

TIGHT BINDING BOOK

**UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY**

OU_212883

**UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY**

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

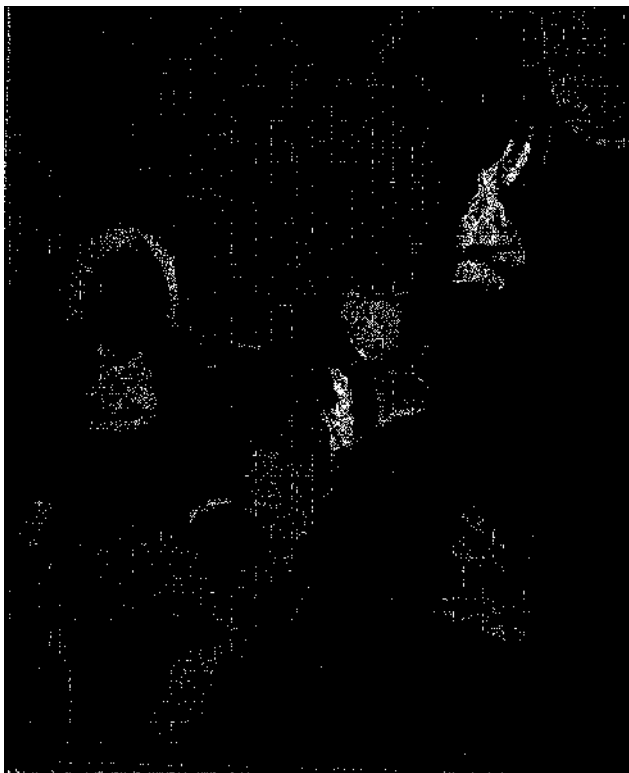
No. 843-76 v.1 Accession No. 17694
D88V

for

Sumas, Alexandre

M. Comte de Bragelonne

This book should be returned on or before the date
marked below. ¹⁹²



E.L

Balsamo calmly levelled it at M. de Sartinés *Page* 383

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE
(THE MEMOIRS OF A PHYSICIAN)

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

INTRODUCTION BY R. BRIMLEY JOHNSON

ILLUSTRATED BY R. W. MATTHEWS



THE ELIXIR OF LIFE
BY ALEXANDRE DUMAS
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY R. BRIMLEY JOHNSON
AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY R. W. MATTHEWS

INTRODUCTION

IT was the ambition of Dumas, and his achievement, to popularise the story of France, in his own phrase, by "elevating history to the dignity of romance." The ideal obviously permits of considerable freedom in the treatment of facts, but its foundation remains the truth, clothed in the splendour of an artist's enthusiastic imagination. Dumas believed in France and painted her glory for her sons; as Shakespeare and Scott taught us the English "faith." Romance lives, while records are forgotten.

The great novels of DUMAS, though not written in historical sequence, almost cover the ground from the Massacre of St. Bartholomew to the Revolution, falling into three periods approximately coincident with the centuries: the sixteenth, of Charles IX. and Henri III., the Medici, Chicot, and the League; the seventeenth, of Louis XIII., Louis XIV., and the redoubtable musketeers; the eighteenth, of Louis XV., Louis XVI., Cagliostro, Marie Antoinette, and the Guillotine.

Of these, *Joseph Balsamo*, or *The Memoirs of a Physician*, opens the last period of romantic France, appropriately enough, with the coming of "the Austrian." Though, as always in Dumas, the national picture is dramatised in the clash of strong individuals, the shadow of change and calamity is here; rather dimly felt to be ominously murmuring beneath the surface than as yet openly expressed. The great;

figures of the Revolution itself have scarcely emerged. The seed is being sown by the visions of Balsamo, and the philosophies of Rousseau.

Naturally, we do not here meet any characters from the earlier novels, for these are altogether new times, but many of those here introduced are destined in the novelist's brain for different—and more important—rôles in later novels of the last days.

To a large extent the course of events, even the first awakening of popular unrest, is seen to be dominated by that mysterious but historical figure (Carlyle's "Archquack"), here known alternatively as Balsamo, Acharat, or the Count de Fenix; afterwards the more openly omniscient and all-powerful Zanoni or Comte de Cagliostro. Dumas is known to have plunged with his usual voracity into the innumerable wonders of occultism, ancient and modern; he himself claimed to have considerable hypnotic powers—tested for this book by experiment—and he here combines in one character the traditions of magic, reincarnation, and possession by the devil.

In the melodramatic opening chapters of "the three hundred phantoms" where Balsamo reveals himself as "the great Copt: he whom the world awaits," he tells us something of his "thirty-two" previous existences. Here is established, or rather directed, the world-wide secret society of Illuminati (with their motto, L.P.D.—*Lelia Pedibus Destrue*) who are, in twenty years:—

"to render odious to France these *fleurs-de-lys* which remind the people of a thousand years of victory and charity, to efface the name of kings from the heart of thirty millions of men. . . . Bring all religious powers into contempt, efface all

social distinctions, put down aristocratic castes, and divide lordly proprietorships."

Yet with these lofty ideals, Balsamo's cruel treatment of the beautiful Italian wife who loved and obeyed him in her sleep-life (*i.e.*, when mesmerised) but feared and hated him in her normal existence, is plainly attributed to Satanic influences, by which, also, he can compel her—for his own ends—to see into the future and warn him of every approaching danger from jealous foes.

"I believe," said Dumas, "that by the help of magnetism a bad man might do much harm, I doubt that a good man could do much good. . . . I consider that magnetism is an amusement but not yet a science." This is clearly the opinion he sets out to illustrate in the personal character and deeds of Balsamo, while allowing him belief in himself and in his mission to humanity. As the novelist's own sympathies were always royalist, there is perhaps no very glaring inconsistency with the magician's later services to the cause of Revolution.

In this novel, however, we find elsewhere many kindly and generous disciples and teachers of the new creed. It is the generation of philosophers (or Encyclopedists, as they were sometimes called), and Rousseau appears chiefly as the gentle herbalist and music-copyist, preaching the simple life, curbing the impetuous pride of visionary youth, and distinguished for his dignified benevolence. It is he, moreover, from whom the Physician, Sebastian Gilbert, obtained the prudent guidance and help which ultimately led to the Court, where, in later novels, we see him vainly counselling the King and Queen to moderate reforms for their own security.

At present, while worshipping an aristocrat, in the person of 'Andree de Taverny—he is goaded to protestations of "equality" by her instinctive, unconscious scorn: in him are united "all the strength of mind of the lower classes with all the refined tastes of the higher." Though much more slightly drawn, the young officer, Philip de Taverny, has greater personal charm, as becomes the well-born, even if democratically inclined. Dumas, no doubt, intends us to admire Philip, destined hero of the final volume in the Revolution series, *Le Chevalier de Maison Rouge*, whose romantic devotion to Marie Antoinette, entirely without reward, almost achieves her escape. And in another novel of this group, *La Comtesse de Charny*, it is his duel with a more favoured rival that leads to Charny's marriage with his sister, Andree, here seen first tasting the joys of Paris and Court life. So far, though not at all a *Maison Rouge*, Philip's sympathies with the people are in the grand manner of the purple-born; but they are also simple, generous, and sincere, inspired by the sympathy and affection of one holding himself brother to all men.

With these intellectual and emotional promptings towards new ideas, Dumas contrasts the other phase of the times, no less provocative of destruction—the cruel and false glitter of the Court, its many intrigues, and its reckless extravagance. The dramatic race to Versailles between the Dauphiness and Madame Dubarry; the latter's frantic efforts to secure her presentation at Court; her brother's consummate diplomacy towards the old Countess de Beam, unearthed to sponsor the beautiful mistress; the eleventh-hour mysterious arrival of the "hair-dresser, dress and carriage" when all seemed lost; the scandalous promotion of her negro to be the Governor of Luciennes,

and the pretty Chon's tricks on solemn Gilbert; all combine to form one of those lively pictures of wit and splendour in a rotten and corrupt State, by which the novelist delights at once to dazzle his readers and to point a moral.

Most of us, I think, would gladly forget two facts about those great romances: that Dumas borrowed freely from earlier versions of many incidents and characters, that he employed others for much of his spade work. We fondly imagine that every glowing phrase is the master's own, and forget that some of the greatest paintings in the world were first laid on by 'prentice hands.

The artist is justified by the use made of his material; whether purely imaginative or arranged from other men's brains. And in everything of importance that bears the name of Dumas, his personality reigns supreme. His touch made it his own. The test of art, or of genius in any form, may not be discovered by a search for origins. It is born and lives, only by self-expression; the expression of a rare, penetrating, and free self. It is, moreover, because Dumas, without documents or collaborators, had a sense for history, that he and no other breathed life into the men who made France. Despite frequent inaccuracies and deliberate twistings of facts, his descriptions are admitted to be extraordinarily realistic *dossiers* of the past.

Joseph Balsamo (originally published in ten Volumes 1846—1847, ^iter appearing in *La Presse*) is one of the novels known to have been written in collaboration with Auguste Maquet, "unwearied rummager of documents," whom Dumas first generously helped, and afterwards employed as his chief assistant in the production of his dramatic romances. The novelist's

personal industry was immense, and, once his plot was ready, he could *write* a tale with incredible rapidity. For a wager, it is on record, he produced the *Chevalier de Maison Rouge*, a neat-looking manuscript of 3375 lines, in sixty-six hours, without neglecting his food or sleep ; and there is nothing in that exciting volume to suggest that it was hurried or badly thought out.

Yet no one human being, we may be sure, could have completed the whole *libraire Dumas* without some assistance at different stages of the work, and too much digging must necessarily have interrupted, and even weakened, the swift current of his thoughts. Certainly Dumas owes much to the impetuosity of his mind. Crowded scenes flash into his imagination ; characters start up, as it were, before his eyes ; stirring deeds tumble over each other in lightning vision ; and he must gather them up, in vivid word-pictures, before they can race headlong out of sight.

There is a sense in which Dumas writes without thought, not wishing his reader to think. True romance adds bright colours, fine adventure, quick emotions, and brave deeds to our normal, obvious existence ; but there is romance, too, for every one of us, in real life, whether or no we find and face it ; and while we have courage to fight out of the groove and defy the cynic, we shall honour the genius who reveals it. As the world grows older, grayer, and more efficient or matter of fact, it has the more need of visions and dreams. May we, at least, not live to see the day when men find neither pleasure nor worth in the gay heroics of Alexandre Dumas !

R. BRIMLEY JOHNSON.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dumas produced some three hundred volumes of novels, memoirs, travel, and plays, of which the most important are :—

PLAYS : DRAMA AND COMEDY.

- Henri III. et sa cour*, 1828.
Christine, 1830.
Antony, 1831.
Napoleon Bonaparte, 1831.
La Tour de Nesle, 1832.
Mile, de Belle-Isle, 1839.
Un manage sous Louis XV., 184T.
Les demoiselles de Saint-Cyr, 1843.

MEMOIRS, TRAVEL.

- Souvenirs d'Antony*, 1835.
Impressions de voyage, 1841.
Excursions sur les bords du Rhin, 3 vols., 1842.
Vie politique de Louis-Philippe, 2 vols., 1852.
Mes Memoires, 22 vols., 1854.
Souvenirs dramatiques, 2 vols., 1868.

NOVELS.

- Les trois mousquetaires*, 8 vols., 1844-6.
Le Comte de Monte-Cristo, 12 vols., 1844-5.
Vingt ans apris, 10 vols., 1845-6.
La Reine Margot, 6 vols., 1845.

- Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge*, 6 vols., 1845.
Memoires d'un Medecin, 19 vols., 1846-8.
Le Vicomte de Bragelonne, 26 vols., 1848-50.
Le Collier de la Reine, 9 vols., 1849-50.
La Tulipe Noire, 3 vols., 1850.
Olympe de Cleves, 9 vols., 1852.
La Comtesse de Charny, 19 vols., 1853.

The numbers of volumes and dates given above are those of first production or publication. Dumas had various publishers for his first editions, but he is now generally read in the *Nouvelle Collection Michel Levy* (Paris, Calmann-Levy, 1 franc per vol.), in which, except for the plays (25 vols.) and memoirs (10 vols.), no work exceeds six volumes in extent.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAOB
I. THE DUKE D'AIGUILLON	17
II. THE KING DIVIDES THE SPOILS	29
III. THE ANTECHAMBER OF THE DUKE DE RICHELIEU	38
IV. RICHELIEU IS DISABUSED	50
V. THE DAUPHIN'S FAMILY REPAST	58
VI. THE QUEEN'S HAIR	69
VII. M. DE RICHELIEU APPRECIATES NICOLE	78
VIII. THE TRANSFORMATION	89
IX. HOW PLEASURE TO SOME IS DESPAIR TO OTHERS	94
X. THE PARLIAMENTS	105
XI. IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT THE PATH OF A MINISTER IS NOT ALWAYS STREWN WITH ROSES	115
XII. M. D'AIGUILLON TAKES HIS REVENGE	131
XIII. IN WHICH THE READER WILL MEET M. FLAGEOT	129
XIV. THE CONTUSION INCREASES	140
XV. THE BED OF JUSTICE	148
XVI. THE INFLUENCE OF THE WORDS OF THE UNKNOWN UPON J. J. ROUSSEAU	156
XVII. THE HOUSE IN THE RUE PLATRIERE	164
XVIII. THE REPORT	174
XIX. THE BODY AND THE SOUL	188
XX. BODY AND SOUL	205
XXI. MARAT'S PORTRESS	216

CHAP.	PAGE
XXII. THE MAN AND HIS WORKS	228
XXIII. ROUSSEAU'S TOILET	239
XXIV. THE SIDE SCENES OF TRIANON	245
XXV. THE REHEARSAL	258
XXVI. THE CASKET	265
XXVII. KING LOUIS XV.'s PETIT SOUPEK	272
XXVIII. PRESENTIMENTS	285
XXIX. GILBERT'S ROMANCE	293
XXX. FATHER AND DAUGHTER	302
XXXI. WHAT ALTHOTAS WANTED TO COMPLETE HIS ELIXIR	309
XXXII. M. DE RICHELIEU'S TWO DROPS OF WATER	324
XXXIII. THE FLIGHT	338
XXXIV. DOUBLE SIGHT	346
XXXV. THE WILL	359
XXXVI. THE HOTEL OF M. DE SARTINES	366
XXXVII. THE COFFER	374
XXXVIII. CONVERSATION	383
XXXIX. SARTINES BEGINS TO THINK BALSAMO A SORCERER	394
XL. THE ELIXIR OF LIFE	401
XLI. THE STRUGGLE	408
XLII. LOVE	412
XLIII. THE PHILTRE	424
XLIV. BLOOD	433
XLV. DESPAIR	443
XLVI. THE JUDGMENT	449
XLVII. DOOM	459
EPILOGUE : THE NINTH OF MAY	466

SYNOPSIS OF THE FIRST BOOKS OF THIS
SERIES.—*JOSEPH BALSAMO AND THE
COUNTESS DUBARRY*

ON the 6th May, 1770, there was assembled in secret on the lonely summit of Mont Tonnerre, a company of men gathered from all corners of the earth, and pledged, under pain of death, to fulfil their motto, L.P.D. (*Lelia Pcdibus Destruere*), to the overthrow of tyranny and the freeing of the oppressed. To this assembly comes the unknown Joseph Balsamo, borne as it were out of the past, on the flying feet of the matchless Djerid. Under his leadership the company scatters, each man to his country and his particular work. Balsamo himself is allotted France as his task.

Eight days later, a terrific storm overtakes Balsamo, who is travelling with Althotas, his old Arabian tutor in the mysteries, and his beautiful Italian wife, Lorenza. In the confusion Lorenza, who had married Balsamo when mesmerised and who accompanies him only under the force of his compelling will, escapes on Djerid. Her husband takes refuge in the Chateau of Taverney. The following morning sees the arrival at this same Chateau of the carriages of Marie Antoinette of Austria, hastening towards Paris for her wedding with the Dauphin, and on her departure she sweeps into her train the rough and poverty-stricken Baron de Taverney and his lovely daughter, Andrei, with her serving-maid Nicole. Philip, the Chevalier de Maison Rouge, brother of Andree, is already in the bodyguard of the Archduchess.

The Taverneys, from the simple country life to which they have grown accustomed, are plunged at once into the gaiety and intrigue of Court life ; while Sebastian Gilbert, our Physician and something of a philosopher, who is the son of the old nurse of the Taverneys, and is passionately in love with Andree, follows on foot towards the Capital and becomes, by accident, attached to the rival faction.

The Countess Dubarry, the King's Mistress, who is at the centre of this intrigue, succeeds with the innocent help of the aged Countess de Beam in effecting her presentation at Court, and is established when Marie Antoinette arrives in Paris—the yawning gulf which is to entomb both her and the whole court.

Gilbert, meanwhile, established now in the favour of the Dubarry household, finds the life irksome to his philosophic soul, and it is not long before his active legs are carrying him, free again, through the woods towards Versailles. At length, tired and hungry, he finds in an old botanist a source of nourishment for body and mind. They return to Paris together and Gilbert is given employment and shelter in the house of his new friend—Jean Jacques Rousseau.

Quite by chance Mademoiselle Andree takes an apartment which is overlooked from Gilbert's garret window, and the glimpses he catches of her, at her window and in the garden, fan his passion to a white heat. She, meanwhile, attracts by her beauty the King himself, and we find her very soon as Lady in Waiting to the Dauphiness at Trianon. The Countess Dubarry, fearing Andree as a rival, obtains for Gilbert, whose new abode and passion have alike been observed, a post as assistant gardener at Trianon, that his unwelcome attentions may continue.

The ceaseless intrigue is now developing to another climax. The chief opposition to the Dubarry faction at Court is the Due de Choiseul, Prime Minister and Confidential Adviser to the King, and the Countess and the Due de Richelieu, in league together, cast around for some means of removing him. There is living in Paris at the time a certain Count de Fenix, who has acquired a considerable reputation as a sorcerer, and the plotters decide to seek his aid. Joseph Balsamo, for it is he, has Lorenza in his power again, and under his hypnotic influence she develops the faculty of second sight. By this means Balsamo watches the secret movements of Choiseul. Damning evidence is submitted to the King, and the disgraced Prime Minister leaves The Dubarry in triumphant possession.

CHAPTER I

THE DUKE D'AIGUILLON

WHILE melancholy visages and red eyes were the order of the day on the road from Paris to Chanteloup, Luciennes was radiant with blooming faces and charming smiles.

It was because at Luciennes was enthroned, not a mere mortal, although the most beautiful and most adorable of mortals, as the poets and courtiers declared, but the real divinity which governed France.

The evening after M. de Choiseul's disgrace, therefore, the road leading to Luciennes was thronged with the same carriages which, in the morning, had rolled after the exiled minister. There were, besides, the partisans of the chancellor, and the votaries of corruption and self-interest, and altogether they made an imposing procession.

But Madame Dubarry had her police, and Jean knew, to a baron, the names of those who had strewn the last flowers over the expiring Choiseuls. He gave a list of these names to the countess, and they were pitilessly excluded, while the courage of the others in braving public opinion was rewarded by the protecting smile and the complete view of the goddess of the day. What joy and what congratulations echoed on all sides ! Pressings of the hand, little smothered laughs and enthusiastic applause, seemed to have become the habitual language of the inhabitants of Luciennes.

After the great throng of carriages, and the general crowd, followed the private receptions. Richelieu, the secret and modest hero, indeed, but yet the real hero of the day, saw the crowd of visitors and petitioners pass away, and remained the last in the countess's boudoir.

"It must be confessed," said the countess, "that the Count Balsamo, or De Fenix, whichever name you give him, marshal, is one of the first men of the age. It would be a thousand pities if such sorcerers were still burnt."

"Certainly, countess, he is a great man," replied Richelieu.

"And a very handsome man, too; I have taken quite a fancy for him, duke."

"You will make me jealous," said Richelieu, laughing, and eager besides to direct the conversation to a more positive and serious subject. "The Count de Fenix would make a dreadful minister of police."

"I was thinking of that," replied the countess; "only it is impossible."

"Why, countess?"

"Because he would render colleagues impossible."

"How so?"

"Knowing everything—seeing into their hand——" Richelieu blushed beneath his rouge.

