of all sorts have they been silent, impassive witnesses!—

But let us leave the tapestry and return to our story.

"Alcibiades, I will go and tell my aunt of your arrival."

"Oh! there's no hurry about that, sister; let us sit down and talk a little while first. Allow me to introduce my young friend Théodore de Sérannes, who will pass some time here. I do not need to urge you to make him welcome;—he is his own sufficient recommendation."—I tell you what he said; do not be in a hurry to accuse me of self-conceit.—

The young lady nodded slightly as if in assent, and we talked of other things.

As we talked I made a more detailed and more careful examination of her than I had been able to do before.

She seemed to be some twenty-three or twenty-four years old and her mourning was most becoming to her; to tell the truth, her manner was not very lugubrious or desolate and I suspect that she had eaten the ashes of her Mausolus in her soup by way of rhubarb.—I do not know whether she had grieved overmuch for her defunct spouse; if she had done it, she hardly showed it now, at all events, and the pretty

cambric handkerchief she had in her hand was as perfectly dry as possible.

Her eyes were not red, on the contrary they were the clearest and brightest eyes in the world, and you would have sought in vain on her cheeks the furrow through which tears had flowed; indeed, there was nothing there save two little dimples formed by the habit of smiling, and it is fair to say that, for a widow, she displayed her teeth very frequently; and it was certainly not an unpleasant spectacle, for they were small and even. I esteemed her, first of all, for not having felt obliged, just because some poor devil of a husband had died, to blacken her eyes and make her nose red: I was grateful to her also for not affecting any little mournful airs and for talking naturally with her silvery, ringing voice, without dragging out her words and interlarding her sentences with virtuous sighs.

It seemed to me in extremely good taste; I set her down at once as a woman of intelligence, which she is in fact.

She was well built, with a foot and hand well suited to her figure; her black dress was arranged with all possible coquetry and so daintily that you entirely forgot the lugubriousness of the color, and she might have gone to a ball in that costume without causing any remark. If I ever marry and am left a widow, I shall ask her for a pattern of her dress, for she looks like an angel in it.

After some little talk, we went up to the old aunt's room.

We found her sitting in a great easy-chair with a sloping back, a little stool under her feet and beside her an old blear-eyed, ugly-looking dog, who raised his black muzzle when we appeared and welcomed us with a far from amiable growl.

I have always looked upon old women with horror. My mother died very young; doubtless, if I had seen her grow old slowly, and her features change imperceptibly, I should have become accustomed to it without a shock.—In my childhood I was surrounded by none but youthful, laughing faces, so that I have retained an insurmountable antipathy for old people. So it was that I shuddered when the lovely

widow touched the dowager's yellow brow with her pure vermilion lips.—It was something I wouldn't have taken upon myself to do. I know that I shall look like that when I am sixty; but I can do nothing to prevent it, and I pray God that I may die young like my mother.

However, the old lady had retained some simple and majestic features of her former beauty which prevented her from attaining the baked-apple stage of ugliness that is the lot of women who have been simply pretty or fresh and healthy: her eyes, although they had crow's feet at the corners and were covered by great, flabby lids, still retained some sparks of their former fire, and you could see that, under the reign of the late king, they might have emitted dazzling flashes of passion. Her fine and thin nose, slightly hooked like the beak of a bird of prey, gave to her profile a sort of solemn grandeur, tempered by the indulgent smile upon her protruding Austrian lip, which was touched with carmine according to the fashion of the last generation.

Her costume was old-fashioned without being absurd, and was in perfect harmony with her face; her head-dress was a simple white cap with a narrow lace border; her long, emaciated hands, which you could see had once been beautiful, were encased in mittens with no fingers or thumbs; a dress of the color of dead leaves, with flowered work of a deeper shade, a black mantle and a paduasoy apron of changing color completed her toilet.

Old women ought always to dress in that way and respect their approaching death sufficiently to avoid decking themselves out with feathers and wreaths of flowers, ribbons of delicate shades and the countless gewgaws that are suited only to extreme youth. It is of no use for them to make advances to life; life will have nothing to do with them; they have their pains for their trouble, like the superannuated courtesans who plaster themselves with red and white paint and whom drunken mule-drivers repulse with insults and kicks.

The old lady welcomed us with the ease of manner and exquisite courtesy

characteristic of those people who were of the old court, the secret of which we seem to be losing from day to day, like so many other valuable secrets—and in a voice which, though broken and trembling, was still extremely sweet.

She seemed much pleased with me and looked at me very attentively for a long while, apparently much moved.—A tear gathered in the corner of her eye and rolled slowly down one of the deep wrinkles, where it dried up and disappeared. She begged me to excuse her and said that I greatly resembled a son who was killed in the army.

All the time that I remained at the chateau, I was treated by the dear old lady with extraordinary, altogether motherly kindness because of that resemblance, real or imaginary. I found more charm in that condition of things than I anticipated at first, for the greatest favor that elderly people can confer upon me is never to speak to me and to leave the room when I enter it.

I will not tell you in detail what I did each day at R—. If I have lingered a little over all this preliminary matter and have drawn with some care these two or three physiognomies of persons and of places, it is because I had there some very strange adventures, albeit very natural and just what I ought to have foreseen when I donned the garb of a man.

My natural light-headedness led me into an imprudence which I bitterly repent, for it has brought trouble to a kind and loving heart, trouble which I cannot allay without disclosing what I am and compromising myself seriously.

In order to acquire masculine manners perfectly and to divert myself a little, I could think of nothing better than to pay court to my friend's sister.—It seemed very amusing to me to fall upon all fours when she dropped her glove and to return it to her with humble reverences, to lean over the back of her chair with an adorably languorous expression, to whisper in her ear a thousand and one flattering speeches of the most seductive description. Whenever she passed from one room to another I

gracefully offered my hand; if she rode, I held her stirrup, and in walking I was always at her side; in the evening I read to her and sang with her;—in short, I performed with scrupulous accuracy all the functions of a cicisbeo.

I did everything that I had seen young men in love do, which amused me and made me laugh like the genuine madcap that I am, when I was alone in my chamber and reflected on all the impertinent remarks I had made in the most serious tone imaginable.

Alcibiades and the old marchioness seemed to look upon the intimacy with pleasure and left us together very often. I sometimes regretted that I was not a man in order to take advantage of the tête-à-tête; if I had been, it would have depended entirely upon me, for our charming widow seemed to have forgotten the defunct entirely, or, if she remembered him, she would readily have been unfaithful to his memory.

Having begun upon that line I could hardly draw back with honor, and it was very difficult to effect a retreat with arms and stores; I could not go beyond a certain limit, however, and I could hardly be affectionate except in words:—I hoped to reach without mishap the end of the month I was to pass at R—, and to retire with a promise to return, intending to do nothing of the kind.—I thought that when I had gone the fair widow would readily be consoled, and would soon forget me when I was out of her sight.

But, while seeking only my own amusement, I had aroused a serious passion, and things turned out differently:—which goes to prove a truth that has long been well known, to wit, that one must never play with fire or with love.

Before she fell in with me, Rosette had not known what love is. Married very young to a man many years her senior, she had felt only a sort of filial affection for him;—courted she had been, I doubt not, but she had had no lover, incredible as it may appear: either the gallants who had hitherto shown her attention were but moderately attractive, or else, which is more probable, her hour had not yet

come.—The petty aristocrats and country squires who talked of nothing but fertilizers and fumets, young boars and seven-year stags, hunting cries and antlers, with an admixture of charades out of the almanac and compliments moss-grown with age, were certainly not made to commend themselves to her, and her virtue had not had to exert itself overmuch in order not to yield to them.—Moreover, the natural gaiety and playfulness of her disposition were a sufficient defence against love, that sentimental passion that takes such strong hold of dreamers and melancholy folk; the idea of sensual pleasure that her old Tithonus had been able to give her was probably not sufficient to arouse any great temptation to try it again, and she enjoyed in a mild way the pleasure of being left a widow so early in life and of having so many years to be pretty.

But on my arrival, there was a great change.—I thought at first that if I had kept strictly within the limits of cold and scrupulous courtesy, she would not have taken any notice of me; but really I was obliged to admit afterward that it would have made no difference at all, and that that supposition, although very modest, was entirely without foundation.—Alas! nothing can turn aside the fatal horoscope, and no one can avoid the influence, whether benignant or malignant, of his star.

It was Rosette's destiny to love but once in her life, and with an impossible passion; she must and she will accomplish her destiny.

I have been loved, O Graciosa, and it is a sweet experience, although I have been loved only by a woman, and in such an unnatural love there is something painful that there certainly cannot be in the other;—oh! it is a very sweet experience!—When you wake in the night and rest upon your elbow, to say to yourself: "Some one is thinking or dreaming of me; my life is of interest to somebody; a movement of my eyes or my mouth causes joy or sadness to another creature; a word I have let fall at random is carefully treasured up, commented upon and dissected for hours at a time; I am the pole toward which a restless magnet

tends; my eye is a heaven, my mouth a paradise more ardently longed for than the real; if I should die, a warm shower of tears would keep my ashes warm, my grave would be brighter with flowers than a wedding-feast; if I were in danger, some one would throw himself between the point of the sword and my breast and sacrifice himself for me!"—it is lovely, and I cannot think what more one can desire in this world.

This thought caused me a feeling of pleasure for which I blamed myself, for I had nothing to give in exchange for it all, and I was in the position of a poor person who accepts presents from a rich and generous friend, with no hope of ever being able to repay them. It delighted me to be so adored and at times I gave myself up to it with strange complaisance. By dint of hearing everybody call me monsieur and of being treated as if I were a man, I gradually forgot that I was a woman; my disguise seemed to be my natural attire, and I forgot that I had ever worn any other; I ceased to reflect that I was, after all, only a little empty-headed creature who had made a sword of her needle and a pair of breeches out of one of her petticoats.

Many men are more like women than I am.—There is little of the woman about me except the breast, some more rounded outlines and more delicate hands; the petticoat is on my hips, not in my mind. It often happens that the sex of the mind is different from that of the body, and that is a contradiction that cannot fail to produce much confusion.—For example, if I myself had not made this resolution, insane in appearance but very wise in reality, to renounce the costume of a sex which is mine only materially and by accident, I should have been very unhappy: I love horses, fencing, all violent exercises, I like to climb and run about like a young boy; it tires me to sit with my feet close together, my elbows glued to my sides, to lower my eyes modestly, to speak in a little soft, sweet voice, and to pass worsted through the holes in a piece of canvas ten million times;—I do not like to obey the laws of society, and the words that are most frequently on my tongue are: "I will."—Behind my smooth brow and beneath my silky hair, strong and virile thoughts are constantly

in motion; all the precious nonsense that generally is most attractive to women has never produced any but the slightest effect upon me, and, like Achilles disguised as a girl, I would gladly lay aside my mirror for a sword.—The only thing about women that attracts me is their beauty;—notwithstanding the inconveniences that result from it, I would not willingly give up my figure, although it is ill-sorted with the spirit it encloses.

Such an intrigue was something novel and alluring, and I should have been greatly entertained by it if it had not been taken so seriously by poor Rosette. She set about loving me with admirable naïveté and earnestness, with all the force of her dear, loving heart—with a love of the sort that men do not understand, of which they cannot form even a remote idea, a refined, ardent love; she loved me as I would like to be loved if I should ever meet the reality of my dream. What a priceless treasure wasted, what white, transparent pearls, such as divers will never find in the jewel-chest of the sea! what sweet breath, what soft sighs scattered through the air, which might have been gathered by pure, loving lips!

That passion might have made a young man so happy! so many unfortunate youths, handsome, charming, well endowed, full of heart and spirit, have pleaded vainly on their knees with insensible, lifeless idols! so many loving, tender souls have thrown themselves in despair into the arms of prostitutes, or have burned out silently like a lamp in a tomb, who might have been saved from debauchery and death by a sincere passion!

What a strange thing is human destiny! and what an inveterate joker is chance.

The thing that so many others had ardently desired came to me, who did not, could not, want it. A whimsical young woman takes a fancy to travel about the country in a man's clothes in order to find out a little something as to what she is to expect on the part of her future lovers; she sleeps at an inn with an excellent brother who leads her by the end of the finger to his sister, who has nothing better to do than to fall in

love with her like a cat, like a dove, like whatever is most amorous and languorous on earth.—It is very clear that, if I had been a young man, and this condition of things could have been of any service to me, it would have turned out very differently and the lady would have taken a violent dislike to me.—Fortune loves to give slippers to those who have wooden legs and gloves to those who have no hands;—the inheritance that would have enabled you to live at your ease, ordinarily falls in on the day of your death.

I went sometimes, not as often as she would have liked, to see Rosette in her bed; although she does not usually receive until she is dressed, an exception is made in my favor.—An exception would have been made in my favor in many other respects, if I had wished;—but, as the saying is, the most beautiful woman can give only what she has, and what I had would have been of little service to Rosette.

She would give me her little hand to kiss;—I confess that it afforded me some pleasure to kiss it, for it is very smooth, very white, exquisitely perfumed, and made softer by a nascent moisture; I felt it shiver and contract under my lips, whose pressure I maliciously prolonged.—Thereupon Rosette, deeply moved and with a supplicating air, would look up at me with her great eyes laden with desire and flooded with a humid, transparent light, then she would let her pretty head, which she had raised a little, the better to receive me, fall back upon the pillow.—I could see her restless bosom rise and fall under the sheet and her whole body suddenly begin to tremble.—Certainly any one who was in a condition to dare might have dared much, and it is equally certain that she would have been grateful to him for his daring and would have thanked him for skipping a few chapters of the novel.

I remained an hour or two with her, not releasing her hand which I had rested on the coverlid; we had interminable, fascinating conversations; for, although Rosette was much engrossed by her love, she believed herself to be too sure of success, not to retain almost all her freedom and playfulness of mind.—From time to time,

however, her passion cast a transparent veil of gentle melancholy over her gaiety, which made her even more seductive.

Indeed, it might well have seemed an incredible thing that a young beginner, as I seemed to be, should not be overjoyed at such good fortune and profit by it to the utmost. Rosette was not so made that she was likely to meet with very cruel rebuffs, and knowing no more than she did about me, she relied upon her charms and upon my youth, in default of my love.

However, as the situation was beginning to be prolonged a little beyond the natural limits, she became anxious, and I had difficulty in restoring her former feeling of security by redoubling my flattering phrases and fine protestations. Two things about me surprised her, and she noticed contradictions in my conduct which she could not reconcile:—those two things were the warmth of my words and the coldness of my actions.

You know better than any one, my dear Graciosa, that my friendship has all the characteristics of a passion; it is sudden, ardent, intense, exclusive, it has almost everything of love even to jealousy, and I had for Rosette a friendship almost equal to my friendship for you.—One might easily misunderstand it.—Rosette misunderstood it the more completely because the coat I wore made it impossible for her to have any other idea.

As I have never loved any man, the overflow of my affection has in some sort spread through my friendships with girls and young men; I plunge into them with the same earnestness and exaltation that I put into everything I do, for it is impossible for me to be moderate in anything, especially in anything touching the heart. In my eyes there are only two classes of people, those I adore and those I abhor; all others are to me as if they did not exist, and I would drive my horse over them as I drive him over the high road; in my mind they stand on the same footing with pavements and milestones.

I am naturally expansive and I have a very caressing manner.—Sometimes, forgetting all that such demonstrations might seem to mean, when I went to walk with Rosette I would put my arm about her waist, as I used to do when you and I walked together in the deserted path at the foot of my uncle's garden; or, as I leaned over the back of her chair while she embroidered, I would twine around my fingers the little stray hairs that grew upon her plump, round neck, or stroke with the back of my hand her lovely hair held in place by the comb, and increase its lustre—or indulge in some other of the endearments to which, as you know, I am much addicted with my dear friends.

She was very far from attributing these caresses to simple friendship. Friendship, as it is usually understood, does not go so far as that; but, seeing that I went no farther, she was inwardly surprised and did not know what to think; she decided finally that it was too great timidity on my part, due to my extreme youth and lack of practice in amorous intrigue, and that I must be encouraged by all sorts of advances and proofs of good-will.

Consequently she took pains to arrange a multitude of opportunities for tête-à-tête interviews in places well adapted to embolden me by their solitude and seclusion from all noise and all interruption; she took me to walk several times in the forest, to see if the voluptuous musings and amorous desires ordinarily aroused in impressionable hearts by the dense and propitious shade of the woods, could not be turned to her advantage.

One day, after we had wandered a long while through a very picturesque park that lay behind the chateau, and of which I knew only the portions near the buildings, she led me through a narrow path that wound capriciously among elder-bushes and hazels, to a little rustic cabin, a sort of charcoal-kiln, built of round timbers laid transversely, with a thatched roof and a door roughly made of five or six pieces of wood almost unplaned, the interstices being stuffed with moss and wild plants; close

beside it, between the green roots of tall ash-trees with silvery bark, marred by black spots here and there, was an abundant spring, which, a few steps away, flowed down over two marble steps into a basin filled with water-cresses greener than the emerald.—In the spots where there were no cresses, you could see at the bottom fine sand as white as snow; the water was as clear as crystal and as cold as ice; coming suddenly from the earth and never receiving the faintest ray of sunlight in that impenetrable shade, it had not time to become warm or disturbed.—Despite its crudity, I love fresh spring water, and seeing how clear that was, I could not resist the impulse to drink some of it; I leaned over and drank several times from the hollow of my hand, having no other vessel at my disposal.