"Countess," replied he, "if he were my colleague, I would wish him to see into mine always, and communicate the cards to you; for you would ever see the knave of hearts on his knees before the queen, and prostrate at the feet of the king."

"Your wit puts us all to the blush, my dear duke," replied the countess. "But let us talk a little of our ministry. I think you mentioned that you warned your nephew D'Aiguillon of what would take place."

" He has arrived, madame, and with what Roman augurs would have called the best conjunction of omens possible; his carriage met ChoiseuFs leaving Paris."

"That is indeed a favourable omen/' said the countess. " Then he is coming here ? "

" Madame, I thought that if M. D'Aiguillon was seen at Luciennes at such a time, it would give rise to unpleasant comment; I begged him, therefore, to remain in the village, until I should send for him according to your orders."

" Send for him immediately, then, marshal, for we are alone, or very nearly so."

" The more willingly that we quite understand each other ; do we not, countess ? "

" Certainly, duke. You prefer war to finance, do you not ? or do you wish for the marines ? "

" I prefer war, madame ; I can be of most service in that department."

" True ; I will speak of it to the king. You have no antipathies ? "

" For whom ? "

" For any colleagues his majesty might present to you."

" I am the least difficult man in the world to live with, countess ; but allow me to send for my nephew, since you are good enough to grant him the favour of an audience."

Richelieu approached the window and looked into the courtyard, now illuminated by the last rays of the setting sun. He made a sign to one of his footmen, who was keeping his eye fixed upon the window, and who darted off as soon as he received the signal.

Lights were now brought in.

Ten minutes after the footman had disappeared,

a carriage rolled into the courtyard. The countess turned quickly towards the window.

Richelieu saw the movement, which seemed to him an excellent prognostic for M. D'Aiguillon's affairs, and consequently for his own.

"She likes the uncle," said he to himself, "and she is in a fair way to like the nephew. We shall be masters here."

While he was feasting on these chimerical visions, a slight noise was heard at the door, and the confidential valet-de-chambre, throwing it open, announced the Duke d'Aiguillon.

He was an extremely handsome and graceful nobleman, richly, and at the same time elegantly and tastefully, dressed. M. d'Aiguillon had passed his earliest prime, but he was one of those men who, whether judged by their looks or minds, seem young until old age renders them infirm.

The cares of government had traced no wrinkles on his brow; they had only enlarged the natural fold which seems to be the birthplace of great thoughts both in statesmen and in poets. His air and carriage were lofty and commanding, and his handsome features wore an expression at once of intelligence and melancholy, as if he knew that the hatred of ten millions of men weighed upon his head, but at the same time wished to prove that the weight was not beyond his strength.

M. D'Aiguillon had the most beautiful hands in the world; they looked white and delicate, even when buried in the softest folds of lace. A well-turned leg was prized very highly at that period, and the duke's was a model of manly elegance and aristocratic form. He combined the suavity of the poet with the nobility of the lord and the suppleness and ease of the dashing

guardsman. He was thus a beau ideal for the countess in the three several qualities which the instinct of this beautiful sensualist taught her to love.

By a remarkable coincidence, or rather by a chain of circumstances skilfully contrived by M. d'Aiguillon, these two objects of public animadversion, the favourite and the courtier, had, with all their mutual advantages, never yet met each other face to face at court.

For the last three years M. d'Aiguillon had managed to be very busy either in Brittany or in his closet, and had not once shown himself at court, knowing well that a favourable or unfavourable crisis must soon take place. In the first case, it would be better to be comparatively unknown; in the second, to disappear without leaving any trace behind, and thus be able to easily emerge from the gulf under new auspices and in a new character.

Another motive influenced his calculations—a motive which is the mainspring of romance, but which nevertheless was the most powerful of all.

Before Madame Dubarry was a countess, and every evening touched the crown of France with her lips, she had been a lovely, smiling, and adored creature—she had been loved, a happiness she could no longer hope for, since she was feared.

Amongst all the young, rich, powerful, and handsome men who had paid court to Jeanne Vaubernier, amongst all the rhymers who had coupled her in their verses with the epithets of angel and divinity, the Duke d'Aiguillon had formerly figured *in* the first rank; but whether it was that the duke was not sufficiently ardent, or whether Mademoiselle Lange was not so easily pleased as her detractors pretended, or lastly, whether the sudden attachment of the king had separated two hearts ready to unite, is not known, but the

fact remains that M. D'Aiguillon got his verses, acrostics, bouquets, and perfumes returned, and Mademoiselle Lange closed her door in the Rue des Petits Champs against him. The duke hastened to Brittany, suppressing his sighs; Mademoiselle Lange wafted all hers towards Versailles, to the Baron de Gonesse, that is, the King of France.

D'Aiguillon's sudden disappearance had troubled Madame Dubarry very little, for she feared the remembrances of the past; but when subsequently she saw the silent attitude of her former admirer, she felt at first perplexed, then astonished, and, being in a good position for judging of men, she ended by thinking him a man of profound tact and discretion.

For the countess this was a great distinction, but it was not all, and the moment was perhaps come when she might think D'Aiguillon a man of heart.

We have seen that the marshal, in all his conversations with Madame Dubarry, had never touched upon the subject of his nephew's acquaintance with Mademoiselle Lange. This silence, from a man accustomed, as the old duke was, to say the most difficult things in the world, had much surprised and even alarmed the countess. She, therefore, impatiently awaited M. d'Aiguillon's arrival, to know how to conduct herself, and to ascertain whether the marshal had been discreet or merely ignorant.

The duke entered, respectful, but at the same time easy, and sufficiently master of himself to draw the distinction in his salutation between the reigning sultana and the court lady. By this discriminating tact he instantly gained a protectress quite disposed to find good perfect, and perfection wonderful,

M. d'Aiguillon then took his uncle's hand, and the

latter, advancing towards the countess, said in his most insinuating voice,—

"The Duke d'Aiguillon, madame. It is not so much my nephew as one of your most ardent servants whom I have the honour to present to you."

The countess glanced at the duke as the marshal spoke, and looked at him like a woman, that is to say, with eyes which nothing can escape. But she saw only two heads bowing respectfully before her, and two faces erect, serene, and calm after the salutation was over.

"I know, marshal, that you love the duke/' said the countess. "You are my friend. I shall request M. d'Aiguillon, therefore, in deference to his uncle, to imitate him in all that will be agreeable to me."

"That is the conduct I had traced out beforehand for myself, madame," said D'Aiguillon, with another bow.

"You have suffered much in Brittany ?" asked the countess.

"Yes, madame, and it is not yet over," replied D'Aiguillon.

"I believe it is, sir ; besides, there is M. de Richelieu, who will be a powerful assistance to you."

D'Aiguillon looked at Richelieu as if surprised.

"Ah," said the countess, "I see that the marshal has not yet had time to have any conversation with you. That is very natural, as you have just arrived from a journey. Well, you must have a thousand things to say to each other, and I shall therefore leave you, marshal, for the present. My lord duke, pray consider yourself at home here."

Sa saying, the countess retired ; but she did not proceed far. Behind the boudoir there opened a large closet filled with all sorts of fantastic baubles with

which the king was very fond of amusing himself when he came to Luciennes. He preferred this closet to the boudoir, because in it one could hear all that was said in the next room. Madame Dubarry, therefore, was certain to hear the whole conversation between the duke and his nephew, and she calculated upon forming from it a correct and irrevocable opinion of the latter.

But the duke was not duped ; he knew most of the secrets of every royal and ministerial residence. To listen when people were speaking of him was one of his means ; to speak while others were overhearing him was one of his ruses.

He determined, therefore, still joyous at the reception which D'Aiguillon had met with, to proceed in the same vein, and to reveal to the favourite, under cover of her supposed absence, such a plan of secret happiness and of lofty power complicated with intrigues, as would present a double bait too powerful for a pretty woman, and above all for a court lady, to resist.

He desired the duke to be seated, and commenced,—
" You see, duke, I am installed here."

" Yes, sir, I see it."

" I have had the good fortune to gain the favour of this charming woman, who is looked upon as a queen here, and who is one in reality."

D'Aiguillon bowed.

" I must tell you, duke," continued Richelieu, " what I could not say in the open street—that Madame Dubarry has promised me a portfolio ! "

" Ah ! " said D'Aiguillon, " that is only your desert, sir."

" I do not know if I deserve it or not, but I am to have it—rather late in the day, it is true. Then,

situated as I shall be, I shall endeavour to advance your interests, D'Aiguillon."

" Thank you, my lord duke ; you are a kind relative, and have often proved it."

" You have nothing in view, D'Aiguillon ? "

" Absolutely nothing, except to escape being degraded from my title of duke and peer, as the parliament insist upon my being."

" Have you supporters anywhere ? "

" Not one/'

" You would have fallen then, had it not been for the present circumstances ? "

" I should have bit the dust, my lord Duke."

" Ah ! you speak like a philosopher. *Diable!* that is the reason I am so harsh, my poor D'Aiguillon, and address you more like a minister than an uncle."

" My uncle, your goodness penetrates me with gratitude."

" When I sent for you in such a hurry, you may be certain it was because I wished you to play an important part here. Let me see; have you reflected on the part M. de Choiseul played for ten years ? "

" Yes, certainly his was an enviable position."

" Enviable,! Yes, enviable when along with Madame de Pompadour he governed the king and exiled the Jesuits; but very sad when, having quarrelled with Madame Dubarry, who is worth a hundred Pompadours, he was dismissed from office in four and twenty hours. You do not reply."

" I am listening, sir, and am endeavouring to discover your meaning."

" You like M. de Choiseul's first part best, do you not ? "

" Certainly."

" Well, my dear duke, I have decided upon playing this part."

D'Aiguillon turned abruptly towards his uncle,—

" Do you speak seriously ? " said he.

" Yes. Why not ? "

" You intend to be a candidate for Madame Dubarry's favour ? "

" Ah ! *diable!* you proceed too fast. But I see you understand me. Yes, Choiseul was very lucky; he governed the king, and governed his favourite also. It is said he was attached to Madame de Pompadour—in fact, why not ? Well, no, I cannot act the lover ; your cold smile tells me plainly so ! You, with your young eyes, look compassionately at my furrowed brow, my bending knees, and my withered hands, which were once so beautiful. In place of saying, when I was speaking of Choiseul's part, that I would play it, I should have said we will play it."

" Uncle ! "

" No, she cannot love me, I know it; nevertheless—I may confess it to you without fear, for she will never learn it—I could have loved this woman beyond everything—but——"

D'Aiguillon frowned. " But——" said he.

" I have a splendid project," continued the marshal. " This part, which my age renders impossible for me, I will divide into two."

" Ha ! " said D'Aiguillon.

" Some one of my family," continued Richelieu, " will love Madame Dubarry. *Parbleu!* a glorious chance—such an accomplished woman ! "

And Richelieu, in saying these words, raised his voice.

" You know it cannot be Fronsac. A degenerate

wretch, a fool, a coward, a rogue, a gambler—duke, will you be the man ? "

" I ? " cried D'Aiguillon ; " are you mad, uncle ? "

" Mad ! What! you are not already on your knees before him who gives you this advice ? What! you do not bound with joy ? You do not burn with gratitude ? You are not already out of your senses with delight at the manner in which she received you ? You are not yet mad with love ? Go, go ! " cried the old marshal, " since the days of Alcibiades there has been but one Richelieu in the world, and I see there will be no more after him."

" My uncle/' replied the duke, with much agitation, either feigned, and in that case it was admirably counterfeited, or real, for the proposition was sudden, " my uncle, I perceive all the advantage you would gain by the position of which you speak ; you would govern with the authority of M. de Choiseul, and I should be the lover who would constitute that authority. The plan is worthy of the cleverest man in France, but you have forgotten one thing in projecting it."

" What! " cried Richelieu uneasily, "is it possible you do not love Madame Dubarry ? Is that it ?—fool!—triple fool!—wretch !—is that it ? "

" Ah ! no, that is not it, my dear uncle," cried D'Aiguillon, as if he knew that not one of his words was lost; " Madame Dubarry, whom I scarcely know, seems to me the most charming of women. I should, on the contrary, love Madame Dubarry madly, I should love her only too well; that is not the question."

" What is it, then ? "

" This, my lord duke. Madame Dubarry will never love me, and the first condition of such an alliance is love. How do you imagine the beautiful countess could distinguish among all the gentlemen of this

brilliant court—surrounded as she is by the homage of so much youth and beauty—how should she distinguish one who has no merit, who is already no longer young, who is overwhelmed with sorrows and who hides himself from all eyes because he feels that he will soon disappear for ever ? My uncle, if I had known Madame Dubarry in the period of my youth and beauty when women admired in me all that is lovable in a man, then she might have given me a place in her memory. That would have been much. But now there is no hope—neither past, nor present, nor future. No, uncle, we must renounce this chimera. You have pierced my heart by presenting it to me in such bright and glowing colours/'

During this tirade, which was delivered with a fire which Mole might have envied, and Lekain would have thought worthy of imitation, Richelieu bit his lips, muttering to himself :

" Has the man guessed that the countess is listening? *Peste!* he is a clever dog. He is a master of his craft. In that case, I must take care ! "

Richelieu was right; the countess was listening, and every word D'Aiguillon spoke sunk deep into her heart. She eagerly drank in the charm of this confession, and appreciated his exquisite delicacy in not betraying the secret of their former intimacy to his nearest confidant, for fear of throwing a shadow over a perhaps still dearly cherished portrait.

" Then you refuse ? " said Richelieu.

" Oh ! as for that, yes, my uncle, for unfortunately I see it is impossible."

" But try, at least, unfortunate that you are ! "

" And how ? "

" You are here one of us—you will see the countess every day ; please her, *morbleu* ! "

" With an interested aim ? Never ! If I should be so unfortunate as to please her with this unworthy view, I should flee to the end of the world, for I should be ashamed of myself ! "

Richelieu scratched his chin.

" The thing is settled," said he to himself, " or D'Aiguillon is a fool."

All at once a noise was heard in the court-yard, and several voices cried out, " The king ! "

"*Diable!*" cried Richelieu, "the king must not see me here ; I shall make my escape."

" And I ? " said the duke.

" It is different with you ; he must see you. Remain; and, for God's sake, do not throw the handle after the axe."

With these words Richelieu stole out by the back-stairs, saying, as he left the room,-

" Adieu till to-morrow."

CHAPTER II

THE KING DIVIDES THE SPOILS.

WHEN the Duke d'Aiguillon was left alone, he felt at first somewhat embarrassed. He had perfectly understood all his uncle had said to him—perfectly understood that Madame Dubarry was listening—perfectly understood, in short, that, for a clever man it was necessary in this conjuncture to seem a man of heart, and to play alone that part in which the old marshal sought to obtain a share.

The king's arrival luckily interrupted the explanation which must have resulted from the puritanical declaration of M. d'Aiguillon.

The marshal was not a man to remain long a dupe, nor above all one who would make another's virtue shine with exaggerated brilliancy at the expense of his own.

But, being left alone, D'Aiguillon had time to reflect.

The king had in truth arrived. Already his pages had opened the door of the antechamber, and Zainore had darted towards the monarch, begging for bonbons—a touching familiarity which Louis, when he was in a bad temper, punished by sundry fillips on the nose or boxes on the ears, both exceedingly disagreeable to the young African.

The king installed himself in the Chinese cabinet; and what convinced D'Aiguillon that Madame Dubarry had not lost a word of his conversation with his uncle, was the fact that he, D'Aiguillon, overheard the entire interview between Madame Dubarry and the king.

His majesty seemed fatigued, like a man who has raised an immense weight. Atlas was less enfeebled when his day's work was done, and when he had held the world suspended on his shoulders for twelve hours.

Louis XV. allowed his favourite to thank, applaud, and caress him and tell him the whole particulars of M. de Choiseul's departure, which amused him exceedingly.

Then Madame Dubarry ventured. It was fair weather for politics; and besides, she felt herself strong enough at that moment to have raised one of the four quarters of the world.

"Sire," said she, "you have destroyed, that is well; you have demolished, that is superb; but now you must think about rebuilding."

"Oh! it is done," said the king carelessly,

"You have a ministry!"

"Yes."

" What! all at once without breathing ? "

" See what it is to want common sense. ' Oh !—woman that you are!—before sending away your cook, must you not, as you said the other day, have a new one in readiness ? "

" Repeat to me that you have formed the cabinet."

The king raised himself upon the immense sofa on which he was lying rather than sitting, using the shoulders of the beautiful countess for his principal cushion."

" One would think, Jeannette," said he, " to hear you making yourself so uneasy that you know my ministry, and wish to find fault with them, or propose another."

" Well," said the countess, " that would not be so absurd as you seem to imagine."

" Indeed ? Then you have a ministry ? "

" You have one, have you not ? " replied she.

" Oh I it is my place to have one, countess. Let me see your candidates."

" By no means ; tell me yours."

" Most willingly, to set you the example."

" In the first place, then, who have you for the navy, where that dear M. de Praslin was ? "

" Ah ! something new, countess ; a charming man, who has never seen the sea."

" Who is it ? "

" Ton honour, it is a splendid idea. I shall make myself very popular, and I shall be crowned in the most distant seas—in effigy, of course."

" But who, sire ? Who is it ? "

" I would wager you do not guess in a thousand attempts. It is a member of parliament, my dear; the first president of the parliament of Besangon."

" M. de Boynes ? "

" The same. *Peste!* how learned you are! You know all these people ! "

" I cannot help it; you talk parliament to me the whole day. Why, the man would not know an oar if he saw it."

" So much the better. M. de Praslin knew his duties too well, and made me pay dearly for all his naval constructions."

" Well, the finance department, sire ? "

" Oh ! that is a different affair; I have chosen a special man."

" A financier ? "

" No; a soldier. The financiers have crushed me too long already."

" Good heavens ! And the war department ? "

" Do not be uneasy; for that I have chosen a financier, Terray. He is a terrible scrutiniser of accounts. He will find errors in all M. de ChoiseuTs additions. I may tell you that I had some idea of putting a wonderful man in the war department—every inch a man, as they say. It was to please the philosophers."

" Good. But who ? Voltaire ? "

" Almost . The Chevalier de Mui—a Cato."

" Oh, heaven ! You alarm me."

" It was all arranged. I had sent for the man, his commission was signed, he had thanked me, when my good or my evil genius—judge which—prompted me to ask him to come to Luciennes this evening to sup and chat with us."

" Fie ! Horrible ! "

" Well, countess, that was exactly what De Mui replied."

" He said that to you ? "

" Expressed in other words, countess. He said

that his most ardent wish was to serve the king, but as for serving Madame Dubarry, it was impossible."

" Well, that was polite of your philosopher."

" You must know, countess, I held out my hand to him—for his brevet, which I tore in pieces with a most patient smile, and the chevalier disappeared. Louis XIV. would have let the rascal rot in one of those ugly dens in the Bastille ; but I am Louis XV., and I have a parliament which gives me the whip, in place of my giving it to the parliament. Ha ! "

" No matter, sire," said the countess, covering her royal lover with kisses, " you are not the less a clever man."

" That is not what the world in general says. Terray is execrated."

" Who is not ? And for foreign affairs ? "

" That honest fellow, Bertin, whom you know."

" No."

" Then whom you do not know."

" But, among them all, I cannot find one good minister."

" So be it ; now tell me yours."

" I will only tell you one."

" You dare not tell me ; you are afraid."

" The marshal."

" The marshal ? What marshal ? " said the king, making a wry face.

" The Duke de Richelieu."

" That old man ? That chicken-hearted wretch ? "

" Good ! The conque'ror of Mahon a chicken-hearted wretch ! "

" That old debauchee ? "

" Sire, your companion."

" An immoral man, who frightens all the women."

" That is only since he no longer runs after them."

" Do not speak to me of Richelieu ; he is my raw-head-and-bloody-bones. The conqueror of Mahon took me into all the gaming-houses in Paris. We were lampooned. No ! no !—Richelieu ! The very name puts me beside myself."

" You hate them so much ? "

" Whom ? "

" The Richelieus."

" I abhor them."

" All ? "

" All. What a worthy duke and peer M. Fronsac makes. He has deserved the rack twenty times."