Rosette expressed a desire to drink some of the water, too, to appease her thirst, and asked me to bring her a few drops, being afraid, she said, to lean over far enough to reach it.—I dipped my two hands, joined as closely as possible, into the clear fountain, then put them like a cup to Rosette's lips and held them there until she had exhausted the water they contained, which was not long, for there was very little of it, and much of that little dropped through my fingers, although I held them close together; we made a very pretty group, and it's a pity that a sculptor was not there to make a sketch of it.

When she had almost finished, having my hand so near her lips, she could not refrain from kissing it, but in such a way that I might think she was drawing in her breath to exhaust the last pearl of water collected in my palm; but I was not deceived, and the charming blush that covered her face betrayed her plainly enough.

She took my arm again and we walked on toward the cabin. The fair widow walked as close to me as possible, and leaned toward me as she spoke so that her breast was pressed against my sleeve; an extremely shrewd position and certain to disturb the equanimity of any other than myself; I could feel distinctly the pure, firm contour and the gentle warmth; furthermore I could detect a hurried undulation, which,

whether it was genuine or affected, was none the less flattering and seductive.

We arrived thus at the door of the cabin, which I opened by pushing with my foot; I certainly did not expect the spectacle that was presented to my eyes.—I supposed that the hut was carpeted with rushes, with possibly a mat on the ground and a stool or two to sit on. Nothing of the sort.

It was a boudoir furnished with all imaginable luxury.—The spaces above the doors and mirrors represented the most amorous scenes from Ovid's Metamorphoses: Salmaces and Hermaphrodite, Venus and Adonis, and Apollo and Daphne, and other mythological loves on plain lilac cameo; the pier-glasses were covered with pompon roses carved with great delicacy, and little marguerites, of which, by a refinement of luxury, only the hearts were gilded, the leaves being silvered. All the furniture was trimmed with silk cord, which was also used to relieve hangings of the most delicate blue imaginable, marvellously well adapted to bring out the whiteness and brilliancy of the skin; the mantel was crowded with a thousand charming and curious things, as were the consoles and étagères, and there was an abundant supply of easy-chairs, reclining-chairs and sofas, which proved conclusively that the retreat was not destined for the most austere avocations, and that mortification of the flesh was not in vogue there.

A lovely clock in rock-work stood on a richly-incrusted bracket opposite a large Venetian mirror, in which it was reflected with strikingly brilliant effect. It had stopped, however, as if it were a superfluous thing to mark the hours in a place where they were destined to be forgotten.

I told Rosette that that refinement of luxury pleased me, that I considered it extremely good taste to conceal the greatest elegance under an appearance of simplicity, and that I strongly approved of a woman wearing embroidered petticoats and chemises trimmed with lace, with an outer garment of simple cloth; it was a delicate attention for the lover that she had or might have, for which he would be

grateful beyond words, and that it certainly was better to put a diamond in a walnut than a walnut in a gold box.

Rosette, to prove that she agreed with me, raised her dress slightly and showed me the edge of a petticoat very richly embroidered with great flowers and leaves; it rested entirely with me to be admitted to the secret of greater interior splendors; but I did not ask to see if the magnificence of the chemise equalled that of the petticoat; it is probable that it did not fall short of it.—Rosette dropped the skirt of her dress, sorry not to have shown more.—However, even that exhibition had served to disclose the beginning of a perfectly-turned calf, giving a most favorable idea of what was above.—The leg, which she put forward, the better to show off her petticoat, was in very truth miraculously graceful and shapely in its neat, tight-fitting pearl-gray silk stocking, and the little heeled slipper, terminating in a rosette of ribbon resembled the glass slipper worn by Cinderella. I complimented her most sincerely upon it and told her that I could hardly imagine a prettier leg or tinier foot.—To which she replied with a frankness and ingenuousness altogether charming and very clever, too:—

"That is true."

Then she went to a cupboard in the wall, took out several bottles of liquors and some plates of cakes and sweetmeats, placed them all upon a small table and sat down beside me in a narrow chair, so that I was obliged to put my arm behind her to avoid being too crowded. As both her hands were free, while I could use only my left, she filled my glass with her own hands and placed fruit and sugar-plums on my plate; seeing that I was helping myself rather awkwardly, she said: "Oh! don't try to do it; I'll feed you, you child, as you don't know how to feed yourself." And she put the pieces in my mouth and compelled me to swallow them faster than I wanted to do, pushing them in with her pretty fingers, just as they do to chickens when they are fattening them—which made her laugh heartily.—I could hardly avoid returning

upon her fingers the kiss she had just now bestowed upon the palm of my hand, and, as if to prevent me, but really to give me a more solid support for my kiss, she struck my mouth two or three times with the back of her hand.

She had drunk two or three fingers of Crême des Barbades and a glass of Canary, and I almost as much. That assuredly was not a great quantity; but it was enough to enliven two women who were accustomed to drink nothing but water barely colored with wine.—Rosette threw herself back and pressed against my arm very amorously.—She had thrown aside her mantle, and I could see the beginning of her breast, which was distended and thrown forward by that position; the tone of the flesh was ravishingly delicate and transparent; the shape marvellously graceful and solid at the same time. I gazed at her for some time with indefinable emotion and pleasure, and the thought came to my mind that men are more favored than we in their passions, that we give the most priceless treasures into their possession and that they have nothing similar to offer us.—What a delight it must be to run one's lips over that fine, smooth skin, those swelling contours which seem to go out to meet the kiss and provoke it! that satiny flesh, those waving lines which melt into one another, the silky hair that is so soft to the touch; what inexhaustible stores of delicious pleasure that we have not with men!—Our caresses can be only-passive, and yet there is more pleasure in giving than in receiving.

These remarks I certainly should not have made last year, and I could have looked at all the bosoms and shoulders in the world without worrying as to whether they were well or ill shaped; but since I have laid aside the garments of my sex and have lived among young men, a sentiment has developed in me that was entirely unfamiliar to me before:—the sentiment of beauty. Women are usually devoid of that sentiment, I don't quite see why, for they would seem at first glance better fitted to judge beauty than men;—but as they are the ones who possess beauty, and as knowledge of one's self is the most difficult knowledge to acquire, it is not surprising that they know nothing about it.—Ordinarily, if one woman considers another woman pretty, you

can be sure that the latter is hideously ugly, and that no man would look twice at her.—On the other hand, all the women whose beauty and grace are vaunted by men, are unanimously voted unsightly and affected by the whole petticoated swarm; there is no end to the outcries and clamor. If I were what I seem to be, I would take no other guide in making my selection, and the disapprobation of the women would be a sufficient certificate of beauty.

Now I know beauty and love it; the clothes I wear separate me from my sex and take away anything like rivalry; I am in a better position to judge than anybody else.—I am no longer a woman, but I am not yet a man, and passion will not blind me so far as to take manikins for idols; I look on coolly, without prejudice for or against, and my position is as completely disinterested as possible.

The length and fineness of the eyelashes, the transparency of the temples, the limpidity of the crystalline lens, the curves of the ear, the color and quality of the hair, the aristocratic shape of the feet and hands, the slenderness of the ankle and wrist, a thousand and one things which I used not to notice and which constitute real beauty and prove purity of breeding, guide me now in my judgments, and make it almost impossible for me to go astray.—I think that one could accept with eyes closed a woman of whom I had said: "Really, she is not bad."

By a natural consequence I am a much better judge of pictures than formerly, and, although I have only a very superficial knowledge of the masters, it would be difficult to pass off a poor work on me for a good one; I find that this study possesses a strange and profound fascination; for, like everything in the world, beauty, moral or physical, requires to be studied and cannot be understood at once.

But let us return to Rosette; the transition from this subject to her is not a difficult one; they are two ideas that attract each other.

As I said, the fair widow had thrown herself back against my arm and her head rested against my shoulder; emotion tinged her cheeks with a delicate pink flush,

admirably heightened by a coquettish little black patch; her teeth glistened through her smile like rain-drops in the heart of a poppy, and her lashes, half-lowered, enhanced the moist brilliancy of her great eyes;—a sunbeam caused a thousand metallic gleams to play upon her silken, glossy hair, a few locks of which had escaped from the comb and fell in natural curls along her plump, round neck, showing off the warm whiteness of the skin; some tiny stray hairs, more rebellious than the others, held aloof from the mass and flew hither and thither in capricious spirals, gleaming like gold, and taking on all the shades of the prism as the light passed through them:—you would have said they were some of the golden threads that surround the heads of virgins in the old pictures.—Neither of us spoke and I amused myself by following the little sky-blue veins under the transparent pearly skin of her temples, and the gradual, insensible disappearance of the down at the extremity of her eyebrows.

She seemed to be absorbed in thought and to be cradled in dreams of infinite pleasure; her arms hung beside her body, as soft and flexible as loosened scarfs; her head fell back farther and farther, as if the muscles that held it had been cut or were too weak to hold it longer. She had drawn her little feet under her skirt, and had succeeded in forcing herself well into my corner of the chair, so that, although it was a very narrow affair, there was a considerable vacant space on the other side.

Her supple, yielding body shaped itself to mine like wax and took its whole exterior outline as exactly as possible:—water would not have found its way more scrupulously into every irregularity in the line.—Thus glued to my side, she produced the effect of the double stroke that painters give to the shadow side of their picture in laying on their color.—Only an amorous woman can manage such undulations and entwining.—The ivies and willows are nowhere.

The gentle warmth of her body penetrated through her clothes and mine; a thousand magnetic currents played about her; her whole life seemed to have passed into me

and to have abandoned her completely. From moment to moment she languished and sank and yielded more and more: a slight perspiration stood on her lustrous brow: her eyes were swimming in moisture and two or three times she made a movement as if to put up her hands to hide them; but her wearied arms stopped half-way and fell back upon her knees, and she could not do it;—a great tear overflowed and rolled down her burning cheek where it was soon dried.

My situation was becoming very embarrassing and decidedly ridiculous;—I felt that I must seem tremendously stupid and that feeling annoyed me to the last degree, although it was not in my power to change my behavior.—Enterprising conduct on my part was out of the question, and it was the only sort that would have been suited to the occasion. I was too sure of meeting with no resistance, to take the risk, and in truth I did not know which way to turn. To pay compliments and make gallant speeches would have been very well in the beginning, but nothing would have seemed more insipid at the point at which we had arrived;—to rise and go out would have been unspeakably rude; and, indeed, I am not sure that Rosette wouldn't have played the part of Potiphar and held me by the corner of my cloak.—I should have had no virtuous reason to give her for my resistance; and then, I confess it to my shame, this scene, equivocal as it was in respect to myself, did not lack a certain fascination to which I yielded more than I should have done; that ardent passion warmed me with its flame and I was really grieved at my inability to satisfy it; I even longed to be a man, as I seemed to be, in order to crown Rosette's love, and I deeply regretted her mistake. My respiration quickened, I felt a flush rising to my cheeks, and I was hardly less agitated than my poor lovelorn companion.—The idea of the identity of sex gradually faded away, leaving behind only a vague idea of pleasure; a mist came before my eyes, my lips trembled, and if Rosette had been a young man instead of what she was, she would have gained an easy victory over me beyond question.

At last, unable to endure it, she sprang suddenly to her feet with a sort of spasmodic

movement and began to walk hurriedly up and down the room; then she stopped before the mirror and adjusted a few locks of hair that were out of place. During that walk of hers I cut but a sorry figure and I hardly knew what face to put upon the matter.

She paused in front of me and seemed to reflect.

She believed that inordinate bashfulness alone held me back, that I was more of a school-boy than she had at first supposed.—Being quite beside herself and stirred to the highest pitch of amorous excitement, she determined to make a supreme effort and to stake all to win all, at the risk of losing the game.

She came to me, seated herself on my knees with lightning-like rapidity, threw her arms around my neck, clasped her hands behind my head, and her mouth clung to mine in a fierce embrace; I felt her breast, half-uncovered, throbbing against mine, and her interlaced fingers moving convulsively in my hair. A shudder ran all over my body and the nipples of my bosom stood erect.

Rosette's mouth did not leave mine; her lips enveloped my lips, her teeth touched my teeth, our breaths mingled.—I recoiled for an instant, and I turned my head away two or three times to avoid the kiss; but an invincible attraction drew me forward again, and I returned it almost as ardently as she had given it to me. I have no very clear idea what would have been the end of it all, had it not been for a tremendous barking out of doors followed by a sound as of feet scratching. The door yielded and a beautiful white greyhound came yelping and bounding into the cabin.

Chapter XII — She came to me, seated herself on my knees with lightning-like rapidity, threw her arms around my neck, clasped her hands behind my head, and her mouth clung to mine in a fierce embrace; I felt her breast, half-uncovered, throbbing against mine, and her interlaced fingers moving convulsively in my hair.

Rosette rose abruptly and rushed to the further end of the room: the beautiful white hound leaped joyously around her and tried to reach her hands to lick them; she was

so confused that she could hardly arrange her mantle over her shoulders.

The greyhound was her brother Alcibiades's favorite dog; he never left him, and when you saw him you could be sure that his master was not far away;—that was what caused poor Rosette's alarm.

Alcibiades did, in fact, appear a moment later, all booted and spurred, with his whip in his hand:—"Ah! here you are," he said; "I have been looking for you for an hour and I certainly shouldn't have found you if my good old Snug hadn't driven you to earth in your hiding-place."

And he glanced at his sister with a half-serious, half-playful expression that made her blush to the whites of her eyes.

"You apparently had some very knotty subjects to discuss to induce you to seek this profound solitude?—you were talking about theology, I suppose, and the twofold nature of the soul?"

"Oh! Mon Dieu, no; our minds were engrossed by subjects much less sublime; we were eating cake and talking fashions—that's all."

"I don't believe a word of it; you looked to me as if you were buried deep in some sentimental discussion;—but, to divert your minds from your vaporish conversation, I think it would be a good idea for you to take a turn on horseback with me.—I have a new mare I want to try.—You shall ride her too, Théodore, and we'll see what we can make of her."

We went out together, I on his arm and Rosette on mine; the expressions on our faces were curiously different.—Alcibiades was pensive, I was altogether content, and Rosette excessively annoyed.

Alcibiades had arrived most opportunely for me, most inopportunely for Rosette, who thus lost, or thought that she lost, all the fruit of her shrewd attacks and her ingenious tactics.—She had it all to do over again;—a quarter of an hour later, deuce take me if I know what might have been the conclusion of that incident—I can

imagine no possible outcome.—Perhaps it would have been better that Alcibiades should not intervene just at the decisive moment like a deux ex machina;—then the thing would have had to come to a climax in one way or another.—Two or three times during that scene I was on the point of telling Rosette who I was; but the fear of being taken for an adventuress and of having my secret revealed retained upon my lips the words that were already to take flight.

Such a condition of things could not last.—My departure was the only method of cutting short that issue-less intrigue; and so, at dinner, I formally announced that I must take my leave the very next day.—Rosette, who was sitting beside me, almost fainted at the news, and dropped her glass. A sudden pallor overspread her lovely face; she bestowed upon me a grieved, reproachful glance which made my emotion and trouble almost as great as her own.

The aunt raised her old wrinkled hands with a gesture of painful surprise, and in her shrill, trembling voice, which wavered even more than usual, she said: "Oh! my dear Monsieur Théodore, are you going to leave us like this? That's not right; yesterday you did not show the slightest disposition to go.—The postman has not arrived, so you have received no letters and you have no reason to go. You gave us another fortnight and now you take it back; really you have no right to do it: a thing given cannot be taken back.—You see how Rosette looks at you, and how displeased she is; I warn you that I shall be as displeased as she, and that I will glare at you as fiercely, and the glare of sixty-eight years is a little more terrible than the glare of twenty-three. See to what you voluntarily expose yourself; to the wrath of the aunt and the niece, and all this on account of some whim that has suddenly taken possession of you between the fruit and the cheese."

Alcibiades, bringing his fist down on the table, swore that he would barricade the doors of the chateau and hamstring my horse rather than let me go.

Rosette gave me another glance, so sad and so supplicating, that one must have been

as ferocious as a tiger who has eaten nothing for eight days not to have been touched by it.—I did not resist, and although I was exceedingly loth to do it, I made a solemn promise to remain.—Dear Rosette would gladly have leaped on my neck and kissed my mouth for my complaisance; Alcibiades took my hand in his great hand and shook my arm so violently that he almost tore it out at the shoulder, changed the shape of my rings from round to oval and drove them deep into three of my fingers.

The old lady in her joy took an immense pinch of snuff.

Rosette, however, did not completely recover her cheerfulness;—the idea that I might go and that I was inclined to do so, an idea that had not before presented itself clearly to her mind, threw her into a profound reverie. The color that my announcement of my departure had driven from her cheeks did not return with the same brilliancy as before;—there was still some trace of pallor on her cheeks, and of anxiety deep in her heart.—My conduct toward her surprised her more and more.—After the marked advances she had made, she could not understand my motives for showing so much restraint in my relations with her: what she wanted was to bring me to a decisive engagement before my departure, having no doubt that after that it would be extremely easy to keep me as long as she chose.

Therein she was right, and, if I had not been a woman, her reckoning would have been accurate; for, however satiated one may be with pleasure and filled with the disgust that ordinarily follows possession, every man who has a heart situated at all as it should be and who is not wretchedly blasé and beyond redemption, feels his love increase with his good-fortune, and very often the best way to retain a lover who is ready to take flight is to give one's self up to him with entire abandon.