" I give him up ; but there are more Richelieus in the world than he."

" Ah ! yes ; D'Aiguillon."

" Well ? "

The reader may judge if, at these words, the ears of the nephew were not strained in the boudoir.

" I ought to hate him more than all the others, for he hounds all the bawlers in France upon me ; and yet—it is a weakness which I cannot conquer—he is bold and does not displease me."

" He is a man of spirit ! " cried the countess.

" A brave man, and zealous in the defence of the royal prerogative. He is a model of a peer ! "

" Yes, yes—a hundred times, yes ! Make something of him."

The king looked at the countess and folded his arms.

" What, countess ! Is it possible that you propose such a thing to me, when all France demands that I should exile and degrade this man ? "

Madame Dubarry folded her arms in her turn.

" Just now," said she, " you called Richelieu

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

chicken-hearted—the name belongs more properly to yourself! "

"Oh, countess! "

"You are very proud because you have dismissed M. de Choiseul."

"Well, it was not an easy task."

"You have done it, and you have done well; **but** you are afraid of the consequences."

"I? "

"Of course. What do you accomplish by sending away M. de Choiseul? "

"Give the parliament a kick in the seat of honour."

"And you will not give them two? *Diable!* Raise both your feet—one after the other, be it understood. The parliament wished to keep Choiseul; you send him away. They want to send away D'Aiguillon; keep him."

"I do not send him away."

"Keep him—improved and considerably enlarged."

"You want an office for this firebrand? "

"I want a recompense for him who defended you at the risk of his position and fortune."

"Say of his life, for he will be stoned some fine morning, along with your friend Maupeou."

"You would encourage your defenders very much, if they could only hear you."

"They pay me back with interest, countess."

"Do not say so; facts contradict you *in* this case? "

"Ah, well! But why this eagerness for D'Aiguillon? "

"Eagerness! I do not know him; I have seen and spoken to him to-day for the first time."

"Ah! that is a different affair. Then it is from conviction of his merit—and I respect conviction in others, because I never have it myself."

"**Then give** Richelieu something in D'Aiguillon's

name, since you will not give D'Aiguillon anything in his own."

" Richelieu ! Never, never, never ! "

" Then something to M. d'Aiguillon, since you refuse Richelieu ? "

" What ! give him a portfolio ! That is impossible at present."

" I understand that; but after some time, perhaps. Remember that he is a man of resources and action, and that with Terray, D'Aiguillon, and Maupeou you will have the three heads of Cerberus. Remember, too, that your ministry is only a jest which cannot last."

" You are mistaken, countess, it will last three months."

" In three months, then, I have your promise ? "

" Oh ! oh ! countess."

" That is enough ; in the meantime, something for the present."

" But I have nothing."

" You have the light horse ; M. D'Aiguillon is an officer—what is called a sword ; give him your light horse."

" Very well, he shall have them."

" Thanks ! " exclaimed the countess, transported with joy, " a thousand thanks."

And M. d'Aiguillon could hear a very plebeian kiss resound on the cheeks of his majesty Louis XV.

" In the meantime," said the king, " order supper to be served, countess."

" No," said she, " there is nothing here ; you have overpowered me with politics. My people have made speeches and fireworks, but no supper."

" Then come to Marly, I will take you with me."

" Impossible ! My poor head is splitting in pieces."

" With headache ? "

" Dreadful headache."

" You must go to bed, countess."

" I am just going to do so, sire."

" Adieu ! then."

" Au re voir, rather."

" I am somewhat like M. de Choiseul; I am dismissed."

" Yes, but accompanied, feasted, cajoled," said the giddy creature, pushing the king gently towards the door, and from thence to the foot of the stairs, laughing loudly, and turning round at each step.

On the peristyle the countess stopped, candle in hand.

" Countess," said the king, turning round and ascending a step.

" Sire ? "

" I trust the poor marshal will not die of it."

" Of what ? "

" Of the portfolio which he has missed."

" How ill-natured you are!" said the countess, escorting him with another loud laugh.

And his majesty drove off, very much delighted with his last quolibot upon the duke, whom he really hated.

When Madame Dubarry returned to her boudoir she found D'Aiguillon on his knees before the door, his hands clasped, his eyes ardently fixed upon her.

She blushed.

" I have failed," said she. " The poor marshal! "

" Oh, I know all! " said he ; " I could hear—thanks, madame—thanks ! "

" I thought I owed you that," she" replied, with a sweet smile ; " but rise, duke, else I shall think your memory is as retentive as your mind is highly cultivated."

" That may well be, madame ; my uncle has told you I am nothing but your admiring and zealous servant."

" And the king's ; to-morrow you must go and pay your respects to his majesty—rise, I beg."

And she gave him her hand, which he kissed respectfully.

The countess seemed to be deeply moved, for she did not add a single word.

M. d'Aiguillon was also silent, as deeply moved as she. At last, Madame Dubarry, raising her head, said,—

" Poor marshal! he must know this defeat."

M. d'Aiguillon looked upon these words as a dismissal, and bowed.

" Madame," said he, " I am going to him."

" Oh, duke ! unpleasant news is always soon enough told ; do something better—sup with me ! "

The day was gained. D'Aiguillon, as we have seen, was a lucky man.

CHAPTER III

THE ANTECHAMBERS OF THE DUKE DE RICHELIEU

M. DE RICHELIEU, like all the courtiers, had an hotel at Versailles, one at Paris, a house at Marly, and another at Luciennes; a residence, in short, near each of the palaces or residences of the king.

Louis XIV., when he multiplied his place of residence so much, had imposed on all men of rank—on all those privileged to attend at the grand and little receptions and levies the obligation of being very rich, that they

might keep pace at once with the splendour 'of his household, and the flights of his whims.

At the period of the disgrace of MM. de Choiseul and De Praslin, M. de Richelieu was living in his house at Versailles; and it was there that he returned after having presented his nephew to Madame Dubarry at Luciennes.

Richelieu had been seen in the forest of Marly with the countess, he had been seen at Versailles after the minister's disgrace, his long and secret audience at Luciennes was known; and this, with the indiscretions of Jean Dubarry, was sufficient for the whole court to think themselves obliged to go and pay their respects to M. de Richelieu.

The old marshal was now going in his turn to inhale that delightful incense of praises, flatteries, and caresses which every interested person offered without discrimination to the idol of the day.

M. de Richelieu, however, was far from expecting all that was to happen to him; but he rose that morning with the firm resolution of closing his nostrils against the incense, as Ulysses closed his ears with wax against the songs of the sirens. The result which he expected could not be known until next day, when the nomination of the new minister would be announced by the king himself.

Great was the marshal's surprise therefore when he awoke, or, rather, was awakened by the loud noise of carriages, to hear from his valet that the court-yards of the hotel, as well as the anterooms and saloons, were filled with visitors.

" Oh !" said he, " it seems I make some noise already."

" It is still early, my lord marshal," said his valet-de-chambre, seeing the duke's haste in taking off his nightcap.

" Henceforward," replied the duke, " there will be no such'word as early for me, remember that."

" Yes, sir."

" What did you reply to the visitors ? "

" That you were not up yet."

" Nothing more ? "

" Nothing more."

" That was exceedingly stupid. You should have added that I was late up last night, or, better still, you should have—let me see, where is Rafte ? "

" M. Rafte is asleep," said the valet.

" What! asleep ! let him be called, the wretch ! "

" Well," said a fresh and smiling old man, who appeared at the door, " here is Rafte ; what is he wanted for ? "

All the duke's bombast ceased at these words.

" Ah ! I was certain that you were not asleep."

" And if I had been asleep, where would have been the wonder ? It is scarcely daylight."

" But, my dear Rafte, you see that I do not sleep."

" That is another thing, you are a minister—how should you sleep ? "

" Oh ! now you are going to scold me," said the marshal, making a wry face before the glass : " are you not satisfied ? "

" I ! What benefit is it to me ? You will fatigue yourself to death and then you will be ill. The consequence will be that I shall have to govern the state, and that is not so amusing, sir."

" How old you are getting, Rafte ! "

" I am just four years younger than yourself, sir. Yes, I am getting old."

The marshal stamped with impatience.

" Did you come through the antechambers ? " asked he.

" Yes/'

" Who is there ? "

" All the world."

" What do they speak of ? "

" Every one is telling what favours he is going to ask from you/'

" That is very natural. But what did you hear about my appointment ? "

" Oh ! I would much rather not tell you that."

" What! Criticisms already ? "

il Yes, and from those who have need of your assistance ! What will they say, sir, whose assistance you need ? "

" Ah ! Rafte," said the old man, affecting to laugh, " those who would say you natter me——"

" Well, sir," said Rafte, " why the devil did you harness yourself to this wagon called a ministry ? Are you tired of living and of being happy ? "

" My dear fellow, I have tasted everything but that."

" *Corbleu!* you have never tasted arsenic ! Why do you not take some in your chocolate, from curiosity?"

" Rafte, you are an idle dog ; you think that, as my secretary, you will have more work, and you shrink—you confessed as much, indeed."

The marshal dressed himself with care.

" Give me a military air," said he to his valet, " and hand me m* military orders."

" It seems we are in the war department! " said Rafte.

" Good heavens ! yes. It seems we are there."

" Oh ! But I have not seen the king's appointment," continued Rafte ; " it is not confirmed yet."

" The appointment will come in good time, no doubt."

" Then, ' no doubt' is the official word to-day ? "

" You become more disagreeable, Rafté, as you get older. You are a formalist, and superstitiously particular. If I had known that, I would not have allowed you to deliver my inauguration speech at the Académie; that made you pedantic!"

" But listen, my lord; since we are in the government, let us be regular. This is a very odd affair."

¹¹ " What is odd ? "

" Monsieur the Count de la Vaudraye, whom I met just now in the street, told me that nothing had yet been settled about the ministry."

Richelieu smiled.

" M. de la Vaudraye is right," said he. " But have you already been out, then ? "

" *Parditu* ! I was obliged. This cursed noise of carriages awoke me ; I dressed, put on my military orders also, and took a turn in the town."

" Ah ! M. Rafté makes merry at my expense."

" Oh ! my lord, God forbid. But——"

" But what ? "

" On my walk, I met some one."

" Whom ? "

" The secretary of the Abbe Terray."

" Well ? "

" Well! he told me that his master was appointed to the war department."

" Oh ! ho ! " said Richelieu, with his eternal smile.

" What does monseigneur conclude from this ? "

" That if M. Terray is appointed to the war department, I am not; that if he is not, I may perhaps be."

Rafté had satisfied his conscience; he was a bold, indefatigable, ambitious man, as clever as his master, and much better armed than he, for he knew himself to be of low origin and dependent, two defects in his coat of mail which for forty years he had exercised

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

all his cunning, strength and acuteness to obviate. When Rafte saw his master so confident, he believed he had nothing more to fear.

"Come, my lord," said he, "make haste; do not oblige them to wait too long; that would be a bad commencement."

"I am ready; but tell me once more who is there?"

"Here is the list."

He presented a long list to his master, who saw with increasing satisfaction the names of the first among the nobility, the law, and the finance.

"Suppose I should be popular, hey, Rafte?"

"We are in the age of miracles," replied the latter.

"Ha! Taverney!" said the marshal, continuing to peruse the list. "What does he come here for?"

"I have not the least idea, my lord marshal; but come, make your entree," and the secretary, with an authoritative air, almost pushed his master into the grand saloon.

Richelieu ought to have been satisfied; his reception might have contented the ambition of a prince of the blood royal. But the refined cunning and craft which characterised the period, and particularly the class of society we are speaking of, only too well assisted Richelieu's unlucky star, which had such a disagreeable contretemps in store for him.

From propriety and respect for etiquette, all this crowded levee abstained from pronouncing the word minister before Richelieu; some were bold enough to venture as far as the word congratulations, but they knew that they must pass quickly over the word, and that Richelieu would scarcely reply to it.

For one and all, this morning visit was a simple demonstration of respect, a mere expression of goodwill; for at this period such almost imperceptible

shades of policy were frequently understood and acted upon by the general mass of the community. There were certain of the courtiers who even ventured, in the course of conversation to express some wish, desire, or hope.

The one would have wished, he said, to have his government rather nearer Versailles ; and it gratified him to have an opportunity of speaking on the subject to a man of such great influence as M. de Richelieu.

Another said he had been three times forgotten by M. de Choiseul in the promotions of the knights of the order, and he reckoned upon M. de Richelieu's obliging memory to refresh the king's, now that there existed no obstacle in the way of his majesty's goodwill. In short, a hundred requests more or less grasping, but all veiled by the highest art, were preferred to the delighted ears of the marshal.

Gradually the crowd retired ; they wished, as they said, to leave the marshal to his " important occupations."

One man alone remained in the saloon ; he had not approached as the others had ; he had asked for nothing ; he had not even presented himself.

When the courtiers had gone, this man advanced towards the duke with a smile upon his lips.

" Ah ! Monsieur de Taverney ! " said the marshal ; " I am enchanted to see you, truly enchanted."

" I was waiting, duke, to pay you my compliments, and to offer you my sincere congratulations."

" Ah ! indeed ? and for what ? " replied Richelieu, for the cautious reserve of his visitors had imposed upon him the necessity of being discreet and even mysterious.

" On your new dignity, duke."

" Hush, hush ! " said the marshal, " let us not speak of that; nothing is settled; it is a mere rumour."

" Nevertheless, my dear marshal, there are many people of my opinion, for your saloons were full."

" In truth, I do not know why."

" Oh, I know very well."

" Why, then ? Why ? "

" One word from me."

" What word ? "

" Yesterday I had the honour of paying my respects to the king at Trianon. His majesty spoke to me of my children, and ended by saying : ' You know M. de Richelieu, I think; pay your compliments to him.'"

" Ah ! his majesty said that ? " replied Richelieu, with a glow of pride, as if these words had been the official brevet, the destination of which Rafté doubted, or at least deplored its delay.

" So that," continued Taverney, " I soon suspected the truth ; in fact, it was not difficult to do so, when I saw the eagerness of all Versailles ; and I hastened to obey the king by paying my compliments to you, and to gratify my own feelings by reminding you of our old friendship."

The duke had now reached a pitch of intoxication. It is a defect in our nature from which the highest minds cannot always preserve themselves. He saw in Taverney only one of those expectants of the lowest order—poor devils who have fallen behind on the road of favour, who are useless even as proteges, useless as acquaintances, and who are reproached with coming forth from their obscurity, after a lapse of twenty years, to warm themselves at the sun of another's prosperity.

" I see what you are aiming at," said the marshal harshly ; " you have some favour to ask of me."

" You have said it, duke."

" Ah !•" grumbled Richelieu, seating himself on, or rather plumping into, the sofa.

" I told you I had two children," continued Taverney, pliant and cunning, for he perceived the coolness of his great friend, and therefore only advanced the more eagerly : " I have a daughter whom I love very dearly, and who is a model of virtue and beauty. She is placed with her highness the dauphiness, who has been condescending enough to grant her her particular esteem. Of my beautiful Andree, therefore, I need not speak to you. Her path is smoothed ; her fortune is made. Have you seen my daughter ? Did I not once present her to you somewhere ? Have you not heard of her ? "

" Pshaw ! — I don't know," said Richelieu carelessly. " Perhaps so."

" No matter," pursued Taverney, " there is my daughter settled. For my own part, I want nothing, the king grants me a pension upon which I can live. I confess I would like to have some emolument to enable me to rebuild Maison-Rouge where I wish to end my days, and with your interest and my daughter's——"

" Ha ! " thought Richelieu, who until now had not listened, so lost was he in contemplation of his grandeur but whom the words, " my daughter's interest," had roused from his reverie. " Oh, ho ! your daughter ! Why, she is a young beauty who annoys our good countess ; she is a little scorpion who is sheltering herself under the wings of the dauphiness, in order to bite some one at Luciennes. Come, I will not be a bad friend, and as for gratitude, this dear countess who has made me a minister shall see if I am wanting in time of need." Then aloud,—

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" Proceed," said he to the Baron de Taverney in a haughty tone.

" Faith, I am near the end," replied the latter, promising himself to laugh in his sleeve at the vain marshal if he could get only what he wanted from him. " I am anxious, therefore, only about my son, Philip, who bears a lofty name, but who will never be able to support it worthily unless some one assists him. Philip is a bold and thoughtful youth ; rather too thoughtful, perhaps, but that is the result of his embarrassed position. You know, the horse which is reined in too tightly droops its head."

" What is all this to me?" thought Richelieu, giving most unequivocal signs of weariness and impatience.

" I want some one," continued Taverney remorselessly, " some one in authority like yourself, to procure a company for Philip. Her highness the dauphiness, on entering Strasbourg, raised him to the rank of captain, but he still wants a hundred thousand livres to enable him to purchase a company in some privileged regiment of cavalry. Procure that for me, my powerful friend."

" Your son," said Richelieu, " is the young man who rendered the dauphiness a service, is he not ? "

" A most essential service," replied Taverney; " it was he who forced the last relay for her royal highness from that Dubarry who wanted to seize it by force."

" Oh, oh ! " thought Richelieu, " that is just it ; the most violent enemies of the countess. He comes at the right time, this Taverney ! He advances claims which are sufficient to damn him for ever."

" You do not answer, duke ? " said Taverney, rather soured by the marshal's obstinate silence.

" It is perfectly impossible, my dear M. de Taverney," replied the marshal, rising to show that the audience was over.

" Impossible ? Such a trifle impossible ? An old friend tell me that ? "

" Why not ? Is it any reason, because you are a friend, as you say, that you should seek to make me commit treason both against friendship and justice ? You never came to see me for twenty years, for during that time I was nothing ; now that I am a minister, you come."

" M. de Richelieu, it is you who are unjust at this moment."

" No, my dear friend, no ; I do not wish to see you dangling in my antechambers ; I am a true friend, and therefore——"

" You have some reason for refusing me, then ? "

" I " exclaimed Richelieu, much alarmed at the suspicion Taverney might perhaps form ; " I ! a reason/ "

" Yes ; I have enemies."

The duke might have replied what he thought, but that would have been to discover to the baron that he tried to please Madame Dubarry from gratitude — it would have been to confess that he was the minister of the favourite ; and that the marshal would not have confessed for an empire. He, therefore, hastily replied,—

" You have no enemy, my dear friend ; but I have many. To grant requests at once, without examining claims, would expose me to the accusations of continuing the Choiseul system. My dear sir, I wish to leave behind some trace of my administration of affairs. For twenty years I have projected reforms,

improvements, and now they shall blossom. Favouritism is the ruin of France ; I will protect me'rit. The writings of our philosophers are bright torches, whose light has not shone for me in vain ; they have dissipated all the mists of ignorance and superstition which brooded over the past, and it was full time it should be so, for the well-being of the state. I shall therefore examine your son's claims neither more nor less than I should do those of any other citizen. I must make this sacrifice to my conscience—a grievous sacrifice, no doubt, but which, after all, is only that of one man for the benefit of three hundred thousand. If your son, M. Philip de Taverney, proves that he merits my favour, he shall have it, not because his father is my friend, not because he bears the name he does, but because he is a man of merit. That is my plan of conduct."

" You mean your system of philosophy/" replied the old baron, biting his nails with rage, and adding to his anger by reflecting how much humiliation and how many petty cowardices this interview had cost him.

" Philosophy, if you will, sir ; it is a noble word."

" Which dispenses good things, marshal, does it not?"

" You arc a bad courtier," said Richelieu with a cold smile.

" Men of my rank are courtiers only of the king."

" Oh ! M. Raito, my secretary, lias a thousand of your rank in my antechambers every day," replied Richelieu ; " they generally come from some obscure den or other in the provinces, where they have learned to be rude to their pretended friends while they preach concord."

" Oh I I am well aware that a Maison-Rouge, a title which dates from the crusades, does not understand concord so well as a Vignerol fiddler."

The "marshal had more tact than Taverney. He could have had him thrown out of the windows, but he only shrugged his shoulders, and replied,—

" You are rather behind the time, most noble scion of the crusades ; you only remember the calumnious memoir presented by parliament in 1720, and have not read that of the peers and dukes in reply. Be kind enough to walk into my library, my dear sir; Rafte will give it to you to read."

As he was bowing his antagonist out with this apt repartee, the door opened, and a man entered noisily, crying —

" Where is my dear duke ? "

This man, with ruddy visage, eyes dilated with satisfaction, and joyous air, was neither more nor less than Jean Dubarry.

On seeing this new-comer, Taverney started back with surprise and vexation.

Jean saw the movement, recognised the face, and turned his back.

" I understand," said the baron quietly, " and I shall retire. I leave the minister in most distinguished company."

And he left the room with dignity.

CHAPTER IV

RICHELIEU IS DISABUSED

FURIOUS at this extremely provoking exit, Jean made two steps after the baron ; then, returning to the marshal, he said, shrugging his shoulders,—

" You receive such people here ? "

"Oh, my dear sir, you mistake ; on the contrary, I send such people away."

"Do you know who this gentleman is ? "

"Alas! Yes."

"No, but do you know really ? "

"He is a Taverney."

"He is a man who wishes to make his daughter the king's favourite——"

"Oh, come ! "

"A man who wishes to supplant us, and who takes all possible means to do so. But Jean is there, and Jean has his eyes about him."

"You think he wishes——"

"It is a very difficult matter to see what he wishes, is it not ? One of the dauphin's party, my dear sir ;—and they have their little stabber too."

"Bah ! "

"A young man, who looks quite ready to fly at people's throats—a bully, who pinks Jean's shoulder •—poor Jean ! "

"Yours ? Is it a personal enemy of yours, my dear count ? " asked Richelieu, feigning surprise.

"Yes, he was my adversary in that affair of the relay, you know."

"Indeed ! What a strange sympathy. I did not know that, and yet I refused all his demands; only, if I had known, I should not only have refused him but kicked him out. But do not be uneasy, count, I have now this worthy bully under my thumb, and he shall find it out to his cost."

"Yes, you can cure him of his taste for attacking people on the highway. For in fact—ha ! by the bye, I have not yet congratulated you."

"Why, yes, count; it seems the affair is definitively settled."

" Oh ! it is all completed. Will you permit me to embrace you ? "

" With all my heart."

" Faith, there was some trouble ; but the trouble is nothing when you succeed. You are satisfied, are you not ? "

" Shall I speak frankly ? Yes ; for I think I can be useful."

" No doubt of that. But it is a bold stroke ; there will be some growling."

" Am I not liked by the public ? "

" You ? Why, there is no question of you, either one way or other : it is he who is execrated."

" He ? " said Richelieu, with surprise : " Who ? he ? "

" Of course," interrupted Jean. " Oh I the parliament will revolt, it will be a second edition of the flagellation of Louis XIV. They are whipped, duke, they are whipped."

" Explain."

" Why, it explains itself. The parliament of course hate the author of their persecutions."

" Ah ! you think that ? "

" I am certain of it, as all France is. No matter, duke, it was a capital stroke of you to send for him that way, just at the very heat of the affair."

" Whom ? Whom, duke ? I am on thorns—I do not understand one word of what you say."

" Why, I speak of M. d'Aiguillon, your nephew."

" Well! what then ? "

" Well, I say it was well-advised of you to send for him."

" Ah ! very good, very good. You mean to say he will assist me ? "

" He will assist us all. Do you know he is on the best terms with little Jeanne ? "

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" Oh ! indeed ? "

" On the best terms. They have already had a chat together, and understand each other perfectly, as it seems to me."

" You know that ? "

" Why, I saw D'Aiguillon's carriage leave Lucionnes late yesterday evening, and as he only arrived yesterday morning in Paris, it seems to me that he must be a great favourite with Jeanne to obtain an audience so early."

" Yes, yes," said Richelieu, rubbing his hands; " he must have supped there. Bravo, D'Aiguillon ! "

" And so there you are all three, like Orestes and Pylades, with the addition of another Pylades."

At this moment, and as the marshal was rubbing his hands with great glee, D'Aiguillon entered the saloon.

The nephew saluted his uncle with an air of condolence which was sufficient to enable Richelieu, without understanding the whole truth, at least to guess the greatest part of it.

He turned pale, as though he had received a mortal wound. It flashed across his mind that at court there exist neither friends nor relatives, and that every one seeks only his own aggrandisement.

" I was a great fool ! " thought he. " Well, D'Aiguillon ? " continued he aloud, repressing a deep sigh.

" Well, marshal ? "

" It is a heavy blow to the parliament," said Richelieu, repeating Jean's words.

D'Aiguillon blushed.

" You know it ? " said he.

" The count has told me all," replied Richelieu ; " even your late stay at Luciennes last night. Your appointment is a triumph for my family."

⁴¹ Be assured, marshal, of my extreme regret."

"What the devil does he mean by that?" said Jean, folding his arms.

"Oh, we understand each other," interrupted Richelieu; "we understand each other."

"That is a different affair; but for my part I do not understand you. Regret! Ah! yes, because he will not be recognised as minister immediately—yes, yes, I see."

"Oh! there will be an interim?" said the marshal, feeling a ray of hope—that constant guest in the heart of the ambitious man and the lover—once more dawn in his breast.

"Yes, marshal, an interim."

"But, in the meantime," cried Jean, "he is tolerably well paid; the finest command in Versailles."

"Ah! a command?" said Richelieu, pierced by a new wound.

"M. Dubarry perhaps exaggerates a little," said the Duke d'Aiguillon.

"But, in one word, what is this command?"

"The king's light horse."

Richelieu again felt his furrowed checks grow pale.

"Oh, yes," said he, with a smile which it would be impossible to describe; "yes, it is indeed a trifling appointment for such a charming man. But what can you expect, duke—the loveliest woman in the world, were she even the king's favourite, can only give what she has."

It was now D'Aiguillon's turn to grow pale.

Jean was scrutinising the beautiful Murillos which adorned Richelieu's walls.

Richelieu slapped his nephew on the shoulder.

"Luckily," said he, "you have the promise of

approaching advancement. Accept my congratulations, duke—my sincere compliments. Your address, your cleverness in negotiations, is only equalled by your good fortune. Adieu ; I have some business to transact. Do not forget me in the distribution of your favours, my dear minister."

D'Aiguillon only replied,—

" Your interests and mine, my lord marshal, are henceforth one and the same/'

And, saluting his uncle, he left the room with the dignity which was natural to him ; thus escaping from one of the most embarrassing positions he had ever experienced in a life strewn with so many difficulties.

" An admirable trait in D'Aiguillon's character," said Richelieu, the moment the former had disappeared, to Jean, who was rather at a loss to know what to think of this exchange of politeness between the nephew and uncle, " and one that I admire particularly, is his artlessness. He is at once frank and high-spirited ; he knows the court, and is withal as simple-minded as a girl."

" And then he loves you so well! " said Jean.

" Like a lamb."

" Oh," said Jean, " he is more like your son than M. de Fronsac."

" By my faith, yes, count—by my faith, yes."

Whilst replying thus, Richelieu kept walking round his chair in great agitation ; he sought but could not find.

" Ah, countess," he
me for this ! "

" Marshal," said Jeai
four will realise that
You know, the one that

" We four, my dear M. Jean ! how do you understand that ? "

" My sister as power, D'Aiguillon as authority, you as advice, and I as vigilance."

" Very good ! very good ! "

" And now let them attack my sister ; I defy them all."

" *Pardieti!* " said Richelieu, whose brain was boiling.

" Let them set up rivals now ! " exclaimed Jean, in ecstasies with his plans and his visions of triumph.

" Oh ! " said Richelieu, striking his forehead.

" Well, my dear marshal, what is the matter ? "

" Nothing ! I think your idea of a league admirable."

" Is *it* not ? "

" And I enter body and soul into your plans."

" Bravo ! "

" Does Taverney live at Trianon with his daughter?"

" No ; he lives in Paris."

" The girl is very handsome, my dear count."

" If she were as beautiful as Cleopatra or—my sister, I do not fear her, now that we are leagued together."

" You said Taverney lives in Paris, in the Rue St. Honore, I think ? "

" I did not say Rue St. Honore ; it is the Rue Coq-Heron in which he lives. Have you any plan of chastising these Taverneys, that you ask ? "

" Yes, count, I think I have found a capital plan."

" You are an incomparable man, but I must leave you now ; I wish to see what they say in town."

" Adieu, then, count. Apropos, you have not told me who the new ministers are."

" Oh, mere birds of passage : Terray, Bertin, and I know not who else. Mere counters in the hands of D'Aiguillon—the real minister, though his appointment is deferred for a short time."

" Perhaps indefinitely adjourned," thought the marshal, directing his most gracious smile to Jean as an affectionate adieu.

Jean retired, Rafte entered. He had heard all, and knew how to conduct himself ; all his suspicions were now realised. He did not utter a word to his master, he knew him too well. He did not even call the valet-de-chambre ; he assisted him with his own hands to undress, and conducted him to his bed, in which the old marshal, shivering with fever, immediately buried himself, after taking a pill which his secretary made him swallow.

Rafte drew the curtains and retired. The ante-chamber was thronged with eager listening valets. Rafte took the head valet aside.

" Attend to the marshal carefully," said he, " he is ill. He has had a serious vexation this morning ; he was obliged to disobey the king."

" Disobey the king!" exclaimed the alarmed valet.

" Yes, his majesty sent a portfolio to my lord, but as he was aware that he owed it to the solicitations of the Dubarry, he refused. Oh ! it was a noble resolve, and the Parisians ought to build him a triumphal arch ; but the shock was great, and our master is ill. Look to him carefully ! "

After these words, whose circulating power he knew beforehand, Rafte returned to his closet.

A quarter of an hour afterwards all Versailles wa[^] informed of the noble conduct and lofty patriotism of the marshal, who in the meantime slept soundly upon the popularity his secretary had gained for him.

CHAPTER V

THE DAUPHIN'S FAMILY REPAST

THE same day, about three o'clock, Mademoiselle Taverney left her apartment to attend upon the dauphiness, who was in the habit of being read to for a short time before dinner.

The abbe who had held the post of first reader to her royal highness no longer exercised his functions, as, for some time previous, ever since certain diplomatic intrigues in which he had displayed a very great talent for business, he had employed himself entirely in important political affairs.

Mademoiselle Taverney therefore set out, dressed as well as circumstances would permit, to fulfil her office. Like all the guests at Trianon, she still suffered considerable inconvenience from the rather sudden installation in her new abode, and had not yet been able to arrange her furniture, or make the necessary provisions for establishing her modest household. She had, therefore, on the present occasion, been assisted in her toilet by one of the femmes-de-chambre of Madame de Noailles, that starched lady of honour whom the dauphiness nicknamed Madame Etiquette.

Andree was dressed in a blue silk robe, with long waist, which fitted admirably to her slender figure. This robe opened in front, and displayed beneath a muslin skirt relieved with three falls of embroidery. Short sleeves, also of muslin, embroidered in the same manner as the dress, and festooned and tapering to the shoulder, were admirably in keeping with a habit shirt, worked a la paysanne, which modestly concealed her neck and shoulders. Her beautiful hair, which fell in long and luxuriant ringlets upon her shoulders,

was simply tied with a ribbon of the same colour as her dress, a mode of arrangement which harmonised infinitely better with the noble, yet modest and retiring, air of the lovely young girl, and with her pure and transparent complexion never yet sullied by the touch of rouge, than the feathers, ornaments, and laces which were then in vogue.

As she walked, Andree drew on a pair of white silk mittens upon the slenderest and roundest fingers in the world, while the tiny points of her high-heeled shoes of pale blue satin left their traces on the gravel of the garden walk.

When she reached the pavilion of Trianon, she was informed that the dauphiness was taking a turn in the grounds with her architect and her head gardener. In the apartment of the first story overhead she could hear the noise of a turning lathe with which the dauphin was making a safety-lock for a coffer which he valued very highly.

In order to rejoin the dauphiness Andree had to cross the parterre, where, notwithstanding the advanced period of the season, flowers carefully covered through the night raised their pale heads to bask in the setting rays of a sun even paler than themselves. **And** as the evening was already closing in, for in that season it was dark at six o'clock, the gardener's apprentices were employed in placing the bell-glasses over the most delicate plants in each bed.

While traversing a winding alley of evergreens clipped into the form of a hedge, bordered on each side by beds of Bengal roses, and opening on a beautiful lawn, Andree all at once perceived one of these gardeners, who, when he saw her, raised himself upon his spade, and bowed with a more refined and studied politeness than was usual in one of his station-

She looked, and in this workman recognised Gilbert, whose hands, notwithstanding his labour, were yet white enough to excite the envy of M. de Taverney.

Andree blushed in spite of herself; it seemed to her that Gilbert's presence in this place was too remarkable a coincidence to be the result of chance.

Gilbert repeated his bow, and Andree returned it, but without slackening her pace.

She was too upright and too courageous, however, to resist the promptings of her heart, and leave the question of her restless soul unanswered. She turned back, and Gilbert, whose cheek had already become as pale as death, and whose dark eye followed her retreating steps with a sombre look, felt as if suddenly restored to life, and bounded forwards to meet her.

" You here, M. Gilbert ? " said Andree coldly.

" Yes, mademoiselle."

" By what chance ? "

" Mademoiselle, one must live, and live honestly//

" But do you know that you are very fortunate ? "

" Oh! yes, mademoiselle, very fortunate," said Gilbert.

" I beg your pardon ; what did you say ? "

" I said, mademoiselle, that I am, as you think, very fortunate."

" Who introduced you here ? "

" M. de Jussieu, a protector of mine."

" Ah ! " said Andree, surprised ; " then you know M. de Jussieu ? "

" He is the friend of my first protector—of my master, M. Rousseau."

" Courage, then, Monsieur Gilbert," said Andree, making a movement to proceed.

" Do you find yourself better, mademoiselle ? " asked Gilbert, in a trembling voice.

" Better ? How so ? " said Andree coldly.

" Why—the accident ? "

" Oh, yes, thank you, Monsieur Gilbert, I am better ; it was nothing/'

" Oh ! you were nearly perishing," said Gilbert, almost speechless with emotion, " the danger was terrible/'

Andree now began to think that it was high time to cut short this interview with a workman in the most public part of the royal park.

" Good-day, Monsieur Gilbert," said she.

" Will mademoiselle not accept a rose ? " said Gilbert, trembling, and the drops of perspiration standing on his forehead.

" But, sir," replied Andree, " you offer me what is not yours to give."

Gilbert, surprised and overwhelmed by this reply, could not utter a word. His head drooped, but as he saw Andree looking at him with something like a feeling of joy at having manifested her superiority, he drew himself up, tore a branch covered with flowers from the finest of the rose-trees, and began to pull the roses to pieces with a coolness and dignity which surprised and startled the young girl.

She was too just and too kind-hearted not to see that she had gratuitously wounded the feelings of an inferior who had, unthinkingly committed a breach of propriety. But, like all proud natures who feel themselves in the wrong, she preserved silence when perhaps an apology or a reparation was hovering upon her lips.

Gilbert added not a word either; he threw away the branch and resumed his spade ; but his character was a mixture of pride and cunning, and whilst stooping to his work, he kept his eye stealthily fixed on Andree's

retreating figure. At the end of the walk she could not help looking round. She was a woman.

This weakness was sufficient for Gilbert; he said to himself that in this last struggle he had been victorious.

"She is weaker than I am," thought he, "and I shall govern her. Proud of her beauty, of her name, of her advancing fortunes, indignant at my love, which she perhaps suspects, she is only the more an object of adoration to the poor working man who trembles while he looks at her. Oh! this trembling, this emotion, unworthy of a man! Oh! these acts of cowardice which she makes me commit, she shall one day repay me for them all. But to-day I have worked enough," added he; "I have conquered the enemy. I, who ought to have been the weakest, since I love, have been a hundred times stronger than she."

He repeated these words once more with a wild burst of joy, as he convulsively dashed back the dark hair **from** his thoughtful brow. Then he stuck his **spade deep** into the flower-bed, bounded through the **hedge of** cypress and yew-tree with the speed of a **rcebuck**, and, light as the wind, threaded a parterre **of plants** under bell-glasses, not one of which he touched, notwithstanding the furious rapidity of his **career**, and posted himself at the extremity of a turn, which he had reached, by describing a diagonal course, before Andree, who followed the winding of **the path**.

From his new position he saw her advancing, thoughtful and almost humbled, her lovely eyes cast down, her moist and motionless hand gently rustling her dress as she walked. Concealed behind the thick hedge, Gilbert heard her sigh twice as if she were speaking

to herself. At last she passed so close to the trees which sheltered him that had he stretched out his arm he might have touched hers, as a mad and feverish impulse prompted him to do.

But he knit his brow with an energetic movement almost akin to hatred, and, placing his trembling hand upon his heart,— " Coward again ! " said he to himself. Then he added softly, " But she is so beautiful ! "

Gilbert might have remained for a considerable time sunk in contemplation, for the walk was long and Andree's step was slow and measured, but this walk was crossed by others, from which some troublesome visitor might at any moment make his appearance, and fate treated Gilbert so scurvily that a man did in fact advance from the first alley upon the left—that is to say, almost opposite the clump of evergreens behind which he was concealed.

This intruder walked with a methodic and measured step ; he carried his head erect, held his hat under his right arm, and his left hand resting upon his sword. He wore a velvet coat underneath a pelisse lined with sable fur, and pointed his foot as he walked, which he did with the easy grace of a man of high rank and breeding.

This gentleman as he advanced perceived Andree, and the young girl's figure evidently pleased him, for he quickened his pace and crossed over in an oblique direction so as to reach as soon as possible the path on which Andree was walking and intercept her course.

When Gilbert perceived this personage, he involuntarily gave a slight cry, and took to flight like a startled lapwing. The intruder's manoeuvre was successful; he was evidently accustomed to it, and in less than three minutes he was in advance of Andree, whom

three minutes before he had been following at some distance.

When Andree heard his footstep behind her she moved aside a little to let the man pass, and when he had passed she looked at him in her turn. The gentleman looked also, and most eagerly ; he even stopped to see better, and returning after he had seen her features,—

" Ah ! mademoiselle," said he, in a very kind voice ; " whither are you hastening so quickly, may I ask ? "

At the sound of this voice Andree raised her head, and saw about twenty paces behind her two officers of the guards following slowly ; she spied a blue ribbon peeping from beneath the sable pelisse of the person who addressed her, and pale and startled at this unexpected rencontre, and at being accosted thus graciously, she said, bending very low :

" The king ! "

" Mademoiselle——" replied Louis XV., approaching her ; " excuse me, I have such bad eyes that I am obliged to ask your name."

" Mademoiselle de Taverney," stammered the young girl, so confused and trembling that her voice was scarcely audible.

" Oh, yes ; I remember. I esteem myself fortunate in meeting you in Trianon, mademoiselle," said the king.

" I was proceeding to join her royal highness the dauphiness, who expects me," said Andree, trembling more and more.

" I will conduct you to her, mademoiselle," replied Louis XV., " for I am just going to pay a visit to my daughter in my quality of country neighbour. Be kind enough to take my arm, as we are proceeding in the same direction."

Andree felt a cloud pass before her eyes, and the blood flow in tumultuous waves to her heart. In fact, such an honour for the poor girl as the king's arm, the sovereign lord of all France, such an unhopedor, incredible piece of good fortune, a favour which the whole court might envy, seemed to her more like a dream than a reality.

She made such a deep and reverential curtsy that the king felt himself obliged to bow a second time. When Louis XV. was inclined to remember Louis XIV., it was always in matters of ceremonial and politeness. Such traditions, however, dated further back and were handed down from Henry IV.

He offered his hand therefore to Andree, who placed the burning points of her fingers upon the king's glove, and they both continued to advance towards the pavilion, where they had been informed that the dauphiness with her architect and her head gardener would be found.

We can assure the reader that Louis XV., although not particularly fond of walking, chose the longest road to conduct Andree to the little Trianon. Although the king was apparently unaware of his error, the two officers who walked behind perceived it but too plainly and bemoaned themselves bitterly, as they were lightly clad and the weather was cold.

They arrived too late to find the dauphiness where they had expected, as Marie Antoinette had just set out for Trianon, that she might not keep the dauphin waiting, for he liked to sup between six and seven o'clock.