Rosette designed to bring me to something decisive before my departure. Knowing how difficult it is to take up a liaison later at the point at which you left it, and, furthermore, being in no wise sure of ever being thrown with me again under such favorable auspices, she would neglect none of the opportunities that might present

themselves to place me in a position where I must declare myself in precise terms and abandon the evasive manœuvres behind which I was in the habit of entrenching myself. As I, for my part, had a very decided purpose to avoid any such meeting as that in the rustic pavilion, and as I could not, without making myself ridiculous, treat Rosette too coldly and import a childish prudery into our relations, I did not know just how to behave, and I tried to arrange it so that there would always be a third person with us.—Rosette, on the contrary, did her utmost to be left alone with me, and she succeeded very often, the chateau being at some distance from the town and little frequented by the neighboring nobility.—This sullen resistance saddened and surprised her;—at times she was assailed by doubts and hesitation as to the power of her charms, and, seeing that she made so little impression upon me, she was sometimes not far from believing that she was ugly.—Thereupon she redoubled her attentions and her coquetry, and although her mourning did not permit her to resort to all the devices of the toilet, she knew how to embellish it and vary it in such a way as to be every day two or three times more charming than the day before—which is no small thing to say.—She tried everything: she was playful, melancholy, tender, passionate, gracious, coquettish, even affected; one after another she put on all the fascinating masks that sit so well upon women that we cannot say whether they are real masks or their real faces;—she assumed successively eight or ten different, strongly-contrasted individualities, to see which pleased me best and settle upon that. She constituted a whole seraglio in herself alone, and I had only to throw down the handkerchief; but, of course, nothing succeeded.

The failure of all these stratagems caused her to fall into a state of profound stupefaction.—Indeed, she would have made old Nestor's brain whirl and melted the ice in chaste Hippolytus himself,—and I resembled no one less than Hippolytus or Nestor: I am young and I had a haughty, resolute mien, was bold in speech and, everywhere except in a tête-à-tête, very self-possessed.

She might well have thought that all the witches of Thrace and Thessaly had cast

their charms upon my body, or that, at all events, I had some physical impediment, and so have formed a very contemptuous opinion of my virility, which does not amount to much in truth. However, it seems that that idea did not occur to her and that she attributed my strange reserve solely to my lack of love for her.

The days passed and her affairs made no progress.—She was visibly affected by that fact: an expression of anxious melancholy replaced the bright smile that always played about her lips; the corners of her mouth, once so joyously arched, drooped sensibly and formed a straight, serious line; the small veins in her eyelids stood out more clearly; her cheeks, formerly so like the peach, had retained nothing of that appearance except the imperceptible velvety down. Often I saw her from my window in the morning walking in the flower-garden in her peignoir; she hardly lifted her feet, as if she were gliding rather than walking, her arms folded across her breast, her head bent forward, doubled over like a willow branch dragging in the water, and with a swaying, uncertain motion like a drapery that is too long and touches the floor.—At such moments she resembled one of the amorous maidens of old, victims of the anger of Venus, upon whom the pitiless goddess empties all the vials of her wrath:—thus I imagine Psyche must have appeared when she lost Cupid.

On the days when she did not exert herself to overcome my coldness and my hesitation her love appeared in a simple, primitive guise that would have fascinated me; there was a silent, confiding unconstraint, a chaste prodigality of caresses, an inexhaustible abundance and plenitude of affection, all the treasures of a lovely nature displayed without reserve. She had none of the petty meannesses that we see in almost all women, even the most generously endowed; she sought no disguise, but calmly allowed me to see the full extent of her passion. Her self-esteem did not rebel for an instant at my failure to respond to such persistent advances, for pride leaves the heart on the day that love enters; and if ever any one was truly loved, I have been and by Rosette.—She suffered, but without complaint and without bitterness, and she attributed the ill-success of her endeavors to herself

alone.—Meanwhile her pallor was increasing every day, and the lilies and roses had fought a pitched battle on the battlefield of her cheeks, resulting in the definitive rout of the latter; that grieved me deeply, but in all conscience I could do less to remedy it than any one.—The more gently and affectionately I spoke to her, the more caressing my manner was to her, the deeper in her heart I buried the barbed arrow of impossible love.—To console her to-day, I exposed her to much greater sorrow in the future; my remedies poisoned her wound while seeming to allay the pain.—I was sorry in a certain sense for all the pleasant things I had succeeded in saying to her, and I would have been glad, on account of my very warm friendship for her, to find a way to make her hate me. Unselfishness can go no farther than that, for I most certainly should have been sorry;—but it would have been better so.

I tried two or three times to say something harsh to her, but I very soon returned to incense, for I dread her smile less than her tears.—On such occasions, although the purity of my purpose absolves me fully in my conscience, I am more touched than I ought to be, and I feel something which is not far from being remorse.—A tear can hardly be dried except by a kiss, and one cannot decently leave that duty to a handkerchief, though it be of the finest lawn imaginable;—I simply undo what I have done, the tear is very soon forgotten, much sooner than the kiss, and the result so far as I am concerned is always increased embarrassment.

Rosette, who sees that I am going to escape her, clings obstinately and wretchedly to the remains of her hope, and my position becomes more and more complicated.—The strange sensation that I felt in the little hermitage, and the inconceivable excitement into which I was thrown by the ardor of my beautiful lover, have been repeated several times, although in a less violent form; and often, as I sit beside Rosette, with her hand in mine, listening to her as she talks to me in her soft, cooing voice, I imagine that I am a man as she believes, and that my failure to respond to her love is pure cruelty on my part.

One evening by some chance I found myself alone with the old lady in the green room;—she had in her hand a piece of embroidery, for, notwithstanding her sixty-eight years, she was never idle, being desirous, as she said, to finish before her death a piece of furniture on which she had been at work for a very long time. Feeling a little tired she put aside her work and leaned back in her great easy-chair; she looked at me very attentively and her gray eyes gleamed through her spectacles with strange vivacity; two or three times she passed her thin hand across her wrinkled forehead and seemed to be in deep thought.—The memory of a time that was no more and which she regretted gave to her face an expression of melancholy emotion.—I said nothing for fear of disturbing her thoughts, and the silence lasted some minutes; at last she broke it.

"They are Henri's eyes,—my dear Henri's,—the same bright, melting glance, the same way of carrying the head, the same sweet, proud face;—one would say it was he.—You cannot imagine how striking the resemblance is, Monsieur Théodore;—when I see you, I can no longer believe that Henri is dead; I think that he has been on a long journey from which he has at last returned.—You have given me much pleasure and much pain, Théodore!—pleasure by reminding me of my poor Henri, pain by showing me how great a loss I have suffered; sometimes I have taken you for his phantom.—I cannot get used to the idea that you are going to leave us; it seems to me that I am losing my Henri once more."

I told her that if it were possible for me to remain longer I would do it with pleasure, but that my stay had already been prolonged far beyond what it should have been; that I looked forward to returning, however, and that my memories of the chateau would be too pleasant to allow me to forget it so quickly.

"Sorry as I am to have you leave us, Monsieur Théodore," she continued, pursuing her thought, "there is some one here who will be more so than I.—You understand whom I refer to, without my telling you. I don't know what we shall do with Rosette

when you have gone; but the old chateau is a very dull place. Alcibiades is always hunting, and for a young woman like her the society of a poor helpless old creature like myself is not very entertaining."

"If any one should feel regret, madame, it is neither you nor Rosette, but myself; you lose little, I lose much; you will readily find society more agreeable than mine, but it is more than doubtful if I can ever find any to replace yours and Rosette's."

"I have no wish to quarrel with your modesty, my dear monsieur, but I know what I am saying, and I say what is true: it is probable that we shall not see Madame Rosette in good humor for a long while, for you are the one who makes rain or fair weather on her cheeks now. Her period of mourning is drawing to an end and it would be truly a deplorable thing that she should lay aside her cheerfulness with her last black dress; that would be a very bad example and altogether opposed to ordinary laws. It is something that you can prevent without much trouble, and that you will prevent, I have no doubt," said the old lady, dwelling on the last words.

"Most assuredly I will do my utmost to have your dear niece preserve her cheerfulness, as you credit me with so much influence over her. But I can hardly see how I am to set about it."

"Oh! really, you can hardly see! What are your bright eyes good for?—I didn't know that you were so near-sighted. Rosette is free; she has eighty thousand francs a year absolutely at her own disposal, and some women twice as ugly as she are considered very pretty. You are young, well-favored, and, so far as I know, unmarried; it seems to me the simplest thing in the world, unless you have an insurmountable horror for Rosette, which is difficult to believe."—

"And which is not and cannot be the fact; for her mind is as attractive as her body, and she is one of those who might be ugly without any one noticing it or wishing her otherwise."—

"She might be ugly with impunity and she is charming.—That is what I call being

right twice over; I do not doubt what you say, but she has taken the wisest course.—So far as she is concerned, I can readily assure you that there are a thousand people whom she hates worse than you, and that, if she were to be asked the question several times, she would finally confess perhaps that you are not exactly indifferent to her. You have on your finger a ring that would fit her perfectly, for your hand is almost as small as hers, and I am almost sure that she would accept it with pleasure."

The good lady paused for a few seconds to see what effect her words produced on me, and I cannot say whether she was likely to be satisfied with the expression of my face.—I was cruelly embarrassed, and I didn't know what to reply. From the beginning of the interview I had seen whither all her hints were tending; and although I almost expected what she had just said, I was surprised and dumfounded; I had no choice but to refuse; but what plausible reasons could I give for such a refusal? I had none except that I was a woman; that was an excellent reason, I agree, but it was precisely the one that I did not choose to give.

I could hardly throw the blame upon intractable, ridiculous relations; all the relations in the world would have welcomed such a match with delirious joy. Even if Rosette had not been what she was, sweet and lovely, and of gentle birth, the eighty thousand francs a year would have removed every obstacle.—To say that I did not love her would have been neither true nor honorable, for I really loved her dearly, more dearly than one woman loves another.

I was too young to pretend to be engaged to somebody else: the best expedient I could invent was to give her to understand that, as I was a younger son, family interests required that I should enter the Order of Malta, and thus made it impossible for me to think of marriage: which fact caused me the greatest sorrow imaginable since I had seen Rosette.

That answer was not worth the breath required to put it into words and I was

perfectly conscious of it. The old lady was not deceived by it and did not look upon it as definitive; she thought that I had spoken thus in order to have time to reflect and consult my relations.—In truth, such a marriage was so advantageous and so far beyond my hopes that it was not possible that I should refuse it, even if I had loved Rosette only a little or none at all; it was an opportunity not to be neglected.

I am unable to say whether the aunt opened the subject to me at her niece's instigation, but I am inclined to think that Rosette was not a party to it; she loved me too simple-mindedly and ardently to think of anything else than immediate possession of me, and marriage would certainly have been the last method she would have employed.—The dowager, who had not failed to notice our intimacy, which she probably believed to be much greater than it was, had arranged this plan in her head, in order to keep me with her, and to replace, as far as possible, her dear son Henri, killed in the army, to whom she discovered such a striking resemblance in me. She had taken great pleasure in the idea and had taken advantage of that brief tête-à-tête to come to an understanding with me. I saw by her manner that she did not consider herself defeated, and that she proposed to return soon to the charge, which vexed me to the last degree.

Rosette, for her part, in the evening of that same day, took a step which had such serious results, that I must tell you the story by itself and not in this letter, which has already exceeded all bounds.—You will see to what extraordinary adventures I am predestined, and that Heaven plainly cut me out for a hero of romance; upon my word, I don't know just what moral can be drawn from all this,—but lives are not like fables, each chapter hasn't a rhymed sentence for a tailpiece.—Very often the meaning of life is that it is not death. Nothing more. Adieu, my dear, I kiss your lovely eyes. You will soon receive the sequel of my triumphant biography.

XIII

Théodore—Rosalind—for I know not by what name to call you—I saw you a

moment ago and now I am writing to you.—How I wish I might know your woman's name! it must be as sweet as honey and float about the lips softer and more melodious than poetry! I should never have dared to tell you that, and yet I should die not to tell you.—No one knows what I have suffered, no one can know, I myself could give only a faint idea of it; words do not express such agony; I should seem to have twisted my phrases at will, to have made mighty efforts to say strange and novel things and to indulge in the most extravagant exaggeration even if I should describe my feelings in far from adequate terms.

O Rosalind, I love you, I adore you, would that there were a word stronger than that! I have never loved, I have never adored any woman but you;—I prostrate myself, I annihilate myself before you, and I would like to compel all creation to bend the knee before my idol; to me you are more than all nature, more than myself, more than God;—indeed, it seems strange to me that God does not come down from heaven to be your slave. Where you are not, everything is a desert, everything is dead, everything is black; you alone people the world for me; you are my life, my sun;—you are everything.—Your smile makes the day, your sadness makes the night; the spheres follow the movements of your body and the celestial harmonies govern themselves by you, O my beloved queen! O my beautiful real dream! You are arrayed in splendor and you swim always in a flood of radiant beams.

It is hardly three months that I have known you, but I have loved you a long, long time.—Before I ever saw you, I was languishing with love of you; I called you, I sought you, and I was in despair at not meeting you on my road, for I knew that I could never love another woman.—How many times you have appeared to me—at the window of the mysterious chateau, leaning in melancholy mood on the balcony and throwing to the wind the petals of some flower, or galloping through the dark paths of the forest, an impetuous Amazon, on your Turkish horse, whiter than the snow!—There were your proud yet gentle eyes, your transparent hands, your lovely, waving hair and your adorably disdainful half-smile.—But you were less beautiful,

for the most ardent, unbridled imagination, the imagination of painter or poet, could not attain the sublime poesy of the original. There is within you an inexhaustible spring of charms, an ever-gushing fountain of irresistible seductions; you are a casket, always open, of the most precious pearls, and in your slightest movements, in your most careless gestures, in your most unstudied poses, you scatter to right and left inestimable treasures of beauty, with royal profusion. If the graceful undulations of a contour, the fleeting outlines of an attitude, could be fixed and preserved in a mirror, the mirrors before which you pass would cause the divinest canvases of Raphael to be despised and looked upon as tavern signs.

Chapter XIII — How many times you have appeared to me—at the window of the mysterious chateau, leaning in melancholy mood on the balcony and throwing to the wind the petals of some flower. * * * There were your proud yet gentle eyes, your transparent hands, your lovely, waving hair and your adorably disdainful half smile.

Every gesture, every motion of the head, every different aspect of your beauty, was engraved on the mirror of my mind with a diamond-point, and nothing in the world could efface its deep impression; I know where the shadow was and where the light, the flat surface illumined by the sunbeam, and the spot where the wandering reflection blended with the softer tints of the neck and cheek.—I could draw you absent; your image is always posing before me.

When I was a child, I stood for whole hours before the pictures of the old masters and gazed eagerly into their dark depths.—I scanned the lovely faces of saints and goddesses whose flesh, of the whiteness of ivory or wax, stood out so marvellously against the dark backgrounds, blackened by the decomposition of the colors; I admired the simplicity and magnificence of their carriage, the strange grace of their hands and feet, the nobility and beauty of their features, at once so delicate and so strong; the magnificence of the draperies which enveloped their divine forms, and whose purple folds seemed to thrust themselves forward like lips to kiss those lovely

bodies.—By dint of persistently plunging my eyes beneath the veil of haze thickened by centuries, my sight would become confused, the outlines of objects would lose their precision, and a sort of motionless, inanimate life would seem to inspire all those pale phantoms of vanished beauties; I always ended by discovering that the faces bore a vague resemblance to the fair stranger whom I adored with all my heart; I sighed as I thought that she whom I was destined to love was perhaps one of them and had been dead three hundred years. That thought often affected me so deeply as to make me shed tears, and I would fly into a fierce passion against myself for not having been born in the sixteenth century, when all those beauties lived. I considered that it was unpardonable stupidity and folly on my part.

When I grew older, the pleasing phantom possessed me even more completely. I saw it always between me and the women I had for mistresses, smiling ironically and mocking at their human beauty with all the perfection of its divine beauty. It made women who were really charming seem ugly to me—women well adapted to make any man happy who was not in love with the adorable shadow, whose body I did not believe to be in existence, but which was only the premonition of your beauty. O Rosalind! how wretched I have been because of you before I knew you! O Théodore! what wretchedness I have endured because of you since I have known you!—If you wish, you can throw open to me the paradise of my dreams. You are standing on the threshold, like a guardian angel enveloped in her wings, and you hold the golden key in your fair hands.—Tell me, Rosalind, tell me, will you do it?

I await only a word from you to live or die;—will you say it?

Are you Apollo driven forth from heaven, or the fair Aphrodite coming from the bosom of the sea? Where did you leave your chariot of precious stones drawn by four fiery steeds? what have you done with your shell of mother-of-pearl, and your dolphins with the sky-blue tails?—what amorous nymph has blended her body with yours in the midst of a kiss, O thou comely youth, more charming than Cyparissus

or Adonis, more adorable than all women in the world?

But you are a woman; we are no longer living in the days of the Metamorphoses;—Adonis and Hermaphroditus are dead,—and such a degree of beauty cannot now be attained by a man;—for, since heroes and gods are no more, women alone retain in their marble bodies, as in a Grecian temple, the priceless gift of shape anathematized by Christ, and prove that earth has no reason to envy heaven; you worthily represent the first divinity in the world, the purest symbol of the eternal essence—beauty.