Her royal highness arrived therefore at the exact hour, and as the punctual dauphin was already upon the threshold of the saloon that he might lose no time in reaching the dining-room the moment the maitre

d'hotel appeared, the dauphiness threw her mantle to a feume-de-chambre, took the dauphin's arm with a winning smile, and drew him into the dining-room.

The table was laid for the two illustrious hosts. They occupied each the centre of the table, so as to leave the place of honour vacant, which, since several unexpected visits of the king, was never occupied in his majesty's absence, even when the room was filled with guests.

At this end of the table, the king's cover and *cadenas* occupied a considerable space ; but the maitre d'hotel, not calculating upon it being occupied this evening, was conducting the service on this side.

Behind the dauphiness's chair, leaving the necessary space between for the valets to pass, was stationed Madame de Noailles, stiff and upright, and yet wearing as amiable an expression on her features as she could conjure up for the festive occasion.

Near Madame de Noailles, were some other ladies, whose position at the court gave them the right, or merited the privilege of being present at the supper of their royal highnesses.

Three times a week Madame de Noailles supped at the same table with the dauphin and dauphiness ; but on the days when she did not sup with them, she would not for anything in the world have missed being present. Besides, it was a delicate mode of protesting against the exclusion of the four days out of seven.

Opposite the Duchess de Noailles, surnamed by the dauphiness Madame Etiquette, was the Duke de Richelieu, on a raised seat very similar to her own.

He was also a strict observer of forms; but his

etiquette was indistinguishable to a casual observer, being always veiled beneath the most perfect elegance and sometimes beneath the wittiest raillery.

The result of this antithesis between the first gentleman of the bedchamber and the first lady of honour of the dauphiness was that the conversation, always dropped by the Duchess de Noailles, was incessantly renewed by M. de Richelieu.

The marshal had travelled through all the courts of Europe, and had adopted the tone of elegance in each which was best suited to his character; so that, from his admirable tact and propriety, he knew exactly what anecdotes to relate at the table of the youthful couple, and what would be suitable to the private suppers of Madame Dubarry.

Perceiving this evening that the dauphiness had a good appetite, and that the dauphin was voracious, he concluded that they would give no heed to the conversation going on around them, and that he had consequently only to make Madame de Noailles suffer an hour of purgatory in anticipation.

He began therefore to speak of philosophy and theatrical affairs, a twofold subject of conversation doubly obnoxious to the venerable duchess. He related the subject of one of the last philanthropic sallies of the philosopher of Ferney, the name already given to the author of the *Henriade*, and when he saw the duchess on the tenterhooks, he changed the text and detailed all the squabbles and disputes which, in his office of gentleman of the chamber, he had to undergo in order to make the actresses in ordinary to the king play more or less badly.

The dauphiness loved the arts, and above all the theatre; she had sent a complete costume for Clytemnestra to Mademoiselle Raucourt, and she therefore

listened to M. de Richelieu not only with indulgence but with pleasure.

Then the poor lady of honour, in violation of all etiquette, was forced to fidget on her bench, blow her nose noisily, and shake her venerable head, without thinking of the cloud of powder which at each movement fell upon her forehead, like the cloud of snow which surrounds the summit of Mont Blanc at every gust of the east wind.

But it was not enough to amuse the dauphiness—the dauphin must also be pleased. Richelieu abandoned the subject of the theatre, for which the heir to the crown had never displayed any great partiality, to discourse of humanity and philosophy. When he spoke of the English, he did so with all the warmth and energy which Rousseau displays in drawing the character of Edward Bromston.

Now Madame de Noailles hated the English as much as she did the philosophers. To admit a new idea was a fatiguing operation for her, and fatigue deranged the economy of her whole person. Madame de Noailles, who felt herself intended by nature for a conserver, growled at all new ideas like a dog at a frightful mask.

Richelieu, in playing this game, had a double end in view; he tormented Madame Etiquette, which evidently pleased the dauphiness, and he threw in, here and there, some virtuous apophthegm, some axiom in mathematics, which was rapturously received by the dauphin, the royal amateur of exact sciences.

He was paying his court, therefore, with great skill and address, and from time to time directing an eager glance towards the door, as if he expected some one who had not yet arrived, when a cry from the foot of the staircase echoed along the arched corridor, was

repeated by two valets stationed at regular intervals from the entrance door, and at last reached the dining-saloon,—

" The king ! "

At this magic word Madame de Noailles started bolt upright from her seat, as if moved by a spring ; Richelieu rose more slowly, and with easy grace ; the dauphin hastily wiped his mouth with his napkin, and stood up before his seat, his face turned towards the door.

As for the dauphiness, she hastened towards the staircase to meet the king, and do the honours of her mansion to him.

CHAPTER VI

THE QUEEN'S HAIR

THE king still held Mademoiselle de Taverney by the hand when they reached the landing-place, and it was only on arriving there that he bowed to her, so courteously and so low, that Richelieu had time to see the bow, to admire its grace, and to ask himself to what lucky mortal it was addressed.

His ignorance did not last long. Louis XV. took the arm of the dauphiness, who had seen all that passed and had already perfectly recognised Andree.

" My daughter," said he, " I come without ceremony to ask you for my supper. I crossed the entire park on my way hither, and happening to meet Mademoiselle de Taverney, requested her to accompany me."

" Mademoiselle de Taverney ! " murmured Richelieu, almost dizzy at this unexpected stroke. " On my faith, I am almost too fortunate I "

" I shall not only be not angry with mademoiselle, who is late," replied the dauphiness graciously, " but I have to thank her for bringing your majesty to us."

Andree, whose cheeks were dyed with as deep a red as the ripe and tempting cherries which graced the epergne in the centre of the table, bowed without replying.

" Diable ! diable ! she is indeed beautiful." thought Richelieu ; " and that old scoundrel Taverney said no more for her than she deserves."

The king had already taken his seat at the table after having saluted the dauphin. Gifted like his grandfather with an obliging appetite, the monarch did justice to the improvised supper which the maitre d'hotel placed before him as if by magic. But while eating, the king, whose back was turned towards the door, seemed to seek something, or rather some one.

In fact, Mademoiselle de Taverney, who enjoyed no privilege, as her position in the dauphiness's household was not yet fixed, had not entered the dining-room, and after her profound reverence in reply to the king's salutation, had returned to the dauphiness's apartment, lest her services might be required, as they had been once or twice already, to read to her highness after she had retired to bed.

The dauphiness saw that the king was looking for the beautiful companion of his walk.

" M. de Coigny," said she to a young officer of the guards who was standing behind the king, " pray request Mademoiselle de Taverney to come up; with Madame de Noailles' permission, we will discard etiquette for this evening."

M. de Coigny left the room, and almost immediately

afterwards returned, introducing Andr^e, who, totally at a loss to comprehend the reason for such a succession of unusual favours, entered trembling.

"Seat yourself there, mademoiselle," said the dauphiness, "beside Madame de Noailles."

Andree mounted timidly on the raised seat, but she was so confused that she had the audacity to seat herself only about a foot distant from the lady of honour. She received, in consequence, such a terrific look that the poor child started back at least four feet, as if she had come in contact with a Leyden jar highly charged.

The king looked at her and smiled.

"Ah ! *ga*," said the duke to himself, "it is scarcely worth my while to meddle with the affair ; everything is progressing of itself."

The king turned and perceived the marshal, who was quite prepared to meet his look.

"Good day, duke," said Louis ; "do you agree well with the Duchess de Noailles ? "

"Sire," replied the marshal, "the duchess always does me the honour to treat me as a madcap.

"Oh ! Were you also on the road to Chanteloup, duke ? "

"I , sire ! Faith, no ; I am too grateful **for** the favours your majesty has showered on my family."

The king did not expect this blow ; he was prepared to rally, but he found himself anticipated.

"What favours have I showered, duke ? "

"Sire, your majesty has given the command of your light horse to the Duke d'Aiguillon."

"Yes ; it is true, duke."

"And that is a step which must have put all the energy, all the skill of your majesty to the task. It is almost a *coup-d'etdt*."

The meal was now over; the king waited for a moment, and then rose from table.

The conversation was taking an embarrassing turn, but Richelieu was determined not to let go his prey. Therefore, when the king began to chat with Madame de Noailles, the dauphiness, and Mademoiselle de Taverney, Richelieu manoeuvred so skilfully that he soon found himself in the full fire of a conversation which he directed according to his pleasure.

"Sire," said he, "your majesty knows that success emboldens."

"Do you say so for the purpose of informing us that you are bold, duke?"

"Sire, it is for the purpose of requesting a new favour from your majesty, after the one the king has already deigned to grant. One of my best friends, an old servant of your majesty, has a son in the gendarmes; the young man is highly deserving, but poor. He has received from an august princess the brevet title of captain but he has not yet got the company/'

"Hie princess? my daughter?" asked the king, turning towards the dauphiness.

"Yes, sire," said Richelieu, "and the father of this young man is called the Baron de Taverney."

"My father!" involuntarily exclaimed Andree, "Philip! Is it for Philip, my lord duke, that you are asking for a company?"

Then, ashamed of this breach of etiquette, Andree made a step backwards, blushing, and clasping her hands with emotion.

The king turned *to* admire the blush which mantled on the cheek of the lovely girl, and then glanced at Richelieu with a pleased look, which informed the courtier how agreeable his request had been.

"In truth," said the dauphiness, "he is a charming

young man, and I had promised to make his fortune. How unfortunate princes are ! When God gives them the best intentions he deprives them of the memory and reasoning powers necessary to carry their intentions into effect. Ought I not to have known that this young man was poor, and that it was not sufficient to give him the epaulette without at the same time giving him the company ? "

"Oh, madame! how could your royal highness have known that ? "

"Oh, I knew it! " replied the dauphiness quickly, with a gesture which recalled to Andr^e's memory the modest but yet happy home of her childhood. " yes, I knew it, but I thought I had done everything necessary in giving a step to M. Philip de Taverney. He is called Philip, is he not, mademoiselle ? "

" Yes, madame."

The king looked round on these noble and ingenuous faces, and then rested his gaze on Richelieu, whose face was also brightened by a ray of generosity, borrowed doubtless from his august neighbour.

" Duke," said he, in a low voice, " I shall embroil myself with Luciennes."

Then, addressing Andree, he added quickly,—

" Say that it will give you pleasure, mademoiselle."

" Ah ! sire," said Andree, clasping her hands, " I request it as a boon from your majesty."

" In that case, it is granted," said Louis. " You will choose a good company for this young man, duke; I will furnish the necessary funds, if the charges are not already paid and the post vacant."

This good action gladdened all who were present. It procured the king a heavenly smile from Andree and Richelieu a warm expression of thanks from those

beautiful lips, from which, in his youth, he would have asked for even more.

Several visitors arrived in succession, amongst whom was the Cardinal de Rohan, who since the installation of the dauphiness at Trianon had paid his court assiduously to her.

But during the whole evening the king had kind looks and pleasant words only for Richelieu. He even commanded the marshal's attendance, when, after bidding farewell to the dauphiness, he set out to return to his own Trianon. The old marshal followed the king with a heart bounding with joy.

While the king, accompanied by the duke and his two officers, gained the dark alleys which lead from the palace, the dauphiness had dismissed Andree.

"You will be anxious to write this good news to Paris, mademoiselle," said the princess ; "you may retire."

And preceded by a footman carrying a lantern, the young girl traversed the walk of about a hundred paces in length which separates Trianon from the offices.

As she advanced, concealed by the thick foliage of the shrubbery, bounded a shadowy figure which followed all her movements with sparkling eyes. It was Gilbert.

When Andree had arrived at the entrance, and began to ascend the stone staircase, the valet left her and returned to the antechambers of Trianon.

Then Gilbert, gliding into the vestibule, reached the court-yard, and climbed by a small staircase as steep as a ladder into his attic which was opposite Andree's windows and was situated in a corner of the building.

From this position he could see Andree call a femme-de-chambre of Madame de Noailles to assist her, as that lady had her apartments in the same corridor.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

But when the girl had entered the room, the window curtains fell like an impenetrable veil between the ardent eyes of the young man and the object of his wishes.

At the palace there now only remained M. de Rohan, redoubling his gallant attentions to the dauphiness, who received them but coldly.

The prelate, fearing at last to be indiscreet, inasmuch as the dauphin had already retired, took leave of her royal highness with the expression of the deepest, and most tender respect. As he was entering his carriage, a waiting-woman of the dauphiness approached, and almost leaned inside the door.

" Here," said she.

And she put into his hand a small paper parcel, carefully folded, the touch of which made the cardinal start.

" Here," he replied hastily, thrusting into the girl's hand a heavy purse, the contents of which would have been a handsome salary. Then, without losing time, the cardinal ordered the coachman to drive to Paris, and to ask for fresh orders at the barrier. During the whole way, in the darkness of the calffege, he felt the paper, and kissed the contents like some intoxicated lover. At the barrier he cried, " Rue St. Claude." A short time afterwards he crossed the mysterious court-yard, and once more found himself in the little saloon occupied by Fritz, the silent usher.

Balsamo kept him waiting about a quarter of an hour. At last he appeared, and gave as a reason for his delay the lateness of the hour, which had prevented him from expecting the arrival of visitors.

In fact it was now nearly eleven o'clock at night.

" That is true, baron," said the Cardinal; " And I must request you to excuse my unseasonable visit.

But you may remember you told me one day, that to be assured of certain secrets——"

" I must have a portion of the person's hair of whom we were speaking on that day," interrupted Balsamo, who had already spied the little paper which the unsuspecting prelate held carelessly in his hand.

" Precisely, baron."

" And you have brought me this hair, sir; very well/'

" Here it is. Do you think it would be possible to return it to me again after the trial ? "

" Unless fire should be necessary ; in which case——"

" Of course, of course," said the cardinal. " However, I can procure some more. Can I have a reply ? "

" To-day ? "

" You know I am impatient."

" I must first ascertain, my lord."

And Balsamo took the packet of hair, and hastily mounted to Lorenza's apartment.

" I shall now know," said he, on the way, " the secret of this monarchy ; the mysterious fate which destiny has in store for it I "

And foam the other side of the wall, even before opening the secret door, he plunged Lorenza into the magnetic sleep. The young girl received him therefore with an affectionate embrace. Balsamo could scarcely extricate himself from her arms. It would be difficult to say which was the most grievous for the poor baron, the reproaches of the beautiful Italian when she was awake, or her caresses when she slept. When he had succeeded in loosening the chain which her snowy arms formed around his neck,—

" My beloved Lorenza/' said he, putting the paper in her hand, " can you tell me to whom this hair belongs ?"

Lorenza took it and pressed it against her breast, and then to her forehead. Though her eyes were open it was only by means of her head and breast that she could see in her sleep.

"Oh," said she, "it is an illustrious head from which this hair has been taken."

"Is it not?—and a happy head too? Speak."

"She may be happy."

"Look well, Lorenza."

"Yes, she may be happy; there is no shadow as yet upon her life."

"Yet she is married."

"Oh!" said Lorenza with a sigh.

"Well!—what? What means my Lorenza?"

"Strange!" said she, "strange indeed! She is married like myself, pure and spotless as I am; but unlike me, my dear Balsamo, she does not love her husband."

"Oh, fate!" said Balsamo. "Thanks, Lorenza, I know all I wished to know."

He embraced her, put the hair carefully into his pocket, and then, cutting a lock off the Italian's black tresses, he burnt it at the wax-light and enclosed the ashes in the paper which had been wrapped round the hair of the dauphiness.

Then he left the room, and whilst descending the stairs he awoke the young woman.

The prelate, agitated and impatient, was waiting and doubting.

"Well, count?" said he.

"Well, my lord, the oracle has said you may hope."

"It said so!" exclaimed the prince, transported with joy.

"Draw what conclusions you please, my lord;

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

the oracle said that this woman did not love her husband."

" Oh ! " said M. de Rohan, with a thrill of joy.

" I was obliged to burn the hair to obtain the revelation by its essence. Here are the ashes, which I restore to you most scrupulously, after having gathered f em up as if each atom were worth a million."

" Thanks, sir, a thousand thanks ; I can never repay you.'

" Do not speak of that, my lord. I must recommend you, however, not to swallow these ashes in wine as lovers sometimes do; it causes such a dangerous sympathy that your love would become incurable, while the lady's heart would cool towards you."

" Oh ! I shall take care," said the prelate, almost terrified. " Adieu, count, adieu."

Twenty minutes afterwards his eminence's carriage crossed M. de Richelieu's at the corner of the Rue des Petits Champs so suddenly that it was nearly upset in a deepjtrench which had been dug for the foundation of a new building.

The two noblemen recognised each other.

" Hai prince," said Richelieu, with a smile.

" Ha ! duke," replied Louis de Rohan, with his finger upon his lips. And they disappeared in opposite directions.

CHAPTER VII'

M. DE RICHELIEU APPRECIATES NICOLE

M. DE RICHELIEU drove straight to M. de Taverney's modest hotel in the Rue Coq-Heron,

Thanks to the privilege we possess, in common with the devil on two sticks, of entering every house, be

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

it ever so carefully locked, we are aware before M. de Richelieu that the baron was seated before the fire-place, his feet resting upon the immense andirons which supported a smouldering log, and was lecturing Nicole, sometimes pausing to chuck her under the chin, in spite of the rebellious and scornful poutings of the young waiting-maid. But whether Nicole would have been satisfied with the caress without the sermon or whether she would have preferred the sermon without the caress, we can give no satisfactory information.

The conversation between the master and the servant turned upon the very important point, that at a certain hour of the evening Nicole never came when the bell was rung; that she had always something to do in the garden or in the greenhouse; and that everywhere but in these two places she neglected her business.

Nicole, turning backwards and forwards with a charming and voluptuous grace, replied,—

" So much the worse ! I am dying with weariness here ; you promised I should go to Trianon **with** made-moiselle."

4

It was thereupon that the baron thought it proper in charity to pat her cheeks and chuck her chin,, no doubt to distract her thoughts from dwelling on so unpleasant a subject; but Nicole continued in the same vein, and, refusing all consolation, deplored her unhappy lot.

" Yes," sighed she, "I am shut up within four horrible walls ; I have no company; I have no air; whilst I had the prospect of a pleasant and fortunate future before me."

" What prospect ? " said the baron.

" Trianon," replied Nicole; " Trianon, where I should have seen the world—where I should have looked about me—where I should have been looked at."

" Oh ! oh ! my little Nicole," said the baron.

" Well, sir, I am a woman, and as well worth looking at as another, I suppose ? "

" *Cordieu!* how she talks," said the baron to himself. " What fire ! what ambition ! "

And he could not help casting a look of admiration at so much youth and beauty. Nicole seemed at times thoughtful and impatient.

" Come, sir," said she, " will you retire to bed, that I may go to mine ! "

" One word more, Nicole."

All at once the noise of the street-bell made Taverney start and Nicole jump.

" Who can be coming," said the baron, " at half-past eleven o'clock at night ? Go, child, and see."

Nicole hastened to open the door, asked the name of the visitor, and left the street door half open. Through this lucky opening a shadow, which had apparently emerged from the court-yard, glided out, not without making noise enough to attract the attention of the marshal, for it was he who turned and saw the flight. Nicole preceded him, candle in hand, with a beaming look.

" Oh ! oh ! " said the marshal, smiling and following her into the room, " this old rogue of a Taveniey only spoke to me of his daughter."

The duke was one of those men who do not require a second glance to see, and see completely. The shadowy figure which he had observed escaping made him think of Nicole, and Nicole of the shadow. When he saw her pretty face, he guessed what errand the shadow had come upon, and, judging from her saucy and laughing eye, her white teeth, and small waist, he drew a tolerably correct picture of her character and tastes.

At the door of the saloon, Nicole, not without a palpitation of the heart, announced,—

" His lordship the Duke de Richelieu."

This name was destined to cause a sensation that evening. It produced such an effect upon the baron that he rose from his arm-chair and walked straight to the door, not being able *to* believe the evidence of his ears.

But before he reached the door, he perceived M. de Richelieu in the shadow of the corridor.

" The duke ! " he stammered.

" Yes, my dear friend, the duke himself," replied Richelieu, in his most whining voice. " Oh ! that surprises you after your visit the other day ? Well, nevertheless, nothing can be more real. In the meantime, your hand, if you please."