As soon as I saw you, something was torn away within me, a veil fell, a door opened, I felt that I was flooded inwardly with waves of light; I realized that my life was before me, and that I had finally reached the decisive crossroads.—The obscure, lost portions of the half-radiant face I was seeking to distinguish in the shadow were suddenly illuminated; the dark tints in which the background of the picture was enveloped were flooded with a soft light; a delicate rosy flush stole over the ultramarine, slightly tinged with green, of the middle distances; the trees, which formed only confused silhouettes, began to stand out more clearly; the dew-laden flowers made bright spots on the dull green of the turf. I saw the scarlet-breasted bullfinch at the end of an elder branch; the little white rabbit, pink-eyed and with ears erect, putting out his head between two wisps of wild thyme and passing his paw over his nose, and the timid stag coming to drink at the spring and gaze at his branching antlers in the water.—On the morning when the sun of love rose upon my life, everything was changed; where shapes barely outlined and rendered terrible or unnatural by their uncertainty, once vacillated before my eyes, were now graceful groups of trees in blossom, hillsides forming charming amphitheatres, silver palaces, with their terraces covered with urns and statues, bathing their feet in the azure lakes and apparently swimming between two skies; the shape that I took in the obscurity for a gigantic dragon with wings armed with talons, crawling on the darkness with his scaly paws, was simply a felucca with silken sails and oars painted and gilded,

filled with women and musicians; and the horrible crab which I fancied that I saw waving his claws and nippers over my head was only a fan-shaped palm whose long, narrow leaves moved gently in the night wind.—My chimeras and my errors have vanished:—I love.

Despairing of ever finding you, I accused my dream of falsehood, and reviled fate bitterly;—I said to myself that I was very foolish to seek such a type, or that nature was very unfruitful and the Creator very unskilful, not to be able to realize the simple thought of my heart.—Prometheus had the noble aspiration to make a man and enter into rivalry with God; I had created a woman, and I believed that, to punish me for my audacity, a longing always unsatisfied would gnaw at my liver like another vulture; I expected to be bound with diamond chains upon a hoary rock on the shore of the wild ocean,—but the lovely sea-nymphs with long green hair, lifting their snow-white, swelling breasts above the waves and showing the sun their mother-of-pearl bodies all dripping with the tears of the sea, would not have come and reclined upon the bank to converse with me and comfort me in my agony, as they do in old Æschylus's play.

It did not turn out so.

You came and I was fain to reproach my imagination with its impotence.—I have not suffered the torture that I dreaded, of being chained forever upon a sterile rock, the victim of an idea; but I have suffered none the less. I had seen that you did, in fact, exist; that my presentiments had not lied to me in that respect; but you appeared to me with the ambiguous, and terrifying beauty of the sphinx. Like Isis, the mysterious goddess, you were enveloped in a veil which I dared not raise for fear of falling dead.

If you knew with what panting, anxious scrutiny, under my apparent indifference, I watched you and followed your slightest movements! Nothing escaped me; how earnestly I gazed at the little flesh that appeared at your neck or your wrists, trying

to determine your sex! Your hands were the subject of profound study on my part, and I can fairly say that I know every detail of their shape, every imperceptible vein, and the tiniest dimple; you might be enveloped from head to foot in the most impenetrable domino, and I would recognize you simply by looking at one of your fingers. I analyzed the undulations of your gait, the way in which you put your foot to the ground, your manner of pushing back your hair; I tried to surprise your secret in the management of your body.—I watched you particularly in your hours of relaxation when the bones seem to be removed from the body, and when the limbs relax and bend as if they were unstrung, to see if the feminine lines would declare themselves more boldly in that careless, forgetful attitude. No one was ever the object of such ardent scrutiny as you.

I forgot myself in contemplating you for hours at a time. Withdrawing to some corner of the salon, with a book that I did not read in my hand, or crouching behind the curtains in my bedroom, when you were in yours and the blinds at your window were raised,—at such times, deeply penetrated by the marvellous beauty that emanates from you and creates a luminous atmosphere about you, I said to myself: "Surely it is a woman;"—then suddenly an abrupt, decided gesture, a virile tone, or some cavalierish action would destroy in a moment my frail edifice of probabilities, and throw me back into my former irresolution.

I would be sailing before the wind over the boundless ocean of amorous reverie, and you would come to ask me to fence or to play tennis with you; the young woman, transformed into a young gallant, would deal me terrific truncheon-like blows and send the foil flying out of my hands as deftly and quickly as the most expert bravo in the trade; every minute in the day I had some such disappointment.

I would be on the point of approaching you, to say: "My dear lady, I adore you," and I would see you lean over and whisper tenderly to some fair dame, and blow madrigals and compliments through her hair in puffs.—Judge of my position.—Or

else some woman, whom, in my mad jealousy, I would have flayed alive with the greatest pleasure on earth, would hang upon your arm, would lead you aside to confide her paltry secrets to you, and detain you for whole hours in a window recess.

It made me furious to see women speak to you, for that forced me to believe that you were a man, and, even if you had been, I could not have endured it without intense suffering.—When the men approached you and addressed you freely and familiarly, I was even more jealous, because I thought this—that you were a woman, and perhaps they suspected it as I did; I was tortured by the most contrary passions, and I did not know what to believe.

I became angry with myself, I reproached myself most bitterly for being so tormented by such a love, and for not having the strength to tear from my heart the noxious plant that had sprung up there in one night like a poisonous mushroom; I cursed you, I called you my evil genius; I believed for an instant that you were Beelzebub in person, for I could not explain the sensation to which I was a prey when in your presence.

When I was thoroughly convinced that you were in reality nothing else than a woman in disguise, the improbability of the motives with which I sought to justify such a whim plunged me into my uncertainty once more, and I began anew to deplore that the figure I had dreamed of for the love of my soul, should prove to belong to a person of the same sex as myself;—I blamed the chance that had arrayed a man in such a charming exterior, and, to my everlasting misery, had thrown him in my way when I had ceased to hope for the realization of the ideal of pure beauty which I cherished so long in my heart.

But now, Rosalind, I am profoundly certain that you are the loveliest of women; I have seen you in the costume of your sex, I have seen your pure, perfectly-rounded shoulders and arms. The upper part of your breast, which your neckerchief disclosed, can belong only to a young woman; neither Meleager, the beautiful

huntsman, nor the effeminate Bacchus, with their uncertain figures, had such purity of outline or such fineness of skin, although they were both made of Parian marble and polished by the amorous kisses of twenty centuries.—I am no longer worried in that direction—But that is not all: you are a woman, and my love is no longer reprehensible; I can give myself up to it without remorse, and abandon myself to the current that draws me toward you; however ardent and unruly my passion, it is legitimate and I can avow it; but you, Rosalind, for whom I have burned in silence and who knew nothing of the immensity of my love, you in whom this tardy disclosure will perhaps arouse no sentiment but surprise—do you hate me, do you love me, can you love me? I do not know—and I tremble and am unhappier than before.

At times it seems to me that you do not hate me;—when we played As You Like It, you gave to certain passages in your part a special intonation that emphasized their meaning, and urged me, in some sense, to declare myself.—I fancied that I could see in your eyes and your smile gracious promises of indulgent treatment, and could feel your hand respond to the pressure of mine.—If I am mistaken—O God! that is a contingency on which I dare not reflect.—Encouraged by all that, and impelled by my love, I have written to you, for the garb you wear is not propitious to such avowals in words, and a thousand times my voice has died upon my lips; although I believe, yes, was firmly convinced that I was speaking to a woman, that masculine costume frightened away all my tender, amorous thoughts, and prevented them from winging their way to you.

I implore you, Rosalind, if you do not love me yet, try to love me, who have loved you in spite of everything, beneath the veil in which you enveloped yourself, through pity for us, I doubt not; do not condemn me for the rest of my life to the most frightful despair and hopeless discouragement; consider that I have adored you since the first ray of thought shone in upon my brain, that you were revealed to me before I saw you, and that, when I was a little fellow, you appeared to me in a dream

with a crown of dew-drops, two rain-bow-like wings, and the tiny blue flower in your hand; that you are the end, the means and the meaning of my life; that, without you, I am nothing but a vain shadow, and that, if you breathe upon the flame you have kindled, naught will remain of me but a pinch of dust, finer and more impalpable than that which is sprinkled upon the wings of Death itself.—Rosalind, do you, who have so many receipts for the cure of love, cure me, for I am very sick; play your part to the end, lay aside the garb of the fair page Ganymede, and extend your white hand to the youngest son of the gallant knight, Sir Rowland des Bois.

XIV

I was at my window busily watching the stars that bloomed joyously in the garden of the sky, and inhaling the sweet perfume of the mirabilis wafted to my nostrils by a dying breeze.—The wind blowing through the open window had extinguished my lamp, the last that remained lighted in the chateau. My thoughts degenerated into vague musing, and a sort of drowsiness began to steal over me; I remained, however, with my elbows resting on the stone balustrade, either because I was fascinated by the charm of the night, or through indifference and forgetfulness.—Rosette, seeing that my lamp was out, and being unable to distinguish my form because of a great wedge of shadow that fell exactly upon the window, had concluded, I presume, that I had gone to bed, and that was what she was waiting for, to risk one last, desperate attempt.—She opened the door so softly that I did not hear her come in, and she was within two steps of me before I discovered her. She was tremendously surprised to find me still up; but she soon recovered from her astonishment, came to me and grasped my arm, calling me twice by my name:—"Théodore, Théodore!"

"What! you, Rosette, here, at this hour, all alone, without a light, in such complete déshabillé!"

I must tell you that she had nothing on but a peignoir of the finest linen, and the

glorious lace-trimmed chemise which I did not choose to see on the day of the famous scene in the little kiosk in the park. Her arms, as cold and smooth as marble, were entirely bare, and the garment that covered her body was so clinging and transparent that you could see her nipples through it, as in the statues of bathers covered with damp drapery.

"Do you mean that for a reproach, Théodore? or is it simply an exclamation? Yes, I, Rosette, la belle dame, here in your bedroom, not in my own where I should be, at eleven o'clock at night, perhaps midnight, without duenna or chaperone or maid, almost naked, in a simple night peignoir;—that is very surprising, is it not?—I am as surprised as you, and I hardly know what explanation to give you."

As she spoke, she put one arm around my body and sank down on the foot of my bed in such a way as to drag me with her.

"Rosette," I said to her, struggling to release myself, "I will try to light the lamp; nothing is so depressing as a dark room; and then, it is downright murder not to be able to see when you are here, and so be deprived of the sight of your charms.—Allow me, with the help of a bit of tinder and a match, to make a little portable sun which will put in relief all that the jealous darkness blots out beneath its shadow."

"It isn't worthwhile; I prefer that you should not see my blushes; I feel that my cheeks are burning hot, for it is quite enough to make me die of shame."

She put her face against my breast and remained some moments so, as if suffocated by her emotion.

Meanwhile, I was mechanically running my fingers through the long floating curls of her hair; I was cudgelling my brain in search of some honorable means of extricating myself from the scrape, but I could find none, for I was driven into my last entrenchments, and Rosette seemed firmly resolved not to leave the room as she had entered it.—There was a formidable negligence about her dress which promised

nothing good. I had on an open robe-de-chambre myself, which would have defended my incognito but feebly, so that I was disturbed beyond measure concerning the result of the battle.

"Listen to me, Théodore," said Rosette, standing up and throwing the hair back from both sides of her face, as well as I could judge by the feeble light which the stars and a very slender crescent moon, just appearing above the horizon, cast into the room, the window being still open;—"this is a strange step I have taken; everybody would blame me for it.—But you are going away soon, and I love you! I cannot let you go thus without having an explanation with you.—Perhaps you will never come back; perhaps this is the first and last time that I am to see you.—Who knows where you will go? But wherever you go you will carry my heart and my life with you.—If you had remained, I should not have resorted to this extreme measure. The happiness I felt on seeing you, of listening to your voice, of living beside you, would have been enough for me; I would have asked for nothing more. I would have confined my love in my heart; you would have thought that you had simply a kind and affectionate friend in me; but that cannot be. You say that you absolutely must go.—It bores you, Théodore, to see me clinging to your footsteps like an amorous shadow which can only follow you, but would like to be blended with your body; it must annoy you always to find behind you imploring eyes and hands stretched out to grasp the hem of your cloak.—I know it, but I cannot refrain from doing it.—You cannot complain, however; it is your fault.—I was calm, peaceful, almost happy before I knew you.—You appeared, handsome, young, and smiling, like Phœbus, the charming god.—You paid me most marked, most gallant attention; never was cavalier more courteous and clever. Rubies and roses fell from your lips every moment; everything became for you an opportunity to turn a compliment, and you knew how to transform the most insignificant words into charming flattery.—A woman who had hated you mortally at first, would have ended by loving you, and for my part, I loved you the moment I saw you. Why, having made yourself so

agreeable, do you seem surprised to be so loved? Isn't it a perfectly natural consequence? I am neither mad nor empty-headed, nor a romantic child who falls in love with the first sword she sees. I have seen society, and I know what life is. Any woman, even the most virtuous or the most prudish, would have done as much as I am doing.—What was your idea or your purpose? to please me, I imagine, for I cannot attribute any other to you. How does it happen, then, that you seem in some measure sorry because you have succeeded so well? Have I unintentionally done anything to displease you?—I ask your pardon.—Do you no longer think me beautiful, or have you discovered in me some defect that repels you?—You have the right to be exacting in the matter of beauty, but either you have lied outrageously, or I am beautiful!—I am young like yourself and I love you; why do you disdain me now? You used to be so attentive to me, you held my arm with such unfailing solicitude, you pressed so tenderly the hand I abandoned to you, your eyes were so languorous when you raised them to mine: if you did not love me, why all that manœuvring? Can it be that you are cruel enough to kindle love in a heart in order to laugh at it afterward? Ah! that would be a ghastly joke, impious and sacrilegious! only a wicked soul could be amused by it, and I cannot believe it of you, however inexplicable your conduct toward me. What is the cause, then, of this sudden change? As for me, I can imagine none.—What mystery is hidden by such coldness?—I cannot believe that you feel repugnance for me; what you have done proves that you do not, for a man does not pay court so earnestly to a woman for whom he has a feeling of disgust, though he were the greatest scoundrel on earth. O Théodore, what have you against me? what has changed you so? what have I done to you?—If the love you seemed to have for me has vanished, mine, alas! has remained, and I cannot tear it from my heart.—Have pity on me, Théodore, for I am very unhappy.—At least pretend to love me a little, and say a few kind words to me; they will not cost you much, unless you have an insurmountable horror of me."

At that pathetic point in her discourse, sobs completely choked her voice; she

clasped her hands on my shoulder and rested her forehead upon them in an attitude of utter despair. All that she said was absolutely true, and I had nothing to say in reply.—I could not treat the matter as a jest. That would not have been decent.—Rosette was not one of the creatures one can treat so lightly; besides, I was too deeply touched to be able to do it. I felt guilty for having thus made a plaything of a charming woman's heart, and I was seized with the deepest and most sincere remorse.

Seeing that I made no reply, the dear child drew a long breath and made a movement as if to rise, but she fell back, crushed by her emotion; then she threw her arms about me—I could feel their cool touch through my doublet—laid her face against mine and began to weep silently.

It produced a strange effect upon me to feel that exhaustless current of tears that did not flow from my own eyes, rolling down my cheeks.—Mine were soon mingling with them, and there was a veritable rain of bitter tears, violent enough to cause another deluge, if it had lasted forty days.

At that instant the moon shone fairly on the window; a pale beam shot into the room and cast a bluish gleam upon our silent group.

With her white peignoir, her bare arms, her uncovered throat and breast, of almost the same color as the linen, her dishevelled hair and her sorrowful expression, Rosette had the aspect of an alabaster figure of Melancholy sitting on a tomb. As for myself, I have no very clear idea what I may have looked like, as I could not see myself and there was no mirror to reflect my image, but I fancy that I might very well have posed for a statue of Uncertainty personified.

I was moved, and I bestowed upon Rosette a caress or two rather more affectionate than usual; from her hair my hand descended to her velvety neck and thence to her round, smooth shoulder which I patted softly as I followed its shivering contour. The child quivered under my touch like a harpsichord under a musician's fingers; her

flesh shuddered and leaped, and amorous thrills ran all over her body.

I myself was conscious of a sort of vague, confused desire, the object of which I could not make out, and I took a keen delight in running my hand over those pure, delicate lines.—I left her shoulder, and, taking advantage of an opening in the folds of her peignoir, I suddenly closed my hand upon her little, frightened breast, which palpitated madly like a turtle-dove surprised in its nest;—from the extreme edge of her cheek, upon which I breathed a hardly perceptible kiss, I arrived at her half-open mouth: we remained in that position for some time.—Upon my word, I have no idea whether it was two minutes or a quarter of an hour or an hour; for I had lost all idea of time, and I did not know whether I was in heaven or on earth, here or elsewhere, dead or alive. The heady wine of lust had so intoxicated me at the first mouthful I swallowed, that all the reason I possessed had fled.—Rosette wound her arms more and more tightly about me and enveloped me with her body; she leaned convulsively toward me and pressed me against her bare, palpitating breast; at every kiss all her life seemed to rush to the spot kissed and to abandon the rest of her person.—Strange ideas passed through my head; if I had not feared to betray my incognito, I would have given full scope to Rosette's passionate impulses, and perhaps I should have made some vain, mad attempt to impart a semblance of reality to the shadow of pleasure which my beautiful lover embraced so ardently; I had not yet had a lover; and those fierce attacks, those reiterated caresses, the touch of that lovely body, those sweet names drowned in kisses, excited me to the last degree—although they proceeded from a woman;—and then that nocturnal visit, that romantic passion, the moonlight, all had for me the refreshing charm of novelty, and made me forget that, after all, I was not a man.

However, making a great effort to control myself, I told Rosette that she was compromising herself terribly by coming to my room at such an hour and remaining there so long, that her women might notice her absence and see that she had not passed the night in her own room.

I said this in such a mild tone that Rosette's only reply was to let her peignoir and slippers fall to the floor and glide into my bed like a snake into a bowl of milk; for she fancied that my clothes alone prevented me from coming to more definite demonstrations, and that they were the only obstacle that held me back.

She believed, poor child, that the happy hour, so laboriously led up to, was about to strike for her; but the clock struck two instead.—I was in a most critical position, when suddenly the door turned on its hinges and gave passage to the Chevalier Alcibiades in person; he held a candlestick in one hand and his sword in the other.

He went straight to the bed and threw back the clothes, and, putting the light under poor, speechless Rosette's nose, said to her in a bantering tone:—"Good-morning, sister." Little Rosette had not the strength to say a word in reply.

"So it seems, my very dear and most virtuous sister, that, having considered in your wisdom that Seigneur Théodore's bed was more downy than your own, you came here to sleep in it? or perhaps there are ghosts in your room and you thought that you would be safer here, under the protection of the aforesaid seigneur?—It is very well thought of.—Aha! Monsieur le Chevalier de Sérannes, you have made soft eyes at Madame our sister, and you think that will be the end of it.—In my opinion, it would not be unhealthy for us to slash at each other a little, and if you would oblige me to that extent I should be infinitely grateful to you.—Théodore, you have abused my friendship for you, and you make me repent the good opinion I formed at first of the loyalty of your character; this is bad, very bad."

I could not defend myself in any valid way; appearances were against me. Who would have believed me if I had said, as the fact was, that Rosette had come to my room against my will, and that, far from trying to attract her, I was doing all I possibly could to turn her away from me.—There was but one thing for me to say, and I said it:—"Seigneur Alcibiades, we will slash at each other all you wish."

During this colloquy, Rosette had not failed to faint according to the most approved

rules of the pathetic;—I went to a goblet filled with water which contained a great white rose, half withered, and I threw a few drops on her face, which restored her to consciousness at once.

Not knowing just what to do, she vanished in the passage beside the bed and buried her pretty head in the bedclothes, like a bird preparing to sleep.—She had piled cushions and clothes about her so that it would have been very hard to discover what was under the heap; a musical sigh that issued therefrom, now and then, was the only thing that denoted that it was naught but a repentant young sinner, or rather one who was excessively annoyed to be a sinner in intention only, not in fact: which was the unfortunate Rosette's plight.

Monsieur the brother, having no further anxiety concerning his sister, resumed the dialogue, and said to me in the sweetest of tones:—"It is not absolutely indispensable for us to cut each other's throats on the spot; that is an extreme method to which there is always time to resort.—Listen:—The game is not equal between us. You are very young and much less strong than I; if we should fight, I should kill you or maim you at the very least—and I am not anxious either to kill or disfigure you—it would be a great pity; Rosette, who is down there under the clothes and hasn't a word to say, would bear me a grudge for it all her life; for she is as unforgiving and wicked as a tigress when she puts her mind to it, the dear little dove. You, who are her Prince Galaor and receive only sweet words from her, know nothing about that; but it isn't pleasant. Rosette is free, so are you; it seems that you are not irreconcilable enemies; her widowhood is at an end and the thing turns out as well as possible. Marry her; she will not need to go back to her own room to sleep, and in that way, you see, I shall be relieved of the necessity of taking you for a sheath for my sword, which would be agreeable to neither of us;—what do you say?"

I must have made a horrible grimace, for what he proposed was of all things in the

world the most impossible of execution by me; I would rather have crawled on all fours on the ceiling like the flies, or have unhooked the sun from the sky without taking anything to stand on, than do what he asked me, and yet the last proposition was incontestably more agreeable than the first.

He seemed surprised that I did not accept with transports of delight, and he repeated what he had said, as if to give me time to reply.

"An alliance with you would be most honorable for me, and I should never have dared to aspire to it; I know that it is an unheard-of good fortune for a young man who has as yet no position or footing in society, and that the most illustrious men would esteem themselves very fortunate;—but I can only persist in my refusal, and as I am free to choose between marriage and a duel, I prefer the duel.—It is a strange choice, and one which few people would make—but it is mine."

At that point Rosette uttered the most heart-broken sigh you can imagine, put her head out from behind the pillow, and instantly drew it back again, like a snail when you strike its horns, when she saw my impassive and determined countenance.

"It is not that I do not love Madame Rosette, I love her very dearly; but I have reasons for not marrying, reasons which you would consider satisfactory if it were possible for me to tell you what they are.—By the way, matters have not gone as far as you might judge from appearances; beyond a kiss or two which a very warm friendship is sufficient to explain and justify, there is nothing between us to which exception can be taken, and your sister's virtue is as pure and unsullied as virtue can be.—I owe her that testimony.—Now, when shall we fight, Monsieur Alcibiades, and where?"

"Here, and instantly!" cried Alcibiades, drunk with rage.

"Can you think of such a thing? before Rosette!"

"Draw your sword, villain, or I will murder you," he continued, brandishing his sword and whirling it around his head.

"At least, let us go out of the room."

"If you don't stand on guard, I will nail you to the wall like a bat, my handsome Celadon, and you will flap your wings in vain, for you won't release yourself, I warn you."—And he rushed at me with his sword in the air.

Chapter XIV — Rosette made a superhuman effort to throw herself between our swords, for both combatants were equally dear to her; but her strength failed her and she fell unconscious across the foot of the bed.

Our blades struck fire, and made a noise like a hammer striking an anvil, for the small space we had at our disposals compelled us to fight at very close quarters.

I drew my rapier, for he would have done as he said, and contented myself at first with parrying the thrusts he aimed at me.

Rosette made a superhuman effort to throw herself between our swords, for both combatants were equally dear to her; but her strength failed her and she fell unconscious across the foot of the bed.

Our blades struck fire, and made a noise like a hammer striking an anvil, for the small space we had at our disposals compelled us to fight at very close quarters.

Alcibiades came very near wounding me two or three times, and if I had not been a most expert fencer, my life would have been in the greatest danger; for his address was quite astonishing and his strength prodigious. He exhausted all the ruses and feints of the trade trying to touch me. Furious at his failure, he uncovered himself two or three times; I declined to take advantage of the opportunity; but he returned to the charge with such desperate, savage fury that I was forced to make the most of such openings as he gave me; and then the clashing of the steel and the whirl of sparks excited and dazzled me. I did not think of death, I was not in the least afraid; that keen, deadly blade that flashed in front of my eyes every second had no more effect on me than if we had been fighting with buttoned foils; but I was, however, indignant at Alcibiades's brutality, and my consciousness of perfect innocence

increased my indignation. I determined just to prick him in the arm or shoulder so as to make him drop his sword, for I had tried in vain to knock it out of his hand.—He had a wrist of iron, and the devil himself could not have turned it.

At last he came at me with such a sharp, well-directed thrust that I could only half parry it; it passed through my sleeve, and I felt the cold steel against my arm; but I was not wounded. At that I became really angry, and instead of defending myself I assumed the offensive in my turn;—I forgot that he was Rosette's brother, and I rushed at him as if he were my mortal enemy. Taking advantage of a false position of his sword, I delivered a thrust in quarte so well directed that I pierced his side; he made an exclamation and fell back.

I thought that he was dead, but he was really only wounded, and his fall was caused by a misstep which he made in trying to parry.—I cannot describe the sensation I felt, Graciosa; certainly it is not difficult to understand that, if you stick a fine, sharp point into the flesh, you will make a hole and blood will flow from it. And yet I was stupefied when I saw the red stream trickling down Alcibiades's doublet.—Of course I did not imagine that bran would come out, as it does when you burst open a doll; but I know that I never was so surprised in my life, and it seemed to me as if something incredible had happened to me.

The incredible thing was not, as it seemed to me, that blood should flow from a wound, but that the wound should have been made by me, and that a girl of my age—I was going to write a young man, I have entered so fully into the spirit of my part—should have laid low a lusty captain, an expert in fencing, like Seigneur Alcibiades;—and all for the crime of seduction and refusing to marry a very rich woman, and a very charming one too!

I was really in a state of cruel embarrassment with the fainting sister, the wounded brother whom I believed to be dead, and I myself, who was not far from being dead or fainting, like one or the other of them.—I seized the bell-rope and I jangled the

bell in a way to wake the dead, so long as the rope remained in my hand; and leaving to the unconscious Rosette and the disemboweled Alcibiades the duty of explaining matters to the servants and the old aunt, I went straight to the stable.—The air restored my self-possession instantly; I led out my horse, saddled and bridled him myself, made sure that the straps were all right, the curb in good condition, and the stirrup leathers of the same length, and took up a hole in the girth; in short, I harnessed him completely, with a care that was at least remarkable at such a moment, and a tranquillity that was almost inconceivable after a combat with such an ending.

I mounted my steed and rode away through the park by a bridle-path that I was familiar with. The branches of the trees, all laden with dew, lashed me and wet my face; you would have said that the old trees were putting out their arms to detain me and keep me for love of their chatelaine.—If I had been in any other frame of mind, or in the least degree superstitious, it would have been easy for me to believe that they were ghosts trying to seize me and shaking their fists at me.

But the truth is that I had no idea at all, neither that nor any other; a leaden stupor, so heavy that I was hardly conscious of it, was pressing on my brain, like a helmet that was too small; but I had a vague feeling that I had killed some one and that that was why I was going away. I had an intense longing to sleep, whether because it was so late or because the violent emotions of the night had reacted on me physically and wearied my body.

I reached a small postern gate, which opened into the fields by a secret spring that Rosette had shown me during our rides. I dismounted, touched the button and opened the gate: after leading, my horse through, I remounted and galloped as far as the high road to C——, where I arrived at daybreak.

This is a true and circumstantial account of my first love-affair and my first duel.

XV

It was five o'clock in the morning when I rode into the town.—The houses were beginning to put their noses out of the window; the worthy natives showed their benignant faces behind the glass, surmounted by pyramidal nightcaps.—At the clatter of my horse's shoes ringing on the uneven, stony pavement, the curiously red faces and the matutinally uncovered breasts of the Venuses of the town issued from their respective casements, while their owners exhausted themselves in conjectures concerning the unusual apparition of a traveller in C—— at such an hour and in such a rig, for I was very scantily dressed, and in a costume that was suspicious, to say the least. I inquired the way to an inn, of a little rascal with hair over his eyes, who cocked up his little spaniel's nose to look at me at his ease; I gave him a few sous for his trouble, and a conscientious rap with my crop which sent him away squeaking like a jay plucked alive. I threw myself on a bed and fell into a sound sleep. When I awoke, it was three o'clock in the afternoon, and even that was hardly enough to rest me completely. Indeed, it was none too much for a sleepless night, an intrigue, a duel, and a very rapid, although triumphant, flight.

I was very anxious about Alcibiades's wound; but a few days later my mind was set at rest, for I learned that it had had no serious consequences and that he was convalescent. That knowledge relieved me of a heavy weight, for the idea that I had killed a man troubled me strangely, although it was strictly in self-defence and against my own wish. I had not yet attained that sublime indifference to the life of my fellow-men at which I have since arrived.

Chapter XV — It was five o'clock in the morning when I rode into the town.—The houses were beginning to put their noses out of the window—*** I inquired the way to an inn, of a little rascal with hair over his eyes, who cocked up his little spaniel's nose to look at me at his ease; I gave him a few sous for his trouble.

I found at C—— several of the young men with whom we had previously journeyed, and I was very glad; I became very intimate with them, and they

introduced me into several pleasant houses.—I was perfectly accustomed to my clothes, and the rough, active life I had led, the violent exercises to which I had devoted much time, had made me twice as robust as I was before. I went everywhere with those young scatterbrains: I rode and hunted and drank with them, for I had gradually accustomed myself to the bottle; without attaining the genuine Teutonic capacity of some of them, I could empty two or three bottles for my share without getting too tipsy—very satisfactory progress. I made verse in great abundance like a god and kissed all the maid-servants in due form.—In short, I became an accomplished young gentleman, conforming in every respect to the latest fashionable pattern.—I cast off certain provincial ideas that I had concerning virtue and other nonsense of that kind; on the other hand, I became so prodigiously punctilious on points of honor, that I fought a duel almost every day: indeed, it became a necessity to me, a sort of indispensable exercise, without which I should have felt ill all day. And so, when no one had stared at me or trodden on my foot, when I had no excuse for fighting, rather than remain idle and fold my hands, I acted as second for my comrades, or even for people whom I did not know by name.

I soon had a tremendous reputation for courage, and nothing less than that would have sufficed to check the jocose remarks which my beardless face and effeminate manner would infallibly have called forth. But by dint of opening three or four extra buttonholes in doublets, and very delicately puncturing some recalcitrant skins, I came to be generally considered as having a more virile air than Mars himself or Priapus, and you might have found men who would have sworn that they had been godfathers to my bastards.

Throughout all this apparent dissipation, in this reckless, disorderly life, I did not cease to follow out my original idea,—that is to say, the conscientious study of man and the solution of the great problem of a perfect lover, a problem rather more difficult of solution than that of the philosopher's stone.

It is the same with certain ideas as with the horizon, which certainly exists because you see it in front of you in whatever direction you turn, but which obstinately eludes you and is always just so far away, whether you walk or gallop toward it; for a certain fixed distance is an indispensable condition of its manifestation; it vanishes as you go toward it to take shape again farther away with its fleeting, intangible azure, and you try in vain to stop it by grasping at the hem of its waving cloak.

The farther I advanced in knowledge of the animal, the more plainly I saw how impossible was the realization of my desire and how certain it was that what I sought in order to love happily was outside the conditions of its nature.—I became convinced that the man who was most sincerely in love with me would find a way, although with the best will in the world, to make me the most miserable of women, and yet I had already laid aside many of the requirements that as a girl I had thought essential.—I had descended from the sublime clouds, not exactly into the street and the gutter, but to the top of a hill of moderate height, accessible, although a little steep.

The ascent was decidedly rough, it is true; but I was conceited enough to believe that I was worth the trouble of making the effort, and that I should be a sufficient reward for the labor of reaching me.—I could never have made up my mind to take a step forward; I waited patiently, perched upon my hilltop.

This was my plan:—in my masculine attire I would make the acquaintance of some young man whose exterior attracted me; I would live on familiar terms with him; by shrewd questions and false confidences which would call forth true ones, I would soon obtain full knowledge of his thoughts and his sentiments; and if I found him to be the kind of man I wanted, I would pretend that I had to make a journey, and would remain away from him three or four months to give him a little time to forget my features; then I would return dressed as a woman, I would furnish luxuriously a little house in some retired suburb, buried among trees and flowers; I would arrange

matters so that he would meet me and pay court to me; and if he showed that he loved me truly and faithfully, I would give myself to him without reserve and without precaution—the title of his mistress would seem to me an honorable one and I would ask for no other.

But that plan is certain never to be carried out, for it is a peculiarity of the plans we make that they are not carried out, and therein the weakness of man's will and his pure nullity are principally apparent.—The proverb—what woman wills, God wills—is no truer than any other proverb, which is equivalent to saying that it is not true at all.

So long as I saw them only at a distance and through the veil of my desire, men seemed noble creatures to me, and my eyes created an illusion.—Now I find that they are horrible to the last degree, and I do not understand how a woman can take one of them into her bed.

As for myself, my gorge would rise and I could not make up my mind to it.

How coarse and mean and unrefined their features are! what broken, ungraceful curves! what rough, black, furrowed skin!—Some are as dark as if they had been hanged six months ago, sallow, bony, hairy, with violin-strings on their hands, great sprawling feet, a filthy moustache always full of food and turned up toward the ears like hooks, hair as coarse as a horse's tail, a chin ending in a wild-boar's jowl, lips chapped and hardened by strong liquors, eyes surrounded by four or five black circles, a neck all twisted veins, huge muscles and protruding cartilage.—Others are enveloped in red flesh, and carry in front of them paunches that their belts will hardly go around; they wink their little sea-green eyes inflamed with lust and look more like hippopotami in breeches than human beings. They always smell of wine or brandy or tobacco or their own natural odor, which is far worse than all the others.—As for those whose exterior is a little less disgusting, they resemble ill-made women.—That's the whole story.

I had not noticed all this. I was living in a cloud, as it were, and my feet hardly touched the ground.—The smell of the roses and lilacs in the spring went to my head like a too powerful perfume. I dreamed only of accomplished heroes, faithful and respectful lovers, passions worthy of the altar, marvellous devotion and self-sacrifice, and I should have expected to find them all in the first blackguard who bade me good-morning.—However, that first, vulgar intoxication lasted only a short time; strange suspicions entered my mind, and I had no rest until I had investigated them.