" My lord Duke, you overwhelm me."

" Where have your wits fled to, my dear friend ? " said the old marshal, giving his hat and cane to Nicole, and seating himself comfortably in an arm-chair, " you are getting rusty ; you dote ; you seeiri no longer to know the world ! "

" But yet, duke," replied Taverney, much agitated, " it seems to me that the reception you gave me the other day was so significant that I could not mistake its purport."

" Hark ye, my old friend," answered Richelieu, " the other day you behaved like a schoolboy, and I like a pedant. Between us there was only the difference of the ferula. You are going to speak—I will save you the trouble ; you might very probably say some very foolish things to me, and I might reply in the same vein. Let us leave the other day aside, therefore, and come direct to the present time. Do you know what I have come for this evening ? "

" No; certainly."

" I have come to bring you the company which you asked me for your son the other day, and which the king has granted. Diable ! can you not understand the difference ? The day before yesterday I was a quasi-minister and to ask a favour was an injustice ; but to-day, when I am simply Richelieu and have refused the portfolio, it would be absurd to not ask ; I have, therefore, asked and obtained, and I now bring it to you."

" Duke, can this be true ? And is this kindness on your part——"

" It is the natural consequence of my duty as your friend. The minister refused, Richelieu asks and gives."

" Ah, duke, you enchant me—you are a true friend I"

" *Pardiea!* "

" But the king—the king, who confers such a favour on me——"

" The king scarcely knows what he has done ; or perhaps I am mistaken, and he knows very well."

"*What do you mean ?* "

"I mean that his majesty has, no doubt, some motive for provoking Madame Dubarry just now; and you owe this favour which he bestows upon you more to that motive than to my influence."

" You think so ? "

" I am certain of it, for I am aiding and abetting. You know it is on account of this creature that I refused the portfolio ? "

" I was told so, but——"

" But you did not believe it. Come, say it frankly."

" Well, I confess that——"

"You always thought me not likely to be troubled by many scruples of conscience—is that it ? "

" At least that I thought you without prejudices,"

" My friend, I am getting old, and I no longer care for pretty faces, except when they can be useful to me. And besides I have some other plans. But, to return to your son ; he is a splendid fellow ! "

" But on bad terms with that Dubarry who was at your house when I had the folly to present myself."

" I am aware of it, and that is why I am not a minister."

" Oh ! you refused the portfolio in order not to displease my son ? "

" If I told you so you would not believe me. No, that is not the reason. I refused it because the requirements of the Dubarrys, which commenced with the exclusion of your son, would have ended in enormities of all kinds."

" Then you have quarrelled with these creatures ? "

" Yes and no. They fear me—I despise them ; it is tit for tat."

" It is heroic, but imprudent."

" Why ? "

" The countess has still some power."

" Pooh ! " said Richelieu.

" How you say that ! "

" I say it like a man who feels the weakness of his position, and who, if necessary, would place the miner in a good position to blow up the whole place."

" I see the true state of the case ; you do my son a favour partly to vex the Dubarrys."

" Principally for that reason, and your perspicacity is not at fault. Your son serves me as a grenade ; I shall cause an explosion by his means. But, apropos, baron, have you not also a daughter ? "

" Yes."

" Young—lovely as Venus—and who lives at present at Trianon ? "

" Ah ! then you know her ? "

" I have spent the evening in her company, and have conversed about her for a full hour with the king."

" With the king ? " cried Taverney, his cheeks in a flame. " The king has spoken of my daughter—of Mademoiselle Andree de Taverney ? "

" The king himself, my friend. Do I vex you in telling you this ? "

" Vex me ? No, certainly not. The king honours me by looking at my daughter—but—the king——"

" Is immoral; is that what you were going to say ?"

" Heaven forbid that I should talk evil of his majesty. He has a right to adopt whatever morals he chooses/ "

" Well! what does this astonishment mean, then ? Do you pretend to say that Mademoiselle Andree is not an accomplished beauty, and that therefore the king may not have looked upon her with admiration ? "

Taverney did not reply; he only shrugged his shoulders and fell into a reverie, during which the unretenting inquisitorial eye of the Duke de Richelieu was still peed upon him.

" Well, I guess what you would say, if, instead of thinking to yourself, you would speak aloud " continued the old marshal, approaching his chair nearer the baron's. " You would say that the king is accustomed to bad society, that he mixes with low company, and that therefore he is not likely to admire this noble girl, so modest in her demeanour and so pure and lofty in her ideas, and is not capable of appreciating the treasures of her grace and beauty."

" Certainly, you are a great man, duke ; you have guessed my thoughts exactly," said Taverney.

" But confess, baron," continued Richelieu, " that our master should no longer force us, gentlemen,

peers and companions of the King of France, «to kiss the vile, open hand of a creature like Dubarry. It is time that he should restore us to our proper position. After having sunk from La Chateauroux, who was a marquise and of stuff to make duchesses, to La Pompadour, who was the daughter and the wife of a farmer of the public revenues, and from La Pompadour to the Dubarry, who calls herself simply Jeanneton, may he not fall still farther and plunge us into the lowest pitch of degradation ? It is humiliating for us, baron, who wear a coronet on our caps, to bow the head before such trumpery creatures."

" Oh ! you only speak the truth," said Taverney. " How evident is it that the court is deserted on account of these new fashions ! "

" No queen, no ladies; no ladies, no courtiers. The king elevates a grisette to the rank of a consort, and the people are upon the throne, represented by Mademoiselle Jeanne Vaubernier, a sempstress of Paris."

" It is so, and yet——"

" You see then, baron," interrupted the marshal, " what a noble career there is open for a woman of mind who should reign over France at present

" Without doubt," said Taverney, whose heart was beating fast; " but unluckily the place is occu-

"For a woman," continued the marshal, " who would have the boldness of these creatures without their vice, and who would direct her views and calculations to a loftier aim. For a woman who would advance her fortune so high that she should be talked of when the monarchy itself should no longer exist. Do you know if your daughter has intellect, baron ? "

" Lofty intellect, and above all, good sense."

" She is very lovely."

" Is she not ? "

" Her beauty is of that soft and charming character which pleases men so much, while her whole being is stamped with that air of candour and virgin purity which imposes respect even upon women. You must take great care of that treasure, my old friend,"

" You speak of her with such fire——"

" I ! I am madly in love with her, and would marry her to-morrow were I twenty instead of seventy-four years of age ! But is she comfortably placed ? Has she the luxury which befits such a lovely flower ? Only think, baron ! this evening she returned alone to her apartments, without waiting-women or lackey. A servant of the dauphin carried a lantern before her ! That looks more like a servant than a lady of her rank."

" What can I do, duke ? you know I am not rich."

" Rich or not, your daughter must at least have a

very well," said he, " that she wants one
or that she ought to have one."
have you none ? "

The baron did not reply.

" Who is that pretty girl you had here just now ? " continued Richelieu. " A fine spirited looking, i'faith."

" Yes, but—I—I cannot send her to Trianon."

" Why not, baron ? On the contrary, she seems to me perfectly suited for the post; she would make a capital femme-de-chambre."

" You did not look at her face then, duke ? "

" I ! — I did nothing else."

" You looked at her and did not remark her strange resemblance I "

" To whom ? "

" Xo—guess. Come hither, Nicole."

Nicole advanced; like a true waiting-woman, she had been listening at the door. The duke took her by both hands and looked her steadily in the face, but the impertinent gaze of this great lord and debauchee did not alarm or embarrass her for a moment.

" Yes," said he, " it is true ; there is a resemblance."

" You know to whom, and you see, therefore, that it is impossible to expose the fortunes of our house to such an awkward trick of fate. Would it be thought agreeable that this little minx of a Nicole should resemble the most illustrious lady in France ? "

" Oh, ho ! " replied Nicole sharply, and disengaging herself from the marshal's grasp, the better to reply to M. de Taverney, "is it so certain that this little minx resembles this illustrious lady so exactly ? Has this lady the low shoulder, the quick eye, the round ankle, and the plump arm of the little minx ! ! !

Nicole was crimson with rage, and there fore wish ingly beautiful.

The duke once more took her pretty , and with a look full of caresses and promis

" Baron," said he, " Nicole has certainly not her equal at court, at least in my opinion. As for the **U**nrrious lady to whom she has, I confess, a slight liblance, we shall know how to spare her self-love. You have fair hair of a lovely shade, Mademoiselle Nicole; you have eyebrows and nose of a most imperial form ; well, in one quarter of an hour employed before the mirror, these imperfections, since the baron thinks them such, will disappear. Nicole, my child, would you like to be at Trianon ? "

" Oh ! " said Nicole, and her whole soul full of long-ing was expressed in this monosyllable.

" You shall go to Trianon, then, my dear, and without prejudicing in any way the fortunes of others. Baron, one word more/ "

" Speak, my dear duke. "

" Go, my pretty child! " said Richelieu, " and leave us alone a moment/ "

Nicole retired. The duke approached the baron.

" I press you the more to send your daughter a waiting-maid, because it will please the king. His majesty does not like poverty, and pretty faces do not frighten him. Let me alone, I understand what I am about. "

" Nicole shall go to Trianon, if you think it will please the king, " replied the baron, with a meaning smile.

" Then, if you will allow me, I will bring her with me ; she can take advantage of the carriage. "

" But still, her resemblance to the dauphiness! We mu|t think of that, duke. "

I have thought of it. This resemblance will disappear in a quarter of an hour under Rafte's hands. I will answer for it. Write a note to your daughter to tell her what importance it is that she should have a femme-de-chambre, and that this femme-de-chambre should be Nicole. "

" You think it important that it should be Nicole. "

" I do. "

" And that no other than Nicole would do ? "

" Upon my honour, I think so. "

" Then I will write immediately. "

And the baron sat down and wrote a letter, which he handed to Richelieu.

" And the instructions, duke ? "

" I will give them to Nicole. Is she intelligent ? "

The baron smiled.

" Then you confide her to me, do you not ? " said Richelieu.

" That is your affair, duke ; you asked me for her. I give her to you ; make of her what you like/'

" Mademoiselle, come with me," said the duke, rising and calling into the corridor, " and that quickly/'

Nicole did not wait to be told twice. Without asking the baron for his consent, she made up a packet of clothes in five minutes, and light as a bird she flew downstairs and took her place beside the coachman.

Richelieu took leave of his friend, who repeated his thanks for the service he had rendered Philip. Of Andr e not a word was said ; it was necessary to do more than speak of her.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRANSFORMATION

NICOLE was overjoyed. To leave Taverney for Paris was not half so great a triumph as to leave Paris for Trianon. She was so gracious with M. de Richelieu's coachman, that the next morning the reputation of the new femme-de-chambre was established throughout all the coach-houses and antechambers, in any degree aristocratic, of Paris and Versailles.

When they arrived at the Hotel de Hanover, M. de Richelieu took the little waiting-maid by the hand and led her to the first story, where M. Raft e was waiting his arrival, and writing a multitude of letters, all on his master's account.

Amidst the various acquirements of the marshal, he occupied the foremost **rank, and** Raft e had **become,**

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

at least in theory, such a skilful man of war, that Polybius and the Chevalier de Fobard, if they had lived at that period, would have esteemed themselves fortunate could they have perused the pamphlets on fortifications and manoeuvring of which Rafte wrote one every week. M. Rafte was busy revising the plan of a war against the English in the Mediterranean when the marshal entered, and said,—

" Rafte, look at this child, will you ? "

Rafte looked.

" Very pretty," said he, with a most significant movement of the lips.

" Yes. but the likeness, Rafte ? It is of the likeness I speak."

" Oh ! true. What the deuce ! "

" You see it, do you not ? "

" It is extraordinary ; it will either make or mar his fortune."

" It will ruin her in the first place ; but we shall arrange all that. You observe she has fair hair, Rafte; but that *will* not signify much, will it ? "

" It will only be necessary to make it black, my lord," replied Bifte, who had acquired the habit of completing his master's thoughts, and sometimes even of thinking entirely for him.

" Come to my dressing-table, child," said the marshal; " this gentleman, who is a very clever man, will fetke you the handsomest and the least easily recognised waiting-maid in France."

In fact, ten minutes afterwards, with the assistance of a composition which the marshal used every week to dye the white hairs beneath his wig black, a piece of coquetry which he often affected to confess by the bedside of some of his acquaintances Rafte had dyed the beautiful auburn hair of Nicole a splendid jet black

Then he passed the end of a pin, blackened -in the flame of a candle, over her thick fair eyebrows, and by this means gave such a fantastic look to her joyous countenance, such an ardent and even sombre fire to her bright clear eyes, that one would have said she was some fairy bursting by the power of an incantation from the magic prison in which her enchanter had held her confined.

" Now, my sweet child/' said Richelieu, after having handed a mirror to the astonished Nicole, " look how charming you are, and how little like the Nicole you were just now. You have no longer a queen to fear, but a fortune to make"

" Oh, my lord ! " exclaimed the young girl.

" Yes, and for that purpose it is only necessary that we understand each other."

Nicole blushed and looked down ; the cunning one expected, no doubt, some of those flattering words which Richelieu knew so well how to say.

The duke perceived this, and, to cut short all misunderstanding, said,—

" Sit down in this arm-chair beside M. Rafte, *my* dear child. Open your ears wide, and listen to me. Oh, do not let M. Rafte's presence embarrass you ; do not be afraid; he will, on the contrary, give us his advice. You are listening, are you not ? "

" Yes, my lord," stammered Nicole, ashamed at having thus been led away by her vanity.

The conversation between M. de Richelieu, M. Rafte, and Nicole lasted more than an hour, after which the marshal sent the little *femme-de-chambre* to sleep with the other waiting-women in the hotel.

Rafte returned to his military pamphlet, and Richelieu retired to bed, after having looked over the different letters, which conveyed to him intelligence of all

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

the acts of the provincial parliaments against M. d'Aiguillon and the Dubarry clique.

Early the next day, one of his carriages without his coat of arms conducted Nicole to Trianon, set her down at the gate with her little packet, and immediately disappeared. Nicole, with head erect, mind at ease, and hope dancing in her eyes, after having made the necessary inquiries, knocked at the door of the offices.

It was ten o'clock in the morning. Andree, already up and dressed, was writing to her father to inform him of the happy event of the preceding day, of which M. de Richelieu, as we have already seen, had made himself the messenger. Our readers will not have forgotten that a flight of stone steps led from the garden to the little chapel of Trianon ; that on the landing-place of this chapel, a staircase branched off towards the right to the first story, which contained the apartments of the ladies-in-waiting, which apartments opened off a long corridor, like an alley, looking upon the garden.

Andr^e's apartment was the first upon the left hand in this corridor. It was tolerably large, well-lighted by windows looking upon the stable court, and preceded by a little bedroom with a closet on either side. This apartment, however insufficient if one considers the ordinary household of the officers of a brilliant court, was yet a charming retreat, very habitable, and very cheerful as an asylum from the noise and bustle of the palace. There an ambitious soul could fly to devour the affronts or the mistakes of the day, and there, too, an humble and melancholy spirit could repose in silence and in solitude apart from the grandeur of the gay world around.

In fact, the stone steps once ascended and the chapel passed, there no longer existed either superiority, duty

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

or display. There reigned the calm of a convent, and the personal liberty of prison life. The slave of the palace was a monarch when she had crossed the threshold of her modest dwelling. A gentle, yet lofty soul such as Andree's found consolation in this reflection ; not that she flew here to repose after the fatigues of a disappointed ambition, or of unsatisfied longings; but she felt that she could think more at her ease in the narrow bounds of her chamber than in the rich saloons of Trianon, or those marble halls which her feet trod with a timidity amounting almost to terror

From this sequestered nook, where the young girl felt herself so well and so appropriately placed, she could look without emotion on all the splendour which during the day had met her dazzled eye. Surrounded by her flowers, her harpsichord, and her German books—such jweet companions to those who read with the heart—Andree defied fate to inflict on her a single grief, or to deprive her of a single joy.

" Here," said she, when in the evening, after her duties were over, she returned to throw around her shoulders her dressing-gown with its wide folds, and to breathe with all her soul, as with all her lungs. " Here I possess nearly everything I can hope to possess till my death. I may one day perhaps be richer but I can never be poorer than I now am. There will always be flowers, music, and a consoling page to cheer the poor recluse."

Andree had obtained permission to breakfast in her own apartment when she felt inclined. This was a precious boon to her, for she could thus remain in her own domicile until twelve o'clock, unless the dauphiness should command her attendance for some morning reading or some early walk. Thus free, in fine weather she set out every morning with a book in her hand

and traversed alone the extensive woods which lie between Versailles and Trianon; then, after a walk of two hours, during which she gave full play to meditation and reverie, she returned to breakfast, often without having seen either nobleman or servant, man or livery.

When the heat began to pierce through the thick foliage, Andree had her little chamber fresh and cool with the double current of air from the door and the window. A small sofa covered with Indian silk, four chairs to match, a simple yet elegant bed with a circular top from which the curtains of the same material as the covering of the furniture fell in deep folds, two china vases placed upon the chimneypiece, and a square table with brass feet, composed her little world, whose narrow confines bounded all her hopes and limited all her wishes.

Andree was seated in her apartment, therefore, as we have said, and busily engaged in writing to her father, when a little modest knock at the door of the corridor attracted her attention.

She raised her head on seeing the door open, and uttered a slight cry of astonishment when the radiant face of Nicole appeared, entering from the little antechamber.

CHAPTER IX

HOW PLEASURE TO SOME IS DESPAIR TO OTHERS

"GOOD-DAY, mademoiselle, it is I," said Nicole, with a joyous curtsey, which nevertheless, from the young girl's knowledge of her mistress's character, was not unmixed with anxiety.

" You ? And how do you happen to be here ? " replied Andree, putting down her pen, the better to follow the conversation which was thus commenced.

" Mademoiselle had forgotten me, so I came—.— "

" But if I forgot you, mademoiselle, it was because I had my reasons for so doing. Who gave you permission to come ! "

" Monsieur the baron, of course, mademoiselle," said Nicole, smoothing the handsome black eyebrows which she owed to the generosity of M. Rafte with a very dissatisfied air.

" My father requires your services in Paris, and I do not require you here at all. You may return, child."

" Oh, then, mademoiselle does not care—I thought mademoiselle had been more pleased with me. It is well worth while loving," added Nicole philosophically, " to meet with such a return at last."

And she did her utmost to bring a tear to her beautiful eyes.

There was enough of heart and feeling in this reproach to excite Andree's compassion.

" My child," said she, " I have attendance here already, and I cannot permit myself unnecessarily to increase the household of the dauphiness by another mouth."

" Oh ! as if this mouth was so large ! " said Nicole, with a charming smile.

" No matter, Nicole, your presence here is impossible."

" On account of this resemblance ? " said the young girl. " Then you have not looked at my face, mademoiselle ? "

" In fact, you seem changed."

" I think so ! A fine gentleman, he who got the promotion for M. Philip, came to us yesterday, and as he saw the baron quite melancholy at your being

here without a waiting-maid, he told him that nothing was easier than to change me from fair to dark. He brought me with him, dressed me as you see, and here I am."

Andree smiled.

"You must love me very much," said she, "since you are determined at all risks to shut yourself up in Trianon, where I am almost a prisoner/"

Nicole cast a rapid but intelligent glance round the room.

"The chamber is not very gay," said she, "but you are not always in it ?"

"I ? Of course not," replied Andree; "but you ?"

"Well, I ?"

"You, who will never enter the saloons of madame the dauphiness ; you, who will have neither the resource of the theatre, nor the walk, nor the evening circle, but will always remain here—you will die of weariness."

"Oh !" said Nicole, "there is always some little window or other; one can surely see some *little* glimpse of the gay world without, were it only through the chinks of the door. If a person can see, they can also be seen—that is all I require ; so do not be uneasy on my account."

"I repeat, Nicole, that I cannot receive you without express orders from my father."

"Is that your settled determination ?"

"It is."

Nicole drew the Baron de Taverney's letter from her bosom.

"There," said she, "since my entreaties and my devotion to you have had no effect, let us see if the order contained in this will have more power."