In the beginning, my horror of men was carried to the last degree of exaggeration and I looked upon them as horrible monstrosities. Their ways of thinking, their bearing, and their carelessly cynical language, their brutal manners and their contempt for women, offended and revolted me beyond endurance, the idea that I had conceived of them corresponded so little with the reality.—They are not monsters, if you choose, but far worse than that, on my word! they are excellent fellows of most jovial disposition, who drink and eat heartily, who will do you all sorts of favors, clever and brave, good painters and good musicians, adapted for a thousand things, but not for the one for which they were created, which is to serve as male to the animal called woman, with whom they have not the slightest connection, moral or physical.

I had difficulty at first in concealing the contempt they inspired in me, but gradually I became accustomed to their manner of life. I felt no more annoyed at the mocking remarks they made concerning women than if I had myself been of their sex.—On the contrary, I made some very amusing ones myself, and their success greatly flattered my pride; indeed, none of my comrades went so far as I in the matter of sarcasm and jests upon that subject. My perfect familiarity with the ground gave me a great advantage, and aside from such piquant meaning as they might have, my epigrams excelled in the matter of accuracy, which theirs often lacked.—For, although all the evil things they say of women have some foundation in fact, it is

difficult, nevertheless, for men to preserve the necessary self-possession to make sport of them successfully, for there is often much love in their invectives.

I noticed that the most tenderly-inclined men and those who thought most of women were the ones who abused them worse than all the others and who returned to the subject with particular persistency, as if they were mortally aggrieved with them for not being such as they would like them to be, and thus falsifying the good opinion they had formed of them at first.

What I wanted before everything was not physical beauty, but beauty of the heart, love; but love as I understand it may not be within the bounds of human possibilities.—And yet it seems to me that I could love so and that I would give more than I demand.

What magnificent folly! what sublime prodigality!

To deliver yourself absolutely, keeping nothing at all of yourself, to renounce control of yourself and your free-will, to place your will in another's hands, to see only with his eyes, to hear only with his ears, to be but one in two bodies, to mingle and blend your hearts in such a way that you do not know whether you are yourself or the other, to absorb and radiate continually, to be now the moon and now the sun, to see the whole world and all creation in a single being, to displace the centre of life, to be ready, at any moment, for the greatest sacrifices and the most absolute self-abnegation; to suffer the pangs of your beloved as if they were your own; O prodigy! to make yourself double by giving yourself away;—that is love as I understand it.

The fidelity of ivy, the twining of a young vine, the cooing of the turtle-dove, all those go without saying, they are the first and simplest conditions.

If I had remained at home, in the costume of my own sex, listlessly turning my spinning-wheel or making tapestry in a window recess behind the glass, this thing that I have sought the world over would perhaps have found me out unaided. Love is

like fortune, it does not like to be run after. It visits by preference those who sleep on well-curbs, and the kisses of queens and goddesses often descend upon closed eyes.—It blinds and deceives you to think that all adventures and all good fortune exist only in the places where you are not, and it is a bad plan to order your horse saddled or to post off in search of your ideal. Many people have made that mistake, many more will make it.—The horizon is always of the loveliest azure, although, when you arrive there, the hills that compose it are usually only bare, seamed, rain-swept fields of yellow clay.

I fancied that the world was full of adorable young men, and that I should meet on the roads whole tribes of Esplandians, Amadises and Launcelots of the Lake in search of their Dulcineas, and I was greatly amazed to find that the world paid but little heed to that sublime search and was content to lie with the first strumpet that came to hand; I am severely punished for my curiosity and my suspicion. I am the most horribly blasé creature in the world without ever having enjoyed anything. In my case, knowledge has gone before experience; there is nothing worse than such premature knowledge which is not the fruit of action.—The most absolute ignorance would be a hundred thousand times better, it would at least make you do many foolish things which would serve to instruct you and rectify your ideas; for, under this disgust of which I spoke just now, there is always an active, rebellious element which produces the most extraordinary confusion; the mind is convinced, the body is not, and will not subscribe to this superb disdain. The young and robust body plunges and rears under the mind like a lusty stallion ridden by a feeble old man whom he cannot unseat, for the nose-band holds his head and the bit tears his mouth.

Since I have lived with men, I have seen so many women shamefully betrayed, so many secret liaisons imprudently divulged, the purest passions recklessly dragged in the wind, young men hurrying off to vile harlots from the arms of the most charming mistresses, the most firmly-established intrigues broken off suddenly and for no plausible reason, that it is no longer possible for me to make up my mind to take a

lover.—It would be like throwing myself into a bottomless abyss in broad daylight with my eyes open.—However, it is still the secret longing of my heart to have one. The voice of nature stifles the voice of reason.—I feel sure that I shall never be happy if I do not love and am not loved; but the unfortunate part of it is that I can have none but a man for a lover, and if men are not devils altogether, they are certainly very far from being angels. It would not avail them to glue wings to their shoulder-blades and put crowns of gold paper on their heads; I know them too well to allow myself to be deceived.—All the fine speeches they might make me would do no good. I know in advance what they will say and I could finish them by myself. I have seen them study their rôles and read them over before going on the stage; I know all their principal harangues for effect and the passages they rely upon.—Neither the pallor of the face nor the distortion of the features would convince me. I know that those things prove nothing.—A night's debauch, a few bottles of wine and two or three girls are enough to make up the face very nicely. I have seen that cunning trick played by a young marquis, naturally very fresh and rosy, with whom it worked exceedingly well, and who owed to that touching pallor, so worthily earned, the crowning of his flame.—I also know how the most lackadaisical Celadons console themselves for the cruelty of their Astreas and find a way to possess their souls in patience, awaiting their hour of bliss.—I have seen the drabs who acted as understudies for modest Ariadnes.

In truth, after that, man does not tempt me much; for he hasn't beauty like woman—beauty, that magnificent garment which so well conceals the imperfections of the soul, that divine drapery which God has cast over the nudity of the world, and which in some sort makes one excusable for loving the vilest courtesan in the gutter, if she possesses that royal, magnificent gift.

In default of mental virtues, I would like to have at least the exquisite perfection of form, the satiny flesh, the roundness of outline, the graceful curves, the fine texture of the skin, everything that tends to make women charming.—Since I cannot have

love, I would at least have sensual pleasure, and fill the brother's place with the sister as far as possible.—But all the men I have seen seem to me horribly ugly. My horse is a hundred times handsomer, and I could kiss him with less repugnance than some dandies who deem themselves extremely fascinating. Certain it is that the genus fop, as I know it, would be by no means a brilliant theme for me to embroider with variations of pleasure.—A man of the sword would suit me no better; soldiers have something mechanical in their gait, and bestial in their faces, which causes me to consider them as something less than human beings; nor do men of the robe attract me much more, for they are dirty, greasy, unkempt, threadbare creatures, with a green eye and a mouth without lips; they smell terribly of must and mould, and I should not enjoy putting my face against their wolf's or badger's muzzle. As for poets, they have no thought for anything on earth except the ends of words, they go back no farther than the penultimate, and it is no exaggeration to say that it is hard to put them to any suitable use; they are greater bores than the others, and they are quite as ugly too, and have not the least distinction or refinement in their manners or their clothes, which is really strange enough:—people who think all day of nothing but form and beauty do not notice that their boots are ill-made and their hats absurd! They look like country apothecaries or exhibitors of trained dogs out of work, and would disgust you with poesy and poetry for several eternities.

As for painters, they are tremendously stupid; they see nothing outside of the seven colors.—One of them, with whom I passed several days at R—, when he was asked what he thought of me, made this ingenious reply: "He's of a decidedly warm tone, and in the shaded parts, I should have to use, instead of white, pure Naples yellow with a little Cassel earth and some red-brown."—That was his opinion, and, furthermore, his nose was crooked and his eyes were like his nose, which did not improve his case.—Whom shall I take? a soldier with swelling chest, a round-shouldered limb of the law, a poet or painter who looks frightened to death, or a little thin-flanked, hollow-chested popinjay? Which cage shall I choose in that

menagerie? I have no idea at all, and I feel no more inclined in one direction than another, for they are as equal as possible in stupidity and ugliness.

After that, if there still remained anything for me to do, it would be to take some one I loved, whether it were a porter or a horse-jockey; but I do not love even a porter. O wretched heroine that I am! an unmated turtle-dove, condemned to coo forever in elegiacs!

Oh! how many times I have longed to be really a man as I seemed to be! How many women there are with whom I could have come to an understanding, whose hearts would have understood my heart!—how perfectly happy the refined pleasures of love, the noble outbursts of pure passion to which I could have responded, would have made me! What bliss, what ecstasy! how freely all the sensitive chords of my heart could have relaxed without being constantly obliged to contract and close under coarse handling! What a charming harvest of invisible flowers that will never open, whose mysterious fragrance would have filled the fraternal union of our hearts with sweet perfume! It seems to me that that would have been a life of enchantment, of infinite ecstasy on wings always open; walking with hands inseparably clasped, through avenues of golden gravel, through thickets of ever-smiling rose-bushes, through parks with many ponds over which swans glide gently, with alabaster urns standing out in sharp relief against the foliage.

If I had been a young man, how I would have loved Rosette! what adoration I would have poured out upon her! Our hearts were really made for each other, two pearls destined to be melted together and to make but a single one! How perfectly I would have realized the ideas she had formed of love! Her disposition suited me exactly, and her type of beauty pleased me. It is a pity that our love was absolutely condemned to inevitable platonism!

I had an adventure recently.

I frequented a house where there was a fascinating little girl, fifteen years old at

most: I had never seen a more adorable miniature.—She was fair, but her complexion was so delicate and transparent that ordinary blondes would have seemed like brunettes, black as moles, beside her; one would have said that she had golden hair powdered with silver; her eyebrows were of such a delicate shade, and so blended with the flesh, that they could hardly be distinguished; her light-blue eyes had the softest expression and the silkiest lashes it is possible to imagine; her tiny mouth, so small that you could hardly put the end of your finger in it, added to the childish, dainty character of her beauty, and the soft curves and dimples in her cheeks had an indescribable charm of artless innocence.—Her whole dear little person delighted me beyond expression; I loved her little slender white hands through which the light shone, her bird's foot which hardly touched the ground, her waist which a breath would have snapped, and her pearly shoulders, hardly formed as yet, which her scarf, placed awry, happily disclosed.—Her childish prattle, whose naïveté added a new charm to her naturally gay manner, kept me absorbed for hours at a time, and I took a singular pleasure in making her talk; she said a thousand deliciously amusing things, sometimes with an extraordinary shrewdness of purpose, sometimes as if she had not the slightest idea of their meaning, which made her infinitely more attractive. I gave her bonbons and pastilles, which I kept expressly for her in a box of light tortoise-shell, which pleased her extremely, for she is a dainty creature like the genuine kitten she is. As soon as I arrived, she would run to meet me and feel my pockets to see if the blessed bonbonnière was there; I would pass it from one hand to the other, and that would lead to a little battle in which she necessarily ended by gaining the upper hand and stripping me completely.

One day, however, she contented herself by saluting me very gravely, and did not come as usual to see if the fountain of sweetmeats was still playing in my pocket; she sat haughtily upright in her chair, her elbows back.

"Well, Ninon," I said, "are you fond of salt now or are you afraid that bonbons will make your teeth fall out?"—And, as I spoke, I tapped my box, which gave forth,

under my waistcoat, the sweetest and most sugary sound in the world.

She put her little tongue to her lips, as if to enjoy the sweet ideal of the absent bonbon, but she did not budge.

Thereupon I took the box from my pocket, opened it and began religiously to devour the almonds, which she loved above everything: the instinct of gluttony was, for an instant, stronger than her resolution; she put out her hand to take some, but instantly drew it back, saying: "I am too big to eat bonbons!" And she sighed.

"I hadn't noticed that you have grown much since last week; are you like the mushrooms that grow in one night? Come and let me measure you."

"Laugh as much as you please," she continued with a charming pout; "I am not a little girl any longer; and I am going to be very big."

"Those are excellent resolutions, in which you must persevere;—and might I know, my dear young lady, what has put these noble ideas into your head? For, a week ago, you seemed to be very well pleased to be a little girl, and you crunched almonds without a thought of compromising your dignity."

The little lady looked at me with a curious expression, cast her eyes around the room, and, when she had made certain that no one could overhear us, leaned toward me with a mysterious air and said:

"I have a lover."

"The devil! I no longer wonder that you don't want pastilles; but you were unwise not to take some; you could have played at having dinner with him, or you could have exchanged them for a shuttlecock."

The child shrugged her shoulders disdainfully and seemed to be profoundly sorry for me.—As she retained the attitude of an offended queen, I continued:

"What is this victorious person's name? Arthur, I suppose, or Henri."—They were two little boys with whom she was in the habit of playing, and whom she called her

husbands.

"No, not Arthur or Henri," she said, fixing her bright, clear eye on me—"a gentleman."—She put her hand above her head to give me an idea of his height.

"As tall as that? Why, this is becoming serious.—Pray, who is this tall lover?"

"Monsieur Théodore, I would like to tell you, but you mustn't mention it to anybody, not to mamma or to Polly"—her governess—"or to your friends who think I'm a child and would make fun of me."

I promised inviolable secrecy, for I was very curious to know who this gallant gentleman might be, and the little one, seeing that I was inclined to treat the affair as a joke, hesitated to give me her full confidence.

Reassured by my solemn undertaking to hold my peace scrupulously, she left her chair, leaned over the back of mine, and whispered very softly in my ear the name of the cherished prince.

I was confounded: it was the Chevalier de G—, a filthy, uncivilized animal, with the morals of a school-master and the physique of a drum-major, the most sottish, debauched creature imaginable—a veritable satyr, minus the cloven foot and pointed ears. That aroused serious apprehensions for my dear Ninon in my mind, and I promised myself that I would straighten matters out.

Somebody came in and the conversation dropped.

I withdrew into a corner and cudgelled my brains for the means of preventing the affair from going any farther, for it would have been downright murder for such a sweet creature to fall to such an arrant knave.

The little one's mother was a rather dissolute woman, who gave card-parties and kept a sort of bureau of wit. People read wretched verses at her house and lost good crowns, which was a compensation.—She cared little for her daughter, who was a living certificate of baptism, so to speak, and embarrassed her in the matter of

falsifying her chronology.—Besides, she was growing apace and her nascent charms occasioned comparisons which were not to the advantage of her prototype, who was already a little defaced by the action of years and men. The child was rather neglected, therefore, and left defenceless against the blackguardly habitués of the house.—If her mother had bestowed any attention upon her, it would have been for no other purpose probably than to sell her youth at a good bargain and farm out her beauty and her innocence.—In one way or another the fate in store for her was not doubtful.—That grieved me, for she was a fascinating little thing, deserving surely of something better, a pearl of the fairest water lost in that noxious pest-hole; the idea affected me so strongly that I determined to rescue her from the horrible place at any price.

The first thing to do was to prevent the chevalier from pursuing his design.—What seemed to me the best and simplest way was to pick a quarrel with him and make him fight me, and I had the utmost difficulty in arranging it, for he is the most arrant poltroon and fears blows more than any other man on earth.—At last I said so many and such cutting things to him, that he had to make up his mind to go out with me, although decidedly against his inclination.—I even threatened to have him horse-whipped by my servants, if he did not show himself more of a man.—He knew how to handle a sword very well, by the way, but fright disturbed him so that our blades had no sooner crossed than I found a way to administer a pretty little thrust that put him to bed for a fortnight.—That was enough for me; I had no wish to kill him, and I much preferred to let him live so that he might be hanged later; a touching attention for which he ought to be most grateful to me!—My rascal stretched out between two sheets and duly trussed and bandaged, it only remained to persuade the little one to leave the house, which was not a very difficult matter.

I told her a tale about her lover's disappearance, as she was tremendously concerned about him. I told her that he had gone with an actress of the troupe then playing at C——; which angered her, as you can imagine.—But I consoled her, telling her all

sorts of evil of the chevalier, who was ugly, besotted, and old, and I ended by asking her if she would not prefer to have me for her sweetheart.—She answered that she would indeed, because I was handsomer and my clothes were new.—This naïve remark, uttered with perfect seriousness, made me laugh until the tears came.—I excited the little one's imagination and worked to such good purpose that I persuaded her to leave the house.—A bouquet or two, as many kisses, and a pearl necklace which I gave her, delighted her to a point difficult to describe, and she assumed an air of importance before her little friends that was as laughable as you can imagine.

I ordered a very rich and elegant page's costume made to fit her, for I could not take her away in her girl's clothes, unless I dressed as a woman myself, which I did not choose to do.—I purchased a small horse of a gentle disposition and easy gait, and yet with speed enough to follow my horse when I chose to ride fast. Then I told the little beauty to try and come down to the door just at dusk and that I would be there to meet her; which she did most punctually.—I found her doing sentry duty in front of the half-open door.—I rode very close to the house; she came out, I gave her my hand, she placed her foot on my toe and leaped quickly to a seat behind me, for she was wonderfully agile in her movements. I spurred my horse and succeeded in returning unnoticed to my own quarters through seven or eight deserted, winding lanes.

I made her take off her clothes and put on her disguise and I myself acted as her maid; she made some objections at first and wanted to dress alone; but I made her understand that that would waste much time, and that, being my mistress, there was not the slightest impropriety, and that it was the way lovers always did.—Less than that would have convinced her, and she bowed to circumstances with the best grace in the world.