Andree read the letter, which was in the following terms :—

" I am aware, and indeed it is already remarked, my dear Andree, that you do not occupy the position at Trianon which your rank imperatively requires. You ought to have two femmes-de-chambre and a valet, as I ought to have clear twenty thousand pounds per annum ; but as I am satisfied with one thousand pounds, imitate my example, and content yourself with Nicole, who in her own person is worth all the servants you ought to have.

" Nicole is quick, intelligent, and devoted to you, and will readily adopt the tone and manners of her new locality. Your chief care indeed will be not to stimulate her, but to repress her anxiety. Keep her then ; and do not imagine that I am making any sacrifice in depriving myself of her services. In case you should think so, remember that his majesty, who had the goodness to think of us, remarked on seeing you (this was confided to me by a good friend), that you required a *little* more attention to your toilet and general appearance. Think of this ; it is of great importance.

" YOUR AFFECTIONATE FATHER."

This letter threw Andree into a state of grief and perplexity. She was then to be haunted, even in her new prosperity, by the remembrance of that poverty which she alone did not feel to be a fault, while all around seemed to consider it as a crime.

Her first impulse was to break her pen indignantly, to tear the letter she had commenced, and to reply to her father's epistle by some lofty tirade expressive of philosophical self-denial, which Philip would have

approved of with all his heart. But she imagined she saw the baron's satirical smile on reading this chef d'oeuvre, and her resolution vanished. She merely replied to the baron's order, therefore, by a paragraph annexed to the news of Trianon which she had already written to him according to his request.

" My father," she added, " Nicole has this moment arrived, and I receive her, since you wish it; but what you have written on this subject has vexed me. Shall I be less ridiculous with this village girl as waiting-maid, than when I was alone amidst this wealthy court? Nicole will be unhappy at seeing me humbled, she will be discontented: for servants feel proud or humbled in proportion to the wealth or poverty of their masters. As to his majesty's remark, my father permit me to tell you that the king has too much good sense to be displeased at my incapacity to play the grand lady, and, besides, his majesty has too much heart to have remarked or criticised my poverty without transforming it into a wealth to which your name and services would have had a legitimate claim in the eyes of all."

This was Andree's reply, and it must be confessed that her ingenuous innocence, her noble pride, had an easy triumph over the cunning and corruption of her tempters.

Andrde said no more respecting Nicole. She agreed to her remaining, so that the latter, joyous and animated, she well knew why, prepared on the spot a little bed in the cabinet on the right of the antechamber, and made herself as small, as aerial, and as exquisite as possible, in order not to inconvenience her mistress by her presence in this modest retreat. One would have thought she wished to imitate the rose-leaf which the Persian sage let fall upon a vase filled with

water to show that something could be added without spilling the contents.

Andree set out for Trianon about one o'clock. She had never been more quickly or more gracefully attired. Nicole had surpassed herself; politeness, attention, and zeal—nothing had been wanting in her services.

When Mademoiselle de Taverney was gone, Nicole felt herself mistress of the domicile, and instituted a thorough examination of it. Everything was scrutinised, from the letters to the smallest knick-knack on the toilet-table, from the mantelpiece to the most secret corners of the closets. Then she looked out of the windows to take a survey of the neighbourhood.

Below her was a large court-yard, in which several ostlers were dressing and currying the splendid horses of the dauphiness. Ostlers ! pshaw ! Nicole turned away her head.

On the right was a row of windows on the same story as those of Andree's apartment. Several heads appeared at these windows, apparently those of chambermaids and floor-scrubbers. Nicole disdainfully proceeded in her examination.

On the opposite side, in a large apartment, some music-teachers were drilling a class of choristers and instrumentalists for the mass of St. Louis. Without ceasing her dusting operations, Nicole commenced to sing after her oWn fashion, thus distracting the attention of the masters, and causing the choristers to sing false.

But this pastime could not long satisfy Mademoiselle Nicole's ambition. When the masters and the singers had quarrelled and been mystified sufficiently, the little waiting-maid proceeded to the inspection of the higher story. All the windows were closed, and,

moreover, they were only attics, so Nicole continued her dusting. But a moment afterwards, one of these attic windows was opened without her being able to discover by what mechanism, for no one appeared. Some person, however, must have opened this window; this some person must have seen Nicole and yet not have remained to look at her, thereby proving himself a most impertinent some person. At least, such was Nicole's opinion. But she, who examined everything so conscientiously, could not avoid examining the features of this impertinent; and she, therefore, returned every moment from her different avocations to the window to give a glance at this attic—that is, at this open eye from which the eyeball was so obstinately absent. Once she imagined that the person fled as she approached; but this was incredible, and she did not believe it.

On another occasion she was almost certain of the fact, having seen the back of the fugitive, surprised, no doubt, by a prompter return than he had anticipated. Then Nicole had recourse to stratagem. She concealed herself behind the curtain, leaving the window wide open to drown all suspicion.

She waited a long time, but at last a head of black hair made its appearance; then came two timid hands, which supported, buttress-like, a body bending over cautiously; and, finally, a face showed itself distinctly at the window. Nicole almost fell, and grasped the curtain so tightly, in her surprise, that it shook from top to bottom.

It was Monsieur Gilbert's face which was looking at her from this lofty attic. But the moment Gilbert saw the curtain move, he comprehended the trick, and appeared no more. To mend the matter, the attic window was closed.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

No doubt Gilbert had seen Nicole; he had been astonished, and had wished to convince himself of the presence of his enemy ; and when he found himself discovered instead, he had fled in agitation and in anger. At least, Nicole interpreted the scene thus, and she was right, for this was the exact state of the case.

In fact, Gilbert would rather have seen his Satanic majesty in person than Nicole. The arrival of this spy caused him a thousand terrors. He felt an old leaven of jealousy against her, for she knew his secret of the garden in the Rue Coq-Heron.

Gilbert had fled in agitation, but not in agitation alone, but also in anger, and biting his nails with rage.

" Of what use now is my foolish discovery, of which I was so proud ? " said he to himself. " Even if Nicole had a lover in Paris, the evil is done, and she will not be sent away from this on that account; but if she tells what I did in the Rue Coq-Heron, I shall be dismissed from Trianon. It is not I who govern Nicole—it is she who governs me. Oh, fury ! "

And Gilbert's inordinate self-love, serving as a stimulant to his hatred, made his blood boil with frightful violence. It seemed to him that Nicole, in entering that apartment, had chased from it, with a diabolical smile, all the happy dreams which Gilbert from his garret had wafted thither every night along with his vows, his ardent love, and his flowers. Had Gilbert been too much occupied to think of Nicole before, or had he banished the subject from his thoughts on account of the terror with which it inspired him ? We cannot determine ; but this we do know, at least, that Nicole's appearance was a most disagreeable surprise for him.

He saw plainly that, sooner or later, war would be declared between them ; but, as Gilbert was prudent

and politic, he did not wish the war to commence until he felt himself strong enough to make it energetic and effective. With this intention he determined to counterfeit death until chance should present him with a favourable opportunity of reviving, or until Nicole, from weakness or necessity, should venture on some step which would deprive her of her present vantage-ground. Therefore, all eye, all ear, when Andr^e was concerned, but at the same time ceaselessly vigilant, he continued to make himself acquainted with the state of affairs in the first apartment of the corridor, without Nicole ever having once met him in the gardens.

Unluckily for Nicole, she was not irreproachable, and even had she been so for the present, there was always one stumbling-block in the past over which she could be made to fall.

At the end of a week's ceaseless watching, morning, noon and night, Gilbert at last saw through the bars of his window a plume which he fancied he recognised. This plume was a source of constant agitation to Nicole, for it belonged to M. Beausire, who, following the rest of the court, had emigrated from Paris to Trianon.

For a long time Nicole was cruel; for a long time she left M. Beausire to shiver in the cold, and melt in the sun, and her prudence drove Gilbert to despair; but one fine morning, when M. Beausire had, doubtless, overleaped the barrier of mimic eloquence, and found an opportunity of bringing persuasive words to his aid, Nicole profited by Andree's absence to descend to the court-yard and join M. Beausire, who was assisting his friend, the superintendent of the stables, to train a little Shetland pony.

From the court they passed into the garden, and from thence into the shady avenue which leads to

Versailles. Gilbert followed the amorous couple with the ferocious joy of a tiger who scents his prey. He counted their steps, their sighs, learned by heart all he heard of their conversation, and it may be presumed that the result pleased him, for the next day, freed from all embarrassment, he displayed himself openly at his attic window, humming a song and looking quite at ease, and so far from fearing to be seen by Nicole, that, on the contrary, he seemed to brave her look.

Nicole was mending an embroidered silken mitten belonging to her mistress ; she heard the song, raised her head, and saw Gilbert. The first evidence she gave of his presence was a contemptuous pouting, which bordered on the bitter, and breathed of hostility at a league's distance. But Gilbert sustained this look with a such singular smile, and there was such provoking intelligence in his air and in his manner of singing, that Nicole looked down and blushed.

"She understands me," thought Gilbert; " that is all I wished." On subsequent occasions Gilbert continued the same behaviour, and it was now Nicole's turn to tremble. She went so far as to long for an interview with him, in order to free her heart from the load with which the satirical looks of the young gardener had burthened it.

Gilbert saw that she sought him. He could not misunderstand the short dry coughs which sounded near the window whenever Nicole knew him to be in his attic, nor the goings and comings of the young-girl in the corridor when she supposed he might be ascending or descending the stairs. For a short time he was very proud of this triumph, which he attributed entirely to his strength of character and wise precautions. Nicole watched him so well that once

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

she spied him as he mounted to his attic. She called him, but he did not reply.

Prompted either by curiosity or fear, Nicole went still farther. One evening she took off her pretty high-heeled slippers, a present from Andr^e, and with a trembling and hurried step she ventured into the corridor, at the end of which she saw Gilbert's door. There was still sufficient daylight to enable Gilbert, aware of Nicole's approach, to see her distinctly through the joining, or rather through the crevices of the panels. She knocked at the door, knowing well that he was in his room, but Gilbert did not reply.

It was, nevertheless, a dangerous temptation for him. He could, at his ease, humble her who thus came to entreat his pardon, and prompted by this thought, he had already raised his hand to draw the bolt, which, with his habitual precaution and vigilance, he had fastened to avoid surprise.

" But no/¹ thought he, " no. She is all calculation ; it is from fear or interest alone that she comes to seek me. She therefore hopes to gain something by her visit; but if so, what may I not lose ? "

And with this reasoning he let his hand fall again by his side. Nicole, after having knocked at the door two or three times, retired, frowning. Gilbert therefore kept all his advantage, and Nicole had only to redouble her cunning in order not to lose hers entirely. At last all these projects and counter-projects reduced themselves to this dialogue, which took place between the belligerent parties one evening at the chapel door, where chance had brought them together.

" Ha! good-evening, Monsieur Gilbert; you are here then, are you ? "

" Oh I good-evening, Mademoiselle Nicole; you are at Trianon ? "

" As you see—waiting-maid to mademoiselle."

" And I am assistant gardener/'

Then Nicole made a deep curtsey to Gilbert, who returned her a most courtly bow, and they separated. Gilbert ascended to his attic as if he had been on his way thither, and Nicole left the offices, and proceeded on her errand; but Gilbert glided down again stealthily and followed the young femme-de-chambre, calculating that she was going to meet M. Beausire.

A man was indeed waiting for her beneath the shadows of the alley; Nicole approached him. It was too dark for Gilbert to recognise M. Beausire; and the absence of the plume puzzled him so much, that he let Nicole return to her domicile, and followed the man as far as the gate of Trianon.

It was not M. Beausire, but a man of a certain age, or rather certainly aged, with a distinguished air, and a brisk gait, notwithstanding his advanced years. When he approached, Gilbert, who carried his assurance so far as almost to brush past him, recognised M. de Richelieu.

" *Teste I* " said he, " first an officer, now a marshal of France ! Mademoiselle Nicole ascends in the scale/'

CHAPTER X

THE PARLIAMENTS

WHILE all these minor intrigues, hatched and brought to light beneath the linden trees and amidst the alleys of Trianon, formed a sufficiently animated existence for the insects of this little world, the great intrigues of the town, like threatening tempests, spread their vast wings over the palace of Themis, as M. Jean

Dubarcy wrote in mythological parlance to his sister.

The parliaments, those degenerate remains of the ancient French opposition, had taken breath beneath the capricious government of Louis XV. ; but since their protector, M. de Choiseul, had fallen they felt the approach of danger, and they prepared to meet it by measures as energetic as their circumstances would permit.

Every general commotion is kindled at first by some personal quarrel, as the pitched battles of armies commence by skirmishes of outposts. Since M. de la Chalotais had attacked M. d'Aiguillon, and in so doing had personified the struggle of the *tiers-etat* with the feudal lords, the public mind had taken possession of the question, and would not permit it to be deferred or displaced.

Now the king—whom the parliament of Brittany and of all France had deluged with a flood of petitions more or less submissive and foolish—the king, thanks to Madame Dubarry, had just given his countenance to the feudal against the tiers party, by nominating M. d'Aiguillon to the command of his light horse.

M. Jean Dubarry had described it very correctly ; it was a smart fillip to " the dear and trusty counsellors, sitting in high court of parliament."

" How would the blow be taken ? ,! Town and court asked itself this question every morning at sunrise ; but members of parliament are clever people, and where others are much embarrassed they see clearly. They began with agreeing among themselves as to the application and the result of this blow, after which they adopted the following resolutions, when it had been clearly ascertained that the blow had been given and received :—

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" *The court of parliament will deliberate upon the conduct of the ex-governor of Brittany, and give its opinion thereon.*"*

But the king parried the blow by sending a message to the peers and princes, forbidding them to repair to the palace, or be present at any deliberation which might take place concerning M. d'Aiguillon. They obeyed to the letter.

Then the parliament, determined to do its business itself, passed a decree, in which, after declaring that the Duke d'Aiguillon was seriously inculpated and tainted with suspicion, even on matters which touched his honour, it proclaimed that that peer was suspended from the functions of the peerage, until, by a judgment given in the court of peers, with the forms and solemnities prescribed by the laws and customs as the kingdom, *the place of which nothing can supply*, he had fully cleared himself from the accusations and suspicions now resting on his honour.

But such a decree passed merely in the court of parliament before those interested, and inscribed in their reports, was nothing; public notoriety was wanting, and, above all, that uproar which song alone ventures to raise in France, and which makes song the sovereign controller of events and rulers. This decree of parliament must be heightened and strengthened by the power of song.

Paris desired nothing better than to take part in this commotion. Little disposed to view either court or parliament with favour, Paris in its ceaseless movement was waiting for some good subject for a laugh, as a transition from all the causes for tears which had been furnished it for centuries.

The decree was therefore properly and duly passed, **and** the parliament appointed commissioners, who were

to have it printed under their own eyes. Ten thousand copies of the decree were to be struck off, and the distribution organised without delay.

Then, as it was one of their rules that the person interested should be informed of what the court had done respecting him, the same commissioners proceeded to the hotel of the Duke d'Aiguillon, who had just arrived in Paris for an important interview, no less indeed than to have a clear and open explanation, which had become necessary between the duke and his uncle, the marshal.

Thanks to Rafté, all Versailles had been informed within an hour of the noble resistance of the old duke to the king's orders, touching the portfolio of M. de Choiseul. Thanks to Versailles, all Paris and all France had learned the same news; so that Richelieu had found himself for some time past on the summit of popularity, from which he made political grimaces at Madame Dubarry and his dear nephew.

The position was unfavourable for M. d'Aiguillon, who was already so unpopular. The marshal, hated, but at the same* time feared, by the people, because he was the living type of that nobility which was so respected and so respectable under Louis XV.—the marshal, so Protean in his character, that—after having chosen a part, he was able to withdraw from it without difficulty when circumstances required it, or when a bon mot might be the result—Richelieu, we repeat, was a dangerous enemy; the more so as the worst part of his enmity was always that which he concealed in order, as he said, to create a surprise.

The Duke d'Aiguillon, since his interview with Madame Dubarry, had two flaws in his coat of mail. Suspecting how much anger and thirst for revenge Richelieu concealed under the apparent equality of

his temper, he acted as mariners do in certain cases of difficulty—he burst the waterspout with his cannon, assured that the danger would be less if it were faced boldly. He set about looking everywhere for his uncle therefore, in order to have a serious conversation with him ; but nothing was more difficult to accomplish than this step, since the marshal had discovered his wish.

Marches and countermarches commenced. When the marshal saw his nephew at a distance, he sent him a smile, and immediately surrounded himself by people who rendered all communication impossible, thus putting the enemy at defiance as from an impregnable fort.

The Duke d'Aiguillon burst the waterspout. He simply presented himself at his uncle's hotel at Versailles ; but Rafte, from his post at the little window of the hotel looking upon the court, recognised the liveries of the duke, and warned his master. The duke entered the marshal's bedroom, where he found Rafte alone, who, with a most confidential smile, was so indiscreet as to inform the nephew that his uncle had not slept at home that night.

M. d'Aiguillon bit his lips and retired. When he returned to his hotel, he wrote to the Marshal to request an audience. The marshal could not refuse to reply. If he replied, he could not refuse an audience; and if he granted the audience, how could he refuse a full explanation ? M. d'Aiguillon resembled too much those polite and engaging duellists, who hide their evil designs under a fascinating and graceful exterior, lead their man upon the ground with bows and reverences, and there put him to death without pity.

The marshal's self-love was not so powerful as to mislead him; he knew his nephew's power. Once

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

in his presence, his opponent would force from him either a pardon or a concession. Now, Richelieu never pardoned any one, and concessions to an enemy are always a dangerous fault in politics. Therefore, on receipt of M. d'Aiguillon's letter, he pretended to have left Paris for several days.

Rafte, whom he consulted upon this point, gave him the following advice,—

" We are on the fair way to ruin M. d'Aiguillon. Our friends of the parliament will do the work. If M. d'Aiguillon, who suspects this, can lay his hand upon you before the explosion, he will force from you a promise to assist him in case of misfortune ; for your resentment is of that kind that you cannot openly gratify it at the expense of your family interest. If, on the contrary, you refuse, M. d'Aiguillon will leave you knowing you to be his enemy and attributing all his misfortunes to you ; and he will go away comforted as people always are when they have found out the cause of their complaint, even although the complaint itself be not removed."

" That is quite true," replied Richelieu ; " but I cannot conceal myself for ever. How many days will it be before the explosion takes place ? "

" Six days, my lord."

" Are you sure ? "

Rafte drew from his pocket a letter from a counsellor of the parliament. This letter contained only the two following lines:—

" It has been decided that the decree shall be passed. It will take place on Thursday, the final day fixed on by the company."

" Then the affair is very simple," replied the marshal;

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" I send the duke back his letter with a note from your own hand :

" MY LORD DUKE,

" You have doubtless heard of the departure of my lord Marshal for . . . This change of air has been judged indispensable by the marshal's physician, who thinks him rather overworked. If, as I believe is the case, after what you did me the honour to tell me the other day, you wish to have an interview with my lord, I can assure you that on Thursday evening next the duke, on his return from . . . will sleep in his hotel in Paris, where you will certainly find him."

" And now," added the marshal, " hide me somewhere until Thursday."

Rafte punctually fulfilled these instructions ; the letter was written and sent, the hiding place was found. Only one evening, Richelieu, who began to feel very much wearied, slipped out and proceeded to Trianon to speak to Nicole. He risked nothing, or thought he risked nothing, by this step, knowing the Duke d'Aiguillon to be at the pavilion of Luciennes. The result of this manoeuvre was, that even if M. d'Aiguillon suspected something, he could not foresee the blow which menaced him until he had actually met his enemy's sword.

The delay until Thursday satisfied him; on that day he left Versailles with the hope of at last meeting and combating this impalpable antagonist. This Thursday was, as we have said, the day on which parliament was to proclaim its decree.

An agitation, low and muttering as yet, but perfectly intelligible to the Parisian, who knows so well the level of these popular waves, reigned in the wide

streets through which M. d'Aiguillon's carriage passed. No notice was taken of him, for he had observed the precaution of coming in a carriage without a coat of arms or other heraldic distinctions.