Her body was a little marvel of delicacy.—Her arms, which were rather thin, like

those of every young girl, had an indescribable smoothness of outline, and her immature bosom gave such charming promise for the future, that no fully-developed bosom could have sustained a comparison with it.—She had all the graces of the child and all the charm of the woman; she was in the adorable period of transition from girl to young woman; a fleeting, intangible, delicious period when beauty is full of hope, and each succeeding day, instead of taking anything away from your love, adds new elements of perfection.

Her costume could not have been more becoming. It gave her a saucy air, very curious and very amusing, which made her roar with laughter when I handed her the mirror so that she could judge of the effect of her toilet. Then I made her eat some biscuit dipped in Spanish wine, in order to give her courage and enable her better to endure the fatigue of the journey.

The horses were waiting, all saddled, in the court-yard;—she coolly mounted hers, I leaped upon the other, and we set off.—It was quite dark, and a few lights, which went out one after another, showed that the good town of C—— was virtuously occupied in sleeping, as every provincial town should be on the stroke of nine.

We could not go very fast, for Ninon was not the best horsewoman that ever was, and when her horse trotted she clung with all her strength to the mane.—However, when morning came we were so far away that no one could overtake us except by using great diligence; but we were not pursued, or, if we were, our pursuers took the opposite direction from that which we had taken.

I became singularly attached to the little beauty.—I no longer had you with me, my dear Graciosa, and I felt a pressing need of loving some one or something, of having with me a dog or a child to caress familiarly.—Ninon was just that to me;—she lay in my bed and slept with her little arms around my body;—she believed herself my mistress in all seriousness, and did not suspect that I was not a man; her extreme youth and her absolute innocence confirmed her in that error, which I was very

careful not to correct.—The kisses I gave her rounded out her illusion perfectly, for her ideas did not yet go beyond kisses, and her desires did not speak loud enough to make her suspect anything else. However, she was only half deceived.

Really there was the same difference between her and myself as between myself and men.—She was so transparent, so slender, so light and airy, and her nature was so refined and exceptional, that she seemed like a woman even to me, who am myself a woman, but who look like a Hercules beside her. I am tall and dark, she is small and fair; her features are so soft that they make mine seem almost hard and stern, and her voice is such a melodious hum that my voice seems harsh beside it. Any man who had her would break her in pieces, and I am always afraid that the wind will blow her away some fine morning.—I would like to shut her up in a box of cotton wool and wear it around my neck.—You can't imagine, my dear friend, how graceful and bright she is, what fascinating, cajoling, dainty little childish ways she has. She is the most adorable creature that ever was, and it really would have been a pity for her to stay with her unworthy mother.

I took malicious delight in thus rescuing that treasure from the rapacity of men. I was the griffin who prevented them from approaching it, and if I did not enjoy it myself, at all events no one else enjoyed it: an idea that never fails to console one, whatever all the absurd decriers of selfishness may say.

I proposed to keep her as long as possible in the same ignorance, and to keep her with me until she was unwilling to stay any longer or until I had found some way of assuring her future.

I took her with me in her boy's costume on all my journeys, east and west; that kind of life pleased her immensely, and the delight she took in it helped her to endure the fatigue.—I was complimented on all sides on the exquisite beauty of my page, and I doubt not that it caused a great many people to form an idea exactly contrary to the truth. Indeed, several persons tried to solve the problem; I did not allow the little one

to speak to any one, and the inquisitive ones were altogether disappointed.

Every day I discovered in the dear child some new quality which made her dearer to me than ever, and caused me to congratulate myself on the resolution I had taken.—Most assuredly no man was worthy to possess her, and it would have been a deplorable thing that such charms of body and mind should have been abandoned to their brutal appetites and their cynical depravity.

Only a woman could love her with proper delicacy and tender affection.—One side of my character, which might not have been developed in a liaison of another sort, but which suddenly manifested itself in this, is the imperative longing to have some one under my protection, which is usually characteristic of men. If I had taken a lover, it would have annoyed me intensely to have him assume to defend me, for the reason that that is something I love to do myself for people whom I am fond of, and my pride is much better suited with the first rôle than the second, although the second may be more agreeable.—So I was very well content to bestow upon my dear little girl all the attentions I ought to have wanted to receive, such as assisting her over difficult places in the road, holding her rein and her stirrup, waiting on her at table, undressing her and putting her to bed, defending her if any one insulted her, in short, doing everything for her that the most passionate and attentive lover does for an adored mistress.

I gradually lost all idea of my sex, and I barely remembered, now and then, that I was a woman. In the beginning I often let slip, unthinkingly, "I am tired," or some remark that did not accord with the coat I wore. Now that never happens, and even when I am writing to you, who are in my confidence, I sometimes retain an unnecessary amount of virility in my adjectives. If I ever take a fancy to go and look for my skirts in the drawer where I left them, which I very much doubt unless I fall in love with some fine young man, I shall have difficulty in accustoming myself to them, and I shall look like a man disguised as a woman, instead of a woman

disguised as a man. The truth is, that I belong to neither sex; I have not the idiotic resignation, the timidity nor the pettiness of the woman; I have not men's vices, their disgusting sottishness and their brutal inclinations:—I am of a third distinct sex which has no name as yet: above or below the others, more imperfect or superior; I have the body and soul of a woman, the mind and strength of a man, and I have too much or not enough of either to enable me to mate with one or the other.

O Graciosa, I shall never love any one, either man or woman, with all my heart; there is always something unsatisfied grumbling within me, and the lover or the friend fills the need of only one side of my character. If I had a lover, such feminine qualities as I have would dominate the virile part of me, I doubt not, but that would last but a short time, and I feel that I should be only half content; if I have a friend of my own sex, the thought of sensual pleasure prevents me from enjoying to the full the pure pleasure of the mind; so that I do not know where to stop, and am forever hesitating between the two.

My ideal of happiness would be to have the two sexes turn and turn about to satisfy this twofold nature:—a man to-day, a woman to-morrow, I would reserve for my lovers my languishing tenderness, my submissive, devoted manners, my softest caresses, my little melancholy, long-drawn sighs, whatever there is of the cat and the woman in my character; then, with my mistresses, I would be froward, enterprising, impassioned, with victorious manners, my hat cocked over my ear and the bearing of a swash-buckling adventurer. Thus my whole nature would come to light, and I should be perfectly happy, for true happiness consists in the ability to develop one's nature freely in every direction, and to be everything that one can be.

But these are impossibilities and I mustn't think about them.

I had kidnapped the little one with the idea of fooling my inclinations, and diverting upon some one all the vague affection that was floating about in my heart, and inundating it; I had taken her as a sort of safety-valve for my faculty of loving; but I

soon realized, notwithstanding all my affection for her, what an immense void, what a bottomless abyss, she left in my heart, how little her fondest caresses satisfied me!—I resolved to try a lover, but a long time passed, and still I met no one who was not disagreeable to me. I have forgotten to tell you that Rosette, having discovered where I had gone, had written me a most imploring letter, begging me to come and see her; I could not refuse, and I visited her at a country estate she has.—I have been there several times since, very recently in fact.—Rosette, in despair at her inability to have me for her lover, had plunged into the whirlpool of society and into dissipation, like all loving souls who are not religious and who have been disappointed in their first love;—she had had many adventures in a short time, and the list of her conquests was already very long, for not everybody had the same reasons for resisting her that I had.

She had with her a young man named D'Albert, who was for the moment her titular lover.—I seemed to make a deep impression on him, and he conceived a very warm friendship for me at once.

Although he treated her with much consideration and his manner toward her was affectionate enough, he did not love Rosette,—not because he was satiated or disgusted with women, but because she did not respond to certain conceptions, true or false, which he had formed of love and beauty. An ideal cloud floated between her and him, and prevented him from being happy as he would have been but for that.—Evidently his dream was not fulfilled and he was sighing for something else.—But he was not seeking it, and remained faithful to bonds that were irksome to him; for he has in his soul a little more delicacy and honor than most men have, and his heart is very far from being as corrupt as his mind.—Not being aware that Rosette had never been in love with any one but me, and was still, through all her love-affairs and follies, he feared to give her pain by letting her see that he did not love her; that consideration restrained him, and he sacrificed himself in the most generous way imaginable.

The character of my features pleased him extraordinarily,—for he attaches undue importance to exterior form—to such a point, in fact, that he fell in love with me, notwithstanding my male attire and the formidable rapier I wear at my side.—I confess that I am obliged to him for the shrewdness of his instinct, and that I esteem him somewhat for having detected me under those deceptive appearances.—In the beginning he fancied that he was blessed with a much more depraved taste than he really was, and I laughed in my sleeve to see him torment himself so.—Sometimes when he approached me he had a frightened look that diverted me beyond measure, and the very natural inclination that drew him toward me seemed to him a diabolical impulsion which one could not resist too sturdily.—At such times he fell back on Rosette in a frenzy, and strove to resume more orthodox methods of love; then he would come back to me, naturally more inflamed than before. At last the illuminating idea that I might be a woman stole into his mind. To convince himself of it, he set about watching and studying me with the most minute attention; he must have an intimate acquaintance with each hair on my head and know just how many lashes I have on my eyelids; my feet, my hands, my neck, my cheeks, the suspicion of down at the corner of my mouth,—he examined them all, compared and analyzed them, and the result of that investigation, in which the artist aided the lover, was the conviction, clear as the day—when it is clear—that I was in very truth a woman, and, what was more, his ideal, his type of beauty, the realization of his dream;—a marvellous discovery!

Nothing remained except to make an impression on me and to induce me to grant him the lover's gift of gratitude, to establish my sex beyond doubt.—A comedy that we acted, and in which I appeared as a woman, convinced him completely. I bestowed some equivocal glances upon him, and used certain passages in my part that bore some analogy to our situation to embolden him and induce him to declare himself.—For, even if I did not love him passionately, I was sufficiently attracted by him not to let him pine away with love where he stood; and as he was the first one

since my transformation to suspect that I was a woman, it was no more than fair that I should enlighten him on that important point, and I determined not to leave a shadow of doubt in his mind.

He came to my room several times with his declaration on his lips, but he dared not put it in words; for after all it is hard to talk of love to some one who wears the same kind of clothes that you do, and affects top-boots. At last, being unable to bring himself to the point, he wrote me a long letter, a most Pindaric production, in which he explained at great length what I knew better than he.

I don't quite know what I had better do.—Grant his request, or reject it,—that would be immoderately virtuous;—moreover, it would grieve him too much to be refused; if we make those who love us unhappy, what shall we do to those who hate us?—Perhaps it would be more in accordance with strict propriety to play the cruel for some time, and to wait at least a month before unclasping the tigress's skin to don the civilized chemise.—But, as I am determined to yield to him, it is quite as well to do it at once as later;—I don't think very much of the noble resistance, mathematically graduated, which abandons one hand to-day, the other to-morrow, then the foot, then the leg and the knee as far as the garter only,—or the intractable virtue that is always ready to clutch the bell-rope if you go a hair's breadth beyond the limit of the territory they have decided to surrender on that day.—It makes me laugh to see these methodical Lucreces walking backward with signs of the most maidenly terror, and casting a furtive glance over their shoulder from time to time to see if the sofa on which they are to fall is directly behind them.—I could not take so much trouble.

I do not love D'Albert, at least in the sense in which I understand the word, but I certainly have a liking and inclination for him;—his wit pleases me and his person does not repel me; there are not many people of whom I can say as much. He hasn't everything, but he has something;—what pleases me, in him is that he does not try

to slake his thirst brutally, like other men; he has a constant aspiration and a sustained impulse toward the beautiful—toward material beauty only, it is true, but that is a noble tendency, and sufficient to keep him within the limits of the pure.—His behavior to Rosette proves honesty of heart,—honesty, that is more rare than the other kind, if that be possible.

And then, if I must tell you, I am possessed by the most violent desires,—I am languishing and dying with lust;—for the coat I wear, while it leads me into all sorts of adventures with women, protects me too perfectly against the enterprises of men; an idea of pleasure that is never realized floats vaguely in my brain, and the dull, colorless dream fatigues and bores me.—So many women lead the life of prostitutes amid the most chaste surroundings! and I, in most ridiculous contrast to them, remain as chaste and unspotted as the cold Diana herself, in the midst of the most reckless dissipation and surrounded by the greatest rakes of the age.—This ignorance of the body, unaccompanied by ignorance of the mind, is the most wretched thing imaginable. In order that my flesh may not put on airs before my mind, I propose to inflict an equal stain upon it—if indeed it is any more of a stain than eating and drinking, which I doubt.—In a word, I propose to know what a man is, and what sort of pleasure he affords. As D'Albert recognized me through my disguise, it is no more than fair that he should be rewarded for his penetration; he was the first person to guess that I was a woman, and I will do my best to prove to him that his suspicions were well founded.—It would be most uncharitable to let him believe that he has developed an unnatural taste.

D'Albert then will solve my doubts, and give me my first lesson in love; it only remains now to bring the thing about in poetic fashion. I am inclined not to answer his letter, and to be cold to him for a few days. When I see that he is very depressed and desperate, cursing the gods, shaking his fist at all creation, and looking into wells to see if they are too deep to throw himself into—then I will withdraw, like Peau d'Ane, to the end of the corridor, and will don my multi-colored dress—that is

to say, my Rosalind costume, for my feminine wardrobe is decidedly limited. Then I will go to him, as radiant as a peacock spreading his feathers, showing ostentatiously what I generally conceal with the greatest care, and wearing only a little lace tucker, very low and very coquettish, and I will say to him in the most pathetic tone I can command:

"O most poetic and most perspicacious of young men, I am in very truth naught but a young and modest beauty, who, over and above all, adores you, and whose only wish is to give pleasure to you and to herself.—Tell me if that is agreeable to you, and if you still retain any scruple, touch this, go in peace, and sin all you can."

That eloquent harangue concluded, I will sink, half-fainting, into his arms, and while I heave a melancholy sigh or two, I will adroitly unfasten the clasp of my dress and appear in the conventional costume, that is to say, half naked.—D'Albert will do the rest, and I hope that, on the following morning, I shall know what to believe about all the fine things that have been troubling my brain so long.—While gratifying my curiosity, I shall have the additional pleasure of making a fellow-creature happy.

I propose also to pay Rosette a visit in the same costume, and to prove to her that my failure to respond to her love was due neither to coldness nor dislike.—I do not want her to retain that bad opinion of me, and she deserves, no less than D'Albert, that I should betray my incognito in her favor.—How will she take that disclosure?—Her pride will be comforted, but her love will groan.

Adieu, my loveliest and best; pray God that pleasure may not seem to me so small a matter as they who dispense it. I have written flippantly throughout this letter, and yet this that I am going to do is a serious thing, and all the rest of my life may feel its effects.

XVI

More than a fortnight had passed since D'Albert placed his amorous epistle on Théodore's table, and yet there was no perceptible change in the latter's

demeanor.—D'Albert did not know to what to attribute that silence;—it seemed as if Théodore had no knowledge of the letter; the pitiable D'Albert believed that it had been destroyed or lost; and yet it was difficult to see how that could be, for Théodore had returned to the room a moment after, and it would have been a most extraordinary thing if he had failed to notice a large paper lying by itself in the middle of the table, in such a way as to attract the most absent-minded glance.

Or was it that Théodore was really a man and not a woman, as D'Albert had imagined—or, in case she was a woman, had she such a pronounced aversion for him, such contempt, that she would not even deign to take the trouble to reply to him?—The poor fellow, who had not had, like ourselves, the privilege of looking through the portfolio of la belle Maupin's confidante, Graciosa, was not in a condition to decide affirmatively or negatively any of these important questions, and he wavered sadly in the most wretched irresolution.

One evening he was in his room, with his forehead pressed against the window, gazing gloomily, without seeing them, at the chestnut-trees in the park, already partly bare of leaves and bright red in spots. The horizon was swimming in a thick haze, night was already descending, rather gray than black, and cautiously placing its velvet feet on the tree-tops;—a large swan amorously dipped her neck and shoulders again and again in the steaming water of the stream, and her white body resembled in the shadow a large star of snow.—She was the only living creature that gave life to that dull landscape.

D'Albert was musing as sadly as a disappointed man can muse at five o'clock on a cloudy autumn afternoon, with no music but the whistling of a shrill north wind and no other outlook than the skeleton of a leafless forest.

He was thinking of throwing himself into the river, but the water seemed very black and cold, and the swan's example only half persuaded him; of blowing out his brains, but he had neither pistol nor powder, and he would have been sorry if he had;

of taking a new mistress, or even two—an ominous resolution! but he knew nobody who suited him, or, for that matter, who did not suit him.—He carried his despair so far as to think of renewing his relations with women who were perfectly unendurable to him and whom he had had his lackeys drive out of his house with horse-whips. He ended by deciding upon something even more ghastly—writing a second letter.

O sextuple idiot!

He was at that point in his meditations when he felt upon his shoulder—a hand—like a little dove alighting on a palm-tree.—The simile halts a little in that D'Albert's shoulder bore but slight resemblance to a palm; no matter, we retain it from a sentiment of pure Orientalism.

The hand was attached to the end of an arm which corresponded with a shoulder forming part of a body, which body was nothing more nor less than Théodore-Rosalind, Mademoiselle d'Aubigny, or Madelaine de Maupin, to give her her true name.

Who was surprised?—Neither you nor I, for you and I were fully prepared for this visit; but D'Albert, who had not the slightest expectation of it.—He gave a little cry of surprise half-way between oh! and ah! However, I have the best of reasons for thinking that it was nearer an ah! than an oh!