Here and there he saw busy-looking crowds, who were showing each other some paper which they read with many gesticulations, and collecting in noisy groups, like ants round a piece of sugar fallen to the ground. But this was the period of inoffensive agitation ; the people were then in the habit of congregating together in this manner for a corn tax, for an article in the *Gazette de Holland*, for a verse of Voltaire's, or for a song against Dubarry or Maupeou.

M. d'Aiguillon drove straight to M. de Richelieu's hotel. He found there only Rafté. "The marshal," the secretary said, "was expected every moment; some delay of the post must have detained him at the barrier."

M. d'Aiguillon proposed waiting, not without expressing some impatience to Rafté, for he took this excuse as a new defeat. His ill-humour increased, however, when Rafté told him that the marshal would be in despair on his return to find that M. d'Aiguillon had been kept waiting; that besides, he was not to sleep in Paris, as he had at first intended; and that, most probably, he would not return from the country alone, and would just call in passing at his hotel to see if there was any news ; that therefore M. d'Aiguillon would be wiser to return to his house, where the marshal could call as he passed.

"Listen, Rafté," said D'Aiguillon, who had become more gloomy during this mysterious reply: "you are my uncle's conscience, and I trust you will answer me as an honest man. I am played upon, am I not, and the marshal does not wish to see me ? Do not

interrupt me, Rafté ; you have been a valuable counsellor to me, and I might have been, and can yet be, a good friend to you ; must I return to Versailles ? "

" My lord duke, I assure you, upon my honour, you will receive a visit at your own house from the marshal in less than an hour."

" Then I can as well wait here, since he will come this way."

" I have had the honour of informing you that he will probably not be alone."

" I understand. And I have your word, Rafté ? "

At these words the duke retired deep in thought, but with an air as noble and graceful as the marshal's was the reverse, when, after his nephew's departure, he emerged from a closet, through the glass door of which he had been peeping.

The marshal smiled like one of those hideous demons which Callot has introduced in his *Temptations*.

" He suspects nothing, Rafté ? " said he.

" Nothing, my lord."

" What hour is it ? "

" The hour has nothing to do with the matter, my lord. You must wait until our little procurer of the Chatelet makes his appearance. The commissioners are still at the printer's."

Rafté had scarcely finished, when a footman opened a secret door, and introduced a personage, very ugly, very greasy, very black—one of those living pens for which Monsieur Dubarry professed such a profound antipathy.

Rafté pushed the marshal into a closet, and hastened, smiling, to meet this man.

" Ah ! it is you, M. Flageot ? " said he ; " I am delighted to see you."

" Your servant, Monsieur Rafte. Well! the business is done."

" Is it printed ? "

" Five thousand are struck off. The first proofs are already scattered over the town, the others are drying."

" What a misfortune, my dear M. Flageot ! What a blow to the marshal's family ! "

M. Flageot, to avoid the necessity of answering—that is, of telling, a lie—drew a large silver box from his pocket and slowly inhaled a pinch of Spanish snuff.

" Well, what is to be done now ? " asked Rafte.

" The forms, my dear sir, the forms. The commissioners, now that they are sure of the printing and the distribution, will immediately enter their carriages, which are waiting at the door of the printing office, and proceed to make known the decree to M. the Duke d'Aiguillon, who happens luckily—I mean unfortunately, M. Rafte—to be in his hotel in Paris, where they can have an interview with him in person/'

Rafte hastily seized an enormous bag of legal documents from a shelf, which he gave to M. Flageot, saying,—

" These are the suits which I mentioned to you, sir; the marshal has the greatest confidence in your abilities, and leaves this affair, which ought to prove most remunerative, entirely in your hands. I have to thank you for your good offices in this deplorable conflict of M. d'Aiguillon's with the all-powerful parliament of Paris, and also for your very valuable advice."

And he gently, but with some haste, pushed M. Flageot, delighted with the weight of his burden, towards the door of the antechamber. Then, releasing the marshal from his prison,—

" Quick, my lord, to your carriage! You have no time to lose if you wish to be present at the scene. Take care that your horses go more quickly than those of the commissioners/'

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT THE PATH OF A MINISTER IS NOT ALWAYS STREWN WITH ROSES.

THE Marshal de Richelieu's horses did go more quickly than those of the commissioners, for the marshal entered first into the court-yard of the Hotel d'Aiguillon.

The duke did not expect his uncle, and was preparing to return to Luciennes to inform Madame Dubarry that the enemy had been unmasked, when the announcement of the marshal's arrival roused his discouraged mind from his torpor.

The duke hastened to meet his uncle, and took both his hands in his with a warmth of affection proportionate to the fear he had experienced. The marshal was as affectionate as the duke ; the tableau was touching. The Duke d'Aiguillon, however, was manifestly endeavouring to hasten the period of explanation, while the marshal on the contrary, delayed it as much as possible, by looking at the pictures, the bronzes, or the tapestry, and complaining of dreadful fatigue.

The duke cut off the marshal's retreat, imprisoned him in an arm-chair, as M. de Villars imprisoned the Prince Eugene in Marchiennes, and commenced the attack.

" Uncle/' said he, " is it true that you, the most discriminating man in France, have judged so ill of

me as to think that my self-seeking did not extend to us both ? "

There was no longer room for retreat; Richelieu decided on his plan of action.

" What do you mean by that ? " replied he, " and in what do you perceive that I judged unfavourably of you or the reverse, my dear nephew ? "

" Uncle, you are offended with me."

" But for what, and how ? "

" Oh ! these loopholes, my lord marshal, will not serve you ; in one word, you avoid me when I need your assistance."

" Upon my honour, I do not understand you."

" I will explain then. The king refused to nominate you for his minister, and because I, on my part, accepted the command of the light horse, you imagine that I have deserted and betrayed you. That dear countess, too, who loves you so well ! "

Here Richelieu listened eagerly, but not to his nephew's words alone.

" You say she loves me well, this dear countess ? " he added.

" And I can prove it."

" But, my dear fellow, I never doubted it. I send for you to assist me to push the wheel; you are younger and therefore stronger than I am ; you succeed, I fail. That is the natural course of things, and on my faith I cannot imagine why you have all these scruples. If you have acted for my interest, you will be a hundredfold repaid, if against me—well! I shall only return the fisticuff. Does that require explanation ? "

" In truth, uncle——"

" You are a child, duke. Your position is magnificent ; a peer of France, a duke, a commander of the

light horse, minister in six weeks—you ought to be beyond the influence of all futile intrigues. Success absolves, my dear child. Suppose—I like apologues—suppose that we are the two mules in the fable. But what noise is that ? "

" Nothing, my dear uncle, proceed/

" There is something ; I hear a carriage in the courtyard."

" Do not let it interrupt you, uncle, pray; your conversation interests me extremely. I like apologues, too."

" Well, my friend, I was going to say that when you are prosperous you will never meet with reproaches, nor need you fear the spite of the envious; but if you limp, if you fall—Diable! you must take care—then it is that the wolf will attack you. But you see I was right; there is a noise in the antechamber ; it is the portfolio which they are bringing you, no doubt. The little countess must have exerted herself for you."

The usher entered.

" Messieurs the commissioners of the parliament! " said he uneasily.

" Ha ! " exclaimed Richelieu.

" The commissioners of the parliament here ? What do they want with me ? " replied the duke, not at all reassured by his uncle's smile.

" In the king's name! " cried a sonorous voice at the end of the antechamber.

" Oh, ho ! " cried Richelieu.

M. d'Aiguillon turned very pale ; he rose, however, and advanced to the threshold of the apartment to introduce the two commissioners, behind whom were stationed two motionless ushers, and in the distance a host of alarmed footmen.

" What is your errand here ? " asked the duke, in a trembling voice.

" Have we the honour of speaking to the Duke d'Aiguillon ? " said one of the commissioners.

" I am the Duke d'Aiguillon, gentlemen."

The commissioner, bowing profoundly, drew from his belt the act in proper form, and read it in a loud and distinct voice.

It was the decree, detailed, complete, and circumstantial, which declared D'Aiguillon gravely arraigned and prejudiced by suspicions even regarding matters which affected his honour, and suspended him from his functions as peer of the realm.

The duke listened to the reading like a man thunder-struck. He stood motionless as a statue on its pedestal, and did not even hold out his hand to take the copy of the decree which the commissioners of the parliament offered him.

It was the marshal who, also standing, but alert and nimble, took the paper, read it, and returned the bow of messieurs the commissioners. They were already at some distance from the mansion, before the Duke d'Aiguillon recovered from his stupor.

" This is a severe blow," said Richelieu ; " you are no longer a peer of France ; it is humiliating."

The duke turned to his uncle, as if he had only at that moment recovered the power of life and thought.

" You did not expect it ? " asked Richelieu, in the same tone.

" And you, uncle ? " rejoined D'Aiguillon.

" How do you imagine any one could suspect that the parliament would strike so bold a blow at the favoured courtier of the king and his favourite ; these people will ruin themselves/'

The duke sat down, and leaned his burning cheek on his hand.

"But if," continued the old marshal, forcing the dagger deeper into the wound, "if the parliament degrades you from the peerage because you are nominated to the command of the light horse, they will decree you a prisoner and condemn you to the stake when you are appointed minister. These people hate you, D'Aiguillon; do not trust them."

The duke bore this cruel irony with the fortitude of a hero; his misfortune raised and strengthened his mind. Richelieu thought this fortitude was only insensibility, or want of comprehension perhaps, and that the wound had not been deep enough.

"Being no longer a peer," said he, "you will be less exposed to the hatred of these lawyers. Take refuge in a few years of obscurity. Besides, look you, this obscurity, which will be your safeguard, will come without your seeking it. Deprived of your functions of peer, you will have more difficulty in reaching the ministry, and may perhaps escape the business altogether. But if you will struggle, my dear fellow, why, you have Madame Dubarry on your side; she loves you, and she is a powerful support."

M. d'Aiguillon rose. He did not even cast an angry look upon the marshal in return for all the suffering the old man had inflicted upon him.

"You are right, uncle," he replied calmly, "and your wisdom is shown in this last advice. The Countess Dubarry, to whom you had the goodness to present me, and to whom you spoke so favourably of me and with so much zeal, that every one at Luciennes can bear witness to it, Madame Dubarry will defend me. Thanks to heaven, she likes me; she is brave, and exerts an all-powerful influence over the mind of

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

the king. Thanks, uncle, for your advice ; I fly thither as to a haven of safety. My horses I Bourignon—to Luciennes I "

The marshal remained in the middle of an unfinished smile. M. d'Aiguillon bowed respectfully to his uncle and quitted the apartment, leaving the marshal very much perplexed, and above all very much confused, at the eagerness with which he had attacked this noble and feeling victim.

There was some consolation for the old marshal in the mad joy of the Parisians when they read in the evening the ten thousand copies of the decree, which was scrambled for in the streets. But he could not help sighing when Rafte asked for an account of the evening. Nevertheless, he told it without concealing anything.

" Then the blow is parried ? " said the secretary.

" Yes and no, Rafte ; but the wound is not mortal and we have at Trianon something better, which I reproach myself for not having made my sole care. We have started two hares, Rafte; it was very foolish."

" Why—if you seize the best ? " replied Rafte.

" Oh, my friend, remember that the best is always [the one we have not taken, and we would invariably give the one we hold for the one which "has escaped."

Rafte shrugged his shoulders, and said M. de Richelieu was in the right.

" You think," said he, " that M. d'Aiguillon will escape ? "

" Do you think the king will, simpleton ? "

" Oh, the king finds an opening everywhere; but this matter does not concern the king, that I know of."

" Where the king can pass, Madame Dubarry will pass, as she holds fast by his skirts; where Madame

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

Dubarry has passed, D'Aiguillon will pass also—but you understand nothing of politics, Rafte."

" My lord, M. Flageot is not of your opinion/ "

" Well, what does this M. Flageot say ? But first of all, tell me what he is."

" He is a procureur, sir."

" Well ? "

" Well! M. Flageot thinks that the king cannot get out of this matter."

" Oh ! ho !—and who will stop the lion ? "

" Faith, sir, the rat ? "

" And you believe him ? "

" I always believe a procureur who promises to do evil."

" We shall see what means M. Flageot intends to employ, Rafte."

" That is what I say, my lord."

" Come to supper then, that I may get to bed. It has quite upset me to see that my poor nephew is no longer peer of France, and will not be minister. I am an uncle, Rafte, after all! "

M. de Richelieu sighed, and then commenced to teugh.

" You have every quality, however, requisite for a minister," replied Rafte.

CHAPTER XII

M. D'AIGUILLON TAKES HIS REVENGE

THE morning succeeding the day on which the terrible decree had thrown Paris and Versailles into an uproar when every one was anxiously awaiting the resin" of this decree, the Duke de Richelieu, who had returned

to Versailles and had resumed his regularly irregular life, saw Rafte enter his apartment with a letter in his hand. The secretary scrutinised and weighed this letter with such appearance of anxiety that his emotion quickly communicated itself to his master.

"What is the matter now?" asked the marshal.

"Something not very agreeable, I presume, my lord, and which is enclosed in this letter."

"Why do you imagine so?"

"Because the letter is from the Duke d'Aiguillon."

"Ha!" said the duke, "from my nephew?"

"Yes, my lord marshal; after the king's council broke up, an usher of the chamber called on me and handed me this paper, for you. I have been turning it over and over for the last ten minutes, and I cannot help suspecting that it contains some evil tidings."

The duke held out his hand.

"Give it me," said he, "I am brave."

"I warn you," interrupted Rafte, "that when the usher gave me the paper, he chuckled outrageously."

"Diable!" that bodes ill," replied the marshal; "but give it me, nevertheless."

And he added: "'M. d'Aiguillon wishes the marshal to have this immediately."

"Pain! thou shalt not make me say that thou art an evil," said the marshal, breaking the seal with a firm hand. And he read it.

"Ha! you change countenance," said Rafte, standing with his hands crossed behind him, in an attitude of observation.

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Richelieu, continuing to read.

"It seems, then, that it is serious?"

'/You look quite delighted."

Of course—I see that I was not mistaken.'

The marshal read on.

"The king is good," said he, after a moment's pause.

"He appoints M. d'Aiguillon minister?"

"Better than that."

"Oh! What then?"

"Read and ponder."

Rafte in his turn read the note. It was in the handwriting of D'Aiguillon, and was couched in the following terms:

"MY DEAR UNCLE,—

"Your good advice has borne its fruit: I confided my wrongs to that excellent friend of our house, the Countess Dubarry, who has deigned to lay them at his majesty's feet. The king is indignant at the violence with which the gentlemen of the parliament pursue me, and in consideration of the services I have so faithfully rendered him, his majesty, in this morning's council, has annulled the decree of parliament, and has commanded me to continue my functions as peer of France.

"Knowing the pleasure this news will cause you, my dear uncle, I send you the tenor of the decision, which his majesty in council came to to-day. I have had it copied by a secretary, and you have the announcement before any one else.

"Deign to believe in my affectionate respect, my dear uncle, and continue to bestow on me your good will and advice.

"(Signed)—DUKE D'AIGUILLON."

"He mocks at me into the bargain!" cried Richelieu.

"Faith, I think so, my lord!"

"The king throws himself into the hornet's nest!"

"You would not believe me yesterday, when I told you so."

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" I did not say he would not throw himself into it, Rafte ; I said he would contrive to get out of it. Now, you see, he does get out of it. "

" The fact is, the parliament is beaten. "

" And I also. "

" For the present, yes. "

" For ever I Yesterday I foresaw it, and you consoled me so well, that some misfortune could not fail to ensue. "

" My lord, you despair a little too soon, I think. "

" Master Rafte, you are a fool. I am beaten, and I must pay the stake. You do not fully comprehend, perhaps, how disagreeable it is to me to be the laughing-stock of Luciennes; at this moment, the duke is mocking me in company with Madame Dubarry. Mademoiselle Chon and Monsieur Jean are roaring themselves hoarse at my expense, whilst the little negro ceases to stuff himself with sweetmeats to make game of me. *Parblicuf* I have a tolerably good temper, but all this makes me furious. "

" Furious, my lord ? "

" I have said it—furious ! "

" Then you have done what you should not have done, " said Rafte philosophically.

" You urged me on, Master Secretary. "

" I ? "

" Yes, you. "

" Why, what is it to me whether M. d'Aiguillon is a peer of France or not—I ask you, my lord ? Your nephew does me no injury, I think. "

" Master Rafte, you are impertinent. "

" You have been telling me so for the last forty-nine years, my lord. "

" Well, I shall repeat it again. "

" Not for forty-nine years more, that is one comfort "

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" Rafte, if this is the way you care for my interests——"

" The interests of your little passions ? No, my lord duke, never ! Man of genius as you are, you sometimes commit follies which I could not forgive even in an understrapper like myself."

" Explain yourself, Rafte, and if I am wrong, I will confess it."

" Yesterday you thirsted for vengeance, did you not ? You wished to behold the humiliation of your nephew; you wished, as it were, to be the bearer of the decree of parliament, and gloat over the tremblings and palpitations of your victim, as M. Crebillon the younger says. Well! my lord marshal, such sights as these must be well paid for; such pleasures cost dear. You are rich—pay, pay, my lord marshal! "

" What would you have done in my place, then, O most skilful of tacticians ? Come, let me see."

" Nothing! I would have waited without giving any sign of life. But you itched to oppose the parliament to the Dubarry, from the moment she found that M. d'Aiguillon was a younger man than yourself."

A groan was the marshal's only reply.

" Well I " continued Rafte, " the parliament was tolerably well prompted by you before it did what it has done. The decree once passed, you should have offered your services to your nephew, who would have suspected nothing."

" That is all well and good, and I admit that I did wrong, but you should have warned me."

" I hinder any evil! You take me for some one else, my lord marshal; you repeat to every one that comes that 'I am your creature, that you have trained me, an,' yet would you have me not delighted when I

see a folly committed, or a misfortune approaching !
Fie ! fie ! "

" Then a misfortune will happen, Master Sorcerer ? "

" Certainly."

" What misfortune ? "

" You will quarrel, and M. d'Aiguillon will become the link between the parliament and Madame Dubarry; then he will be minister, and you exiled or at the Bastille."

The marshal in his anger upset the contents of his snuff-box upon the carpet.

" In the Bastille ! " said he, shrugging his shoulders; " is Louis XV., think you, Louis XIV. ? "

" No, but Madame Dubarry, supported by M. d'Aiguillon, is quite equal to Madame de Main tenon. Take care ; I do not know any princess in the present day who would bring you bonbons and eggs."

" These are melancholy prognostics," replied the marshal, after a long silence. " You read the future ; but what of the present, if you please ? "

" My lord marshal is too wise for me to give him advice."

" Come, master witty-pate, are you too not mocking me ? "

" I beg you to remark, my lord marshal, that you confound dates; a man is never called a witty-pate after forty; now, I am sixty-seven."

" No matter, assist me out of this scrape—and quickly too—quickly ! "

" By an advice ? "

" By anything you please."

" The time has not come yet."

" Now you are certainly jesting."

' Would to heaven I were I Wlaen I jest, the subject

shall be a jesting matter—and unfortunately this is not."

"What do you mean by saying that it is not yet time?"

"No, my lord, it is not time. If the announcement of the king's decree were known in Paris beforehand I would not say. Shall we send a courier to the President d'Aligre?"

"That they may laugh at us all the sooner?"

"What a ridiculous self-love, my lord Marshal! You would make a saint lose patience. Stay, let me finish my plan of a descent on England, and you can finish drowning yourself in your portfolio intrigue since the business is already half done!"

The marshal was accustomed to these sullen humours of his secretary. He knew that when his melancholy had once declared itself he was dangerous to touch with ungloved fingers.

"Come," said he, "do not pout at me, and if I do not understand, explain yourself."

"Then my lord wishes me to trace out a line of conduct for him?"

"Certainly, since you think I cannot conduct myself."

"Well then, listen."

"I am all attention."

"You must send by a trusty messenger to M. d'Aligre," said Rafté abruptly, "the Duke d'Aiguillon's letter, and also the decree of the king in council. You must then wait till the parliament has met and deliberated upon it, which will take place immediately; whereupon you must order your carriage and pay a visit to your little procureur, M. Flageot."

"Eh!" said Richelieu, whom this name made start as it had done one the previous day; "M. Flageot

again ! What the deuce has M. Flageot to do with all this, and