Chapter XVI — He was at that point in his meditations when he felt upon his shoulder—a hand—like a little dove alighting on a palm-tree.— *** The hand was attached to the end of an arm which corresponded with a shoulder forming part of a body, which body was nothing more nor less than Théodore-Rosalind, Mademoiselle d'Aubigny, or Madelaine de Maupin, to give her her true name.

It was Rosalind herself, so fair and radiant that she lighted up the whole room,—with the strings of pearls in her hair, her prismatic dress, her ample lace sleeves, her red-heeled shoes, her lovely peacock's-feather fan,—in a word, just as

she was on the day of the play. But there was this important and decisive difference, that she had neither neckerchief nor wimple nor ruff nor anything at all to conceal from his eyes those two charming hostile twin brothers,—who, alas! are only too often inclined to be reconciled.

A breast entirely bare, as white and transparent as antique marble, of the purest and most exquisite form, protruded boldly from a very scanty corsage and seemed to challenge kisses. It was a very reassuring sight; and D'Albert was quickly reassured, and gave way in all confidence to his wildest emotions.

"Well, Orlando, do you not recognize your Rosalind?" said the fair one, with the most charming smile; "or have you left your love hanging with your sonnets on the bushes in the forest of Arden? Are you really cured of the disease for which you asked me so persistently for a remedy? I am very much afraid so."

"Oh, no! Rosalind, I am sicker than ever. I am in the death-agony; I am dead, or nearly so."

"You look very well for a corpse, and many living men have not so good a color as you."

"What a week I have passed!—You can't imagine it, Rosalind. I hope that it will be worth at least a thousand years of purgatory to me in the other world.—But, if I may venture to ask you, why did you not answer sooner?"

"Why?—I am not quite sure, unless it was just because.—If that reason doesn't strike you as satisfactory, here are three others not so good; you can take your choice: first, because, in the excitement of your passion, you forgot to write legibly and it took me more than a week to guess what your letter was about;—secondly, because my modesty could not accustom itself in less time to the ridiculous idea of taking a dithyrambic poet for a lover; and thirdly, because I was not sorry to find out if you would blow out your brains, poison yourself with opium, or hang yourself with your garter.—There you are."

"You wicked jester!—You did well to come to-day, I assure you, for you might not have found me to-morrow."

"Really! poor boy!—Don't put on such a disconsolate expression, for I shall be touched too, and that would make me stupider in my single person than all the animals that were in the ark with the late Noah.—If I once open the flood-gates of my sentimentality, you will be submerged, I warn you.—Just now I gave you three bad reasons, I offer you now three good kisses; will you accept, on condition that you are to forget the reasons for the kisses?—I owe you that much, and more."

As she spoke, the lovely girl stepped up to the doleful lover and threw her beautiful bare arms around his neck.—D'Albert kissed her effusively on both cheeks and on the mouth.—The last kiss lasted longer than the others and might well have counted for four.—Rosalind saw that all that she had done hitherto was mere child's play. Her debt paid, she sat on D'Albert's knee, still deeply moved, and said, passing her hands through his hair:

"All my cruelty is exhausted, my sweet friend; I took this fortnight to satisfy my natural ferocity; I will confess that it seemed very long to me. Don't be conceited because I speak frankly, but that is the truth.—I put myself in your hands, take your revenge for my past rigor.—If you were a fool, I would not say this to you, nor indeed would I say anything else, for I don't care for fools.—It would have been very easy for me to make you believe that I was tremendously incensed by your boldness and that you would not have a sufficient store of platonic sighs and highly concentrated rhapsodies to obtain forgiveness for an offence with which I was well pleased; I might, like other women, have haggled with you for a long while and given you in instalments what I give you freely and all at once; but I do not think you would have loved me a single hair's breadth more.—I do not ask you for an oath of everlasting love nor for any extravagant protestations.—Love me as much as God pleases.—I will do the same for my part.—I will not call you a perfidious villain

when you cease to love me.—You will have the kindness also to spare me the odious corresponding titles, if I should happen to leave you.—I shall simply be a woman who has ceased to love you—nothing more.—It isn't necessary for us to hate each other all our lives because we have lain together for a night or two.—Whatever happens, and wherever my destiny may guide me, I swear to you, and this is an oath one can keep, that I will always retain a delightful memory of you, and, even if I am no longer your mistress, that I will always be your friend as I have been your comrade.—For you I have laid aside my man's clothes for to-night; to-morrow morning I shall resume them again for all.—Remember that I am Rosalind only at night, and that through the day I am and can be only plain Théodore de Sérannes—"

The conclusion of the sentence was stifled by a kiss, succeeded by many others, which they ceased to count and of which we will not undertake to furnish an exact reckoning, because it would certainly be a little long and perhaps very immoral—in the eyes of some people—for, so far as we are concerned, we know of nothing more moral and more sacred under heaven than the caresses of a man and a woman, when both are young and beautiful.

As D'Albert's solicitations became more passionate and more earnest, Théodore's lovely face, instead of expanding and beaming, assumed an expression of dignified melancholy which caused her lover some anxiety.

"Why, my dear sovereign, have you the chaste and solemn air of an antique Diana, when you should display the smiling lips of Venus rising from the sea?"

"You see, D'Albert, I resemble the huntress, Diana, more than anything else on earth.—When I was very young, I assumed this masculine costume for reasons which it would be tedious and useless to tell you.—You alone have divined my sex—and if I have made conquests, they have been of women only, superfluous conquests by which I have more than once been embarrassed.—In a word, although it may seem absurd and incredible, I am a virgin—as spotless as the snow of the

Himalayas, as the Moon before she had lain with Endymion, as Mary before she made the acquaintance of the heavenly dove, and I am serious like everybody who is about to do something that can never be undone.—I am about to undergo a metamorphosis, a transformation.—To change the name of maiden for the name of woman, to have not that to give to-morrow which I had yesterday; something that I do not know and am going to learn; an important leaf turned in the book of life.—That is why I am sad, my friend, and not because of anything for which you are to blame."

As she spoke, she put aside the young man's long hair with her two lovely hands, and pressed her softly clinging lips to his pale forehead.

D'Albert, deeply moved by the gentle, solemn tone in which she delivered her speech, took her hands and kissed all the fingers, one after another,—then gently broke the fastenings of her dress so that the corsage opened and the two white treasures appeared in all their splendor: upon that gleaming bosom, as pure as silver, bloomed the two loveliest roses in paradise. He softly pressed his mouth to the blushing points and so ran over the whole surface. Rosalind, with inexhaustible good nature, allowed him to do as he pleased, and tried to return his caresses as exactly as possible.

"You must find me very awkward and very cold, my poor D'Albert; but I hardly know what I am to do;—you will have much trouble to teach me, and really I am putting a very hard task upon you."

D'Albert made the simplest of all replies, he did not reply at all,—and embracing her with increased passion, he covered her bare shoulders and breast with kisses. The half-fainting girl's hair became unfastened, and her dress fell to her feet as if by enchantment. She stood like a white phantom with a simple chemise of the most transparent linen. The happy lover knelt and had soon tossed the two pretty little red-heeled shoes into opposite corners of the room;—the stockings with

embroidered clocks followed them close.

The chemise, endowed with a happy spirit of emulation, did not lag behind the dress: first it slipped from the shoulders before she thought of preventing it; then, taking advantage of a moment when the arms were perpendicular, it escaped from them with much address and fell as far as the hips, whose waving contour half stopped it.—Thereupon Rosalind noticed the perfidy of her last garment and raised her knee a little to prevent it from falling altogether.—In that pose she was a perfect copy of the marble statues of goddesses, whose intelligent drapery, grieved to conceal so many charms, regretfully envelops the shapely thighs, and by well-planned treachery stops just below the place it is intended to hide.—But as the chemise was not of marble, and its folds did not sustain it, it continued its triumphal descent, fell upon the dress and lay in a circle at its mistress's feet like a great white greyhound.

Chapter XVI — The chemise, endowed with a happy spirit of emulation, did not lag behind the dress: first it slipped from the shoulders before she thought of preventing it; then, taking advantage of a moment when the arms were perpendicular, it escaped from them with much address and fell as far as the hips, whose waving contour half stopped it.

Of course, there was a very simple means of avoiding all this confusion; namely, by holding the fleeing garment with the hand; but that idea, natural as it was, did not occur to our modest heroine.

She was left, therefore, without any veil, her fallen clothing forming a sort of pedestal, in all the transparent splendor of her lovely nudity, in the soft light of an alabaster lamp that D'Albert had lighted.

D'Albert, fairly dazzled, gazed at her in ecstasy.

"I am cold," she said, folding her arms across her breast.

"Oh! one moment more! I pray you!"

Rosalind unfolded her arms, rested the tip of her finger on the back of a chair, and stood perfectly still; she leaned slightly to one side in order to bring out all the grace of the undulating line;—she seemed in no wise embarrassed, and the imperceptible flush on her cheek did not deepen a single shade: but the somewhat hurried beating of her heart made the contour of her left bosom tremble.

The young enthusiast in beauty could not feast his eyes enough on such a spectacle: we must say, to the unbounded praise of Rosalind, that this time the reality surpassed his dream, and that he was not conscious of the slightest disillusionment.

Everything was combined in the lovely body posing before him;—delicacy and strength, form and coloring, the outlines of a Grecian statue of the most glorious days of the art, and the tones of a Titian.—He saw there, palpable and crystallized, the misty chimera he had tried so many times to check in its flight—he was not compelled, as he had complained so bitterly to his friend Silvio, to confine his glances to some special well-formed portion of the body, and not to look beyond it, under penalty of seeing something horrible, and his amorous eyes descended from the head to the feet and ascended from the feet to the head, always softly caressed by a harmonious, correctly proportioned line.

The knees were wonderfully pure, the ankles slender and shapely, the legs and thighs built upon a noble, superb model, the belly as lustrous as agate, the hips supple and strong, a bosom that might well tempt the gods to come down from heaven to kiss it, arms and shoulders of the most magnificent shape;—a torrent of beautiful brown hair, curling slightly, as in the heads drawn by the old masters, fell in tiny waves along a back of polished ivory, marvellously heightening the effect of its whiteness.

The painter satisfied, the lover gained the upper hand; for, however great one's love of art, there are things which one cannot long remain contented in looking at.

He took the fair one in his arms and carried her to the bed; in a twinkling he had

undressed himself and jumped in beside her.

Our fair reader of the gentler sex would surely look askance at her lover if we should disclose the formidable figure attained by D'Albert's love, assisted by Rosalind's curiosity. Let her remember the most completely filled and the most delightful of her own nights, the night when—the night she would remember a hundred thousand days if she did not die long before; let her put the book beside her and count upon her pretty white fingers how many times he who loved her best loved her that night, and thus fill the gap which we leave in this glorious history.

Rosalind was extremely well disposed, and made astonishing progress in that one night.—The artlessness of body which wondered at everything, and the finesse of mind which wondered at nothing, formed a most alluring and fascinating contrast.—D'Albert was enchanted, bewildered, transported, and would have liked the night to last forty-eight hours, like that in which Hercules was conceived.—Toward morning, however, despite an infinity of the most amorous kisses, and caresses, and endearments, well adapted to keep a man awake, he was obliged, after a superhuman effort, to take a little rest. Sweet, luxurious slumber touched his eyelids with the end of its wing, his head sank and he fell asleep between his fair mistress's bosoms.—She gazed at him for some time with an air of profound and melancholy meditation; then, as the dawn cast its first rays through the curtains, she raised him gently, laid him beside her, rose and passed lightly over his body.

She seized her clothes and dressed in haste, then, returning to the bed, leaned over D'Albert, who was still sleeping, and kissed both his eyes on their long silky lashes.—That done, she left the room, walking backward and still looking at him.

Instead of returning to her room, she went to Rosette's.—What she said there, what she did there, I have never been able to learn, although I have striven most conscientiously to do so.—I have not found among Graciosa's papers or D'Albert's

or Silvio's anything relating to that visit. But one of Rosette's maids told me of this singular circumstance: although her mistress did not lay with her lover that night, her bed was rumpled and tossed about and bore the impressions of two bodies.—Furthermore, she showed me two pearls exactly like those Théodore wore in his hair when he played Rosalind. She had found them in the bed when she made it. I state the fact and leave the reader to draw whatever deductions he may choose therefrom; for my own part I have made a thousand conjectures each more unreasonable than the last, and so ridiculous that I really do not dare to write them even in the most virtuously periphrastic style.

It was quite noon when Théodore left Rosette's chamber.—He did not appear at dinner or supper.—D'Albert and Rosette did not seem surprised.—He went to bed early, and the next morning, at daybreak, without a word to any one, he saddled his horse and his page's and left the chateau, telling a servant not to expect him at dinner, and that he might not return for some days.

D'Albert and Rosette were greatly astonished, and did not know how to account for this sudden disappearance—especially D'Albert, who, by the prowess he displayed the first night, thought he had well earned a second. Toward the end of the week, the unhappy, disappointed lover received a letter from Théodore which we propose to transcribe. I am afraid it will not satisfy my readers of either sex; but the letter was written so and not otherwise, and this glorious romance shall have no other conclusion.

XVII

Doubtless, my dear D'Albert, you are greatly surprised by what I now do after what I have done.—I permit you to be, there is good reason for it.—I will wager that you have already applied to me at least twenty of the epithets we agreed to strike out of our vocabulary: perfidious, inconstant, vile creature—is it not so?—At all events, you will not call me cruel or virtuous, which is so much gained.—You curse me and

you are wrong.—You desired me, you loved me, I was your ideal:—very good. I granted you on the spot what you wanted; it was nobody's fault but your own that you hadn't it sooner. I served as body to your dream in the most accommodating way.—I gave you what I certainly shall never again give any one—a surprise upon which you hardly reckoned and for which you certainly ought to be most grateful to me.—Now that I have satisfied you, it pleases me to go away.—What is there so monstrous in that?

You had me absolutely and without reserve a whole night; what more do you want? Another night and then still another; you would even put up with a few days at need.—And so you would go on until you were disgusted with me.—I can hear you from here crying most politely that I am not one of those with whom men become disgusted. Mon Dieu! yes, with me as with others.

It would last six months, two years, even ten years, if you choose, but it must end at some time or other.—You would keep me through a sort of feeling of duty, or because you had not the courage to give me my dismissal. What is the use of waiting until it comes to that?

And then perhaps I should be the one to cease to love you. I have found you charming; perhaps, by virtue of seeing you often, I should have found you detestable.—Forgive that supposition.—By living with you on terms of close intimacy, I should have occasion, I doubt not, to see you in a cotton night-cap or in some absurd or grotesque domestic situation.—You would necessarily have lost the romantic and mysterious side that charms me above all things, and your character, being better understood, would no longer have seemed so unique to me. I should be less engrossed with you, having you near me, just as it happens with books that one never opens because one has them in his library.—Your nose or your mind would no longer seem to me nearly as well turned; I should notice that your coat didn't fit you, or that your stockings weren't drawn tight; I should have a thousand disillusionments

of that sort which would have made me very unhappy, and I should have come at last to this conclusion!—that you certainly had neither heart nor soul, and that I was destined not to be understood in the matter of love.

You adore me and I reciprocate the feeling. You have not the slightest reason to reproach me, and I have not the slightest complaint to make of you. I have been perfectly faithful to you throughout our whole liaison. I have deceived you in nothing.—I had neither a false bosom nor false virtue; you had the extreme kindness to tell me that I was even more beautiful than you imagined.—In return for the beauty I gave you, you gave me much pleasure; we are quits;—I go my way and you yours, and perhaps we shall meet again at the Antipodes.—Live in that hope.

You think perhaps that I do not love because I leave you. Later you will realize how far that is true.—If I had cared less for you, I would have remained and poured out the insipid draught for you to the dregs. Your love would soon have been dead of ennui; after some time you would have entirely forgotten me, and as you read my name on the list of your conquests, you would have asked yourself: "Who the devil was she?"—I have at least the satisfaction of thinking that you will remember me more than some others.—Your unsatisfied desire will still spread its wings to fly to me; I shall always be to you something desirable to which your fancy will love to return, and I hope that in the bed of the mistresses you may have hereafter, you will think sometimes of the single night you passed with me.

You will never be more lovable than you were on that blessed evening, and even if you should be as much so, that would show a falling-off; for in love, as in poetry, to remain at the same point is to retrograde. Cling to that impression—you will do well.

You have made the task of such lovers as I may have—if I have other lovers—a difficult one, and no one will ever be able to efface my memory of you;—they will be the heirs of Alexander.

If it grieves you too deeply to lose me, burn this letter, which is the only proof that you have had me, and you will think you have had a pleasant dream. What is there to prevent that? The vision vanished before dawn, just at the hour when dreams return home through the doors of horn or ivory.—How many men have died, less fortunate than you, without giving so much as a single kiss to their chimera!

I am neither whimsical nor mad nor prudish.—What I do is the result of profound conviction.—It was not to inflame your passion or from any deep design of coquetry that I left C——; do not try to follow me or to find me: you will not succeed. My precautions to conceal my tracks from you are too well taken; you will always be, in my mind, the man who opened to me a world of novel sensations. Those are things a woman doesn't readily forget. Although absent, I shall think of you often, more often than if you were with me.

Do your best to console poor Rosette, who is likely to be at least as grieved as you at my departure. Love each other well in memory of me, whom you have both loved, and mention my name sometimes in a kiss.

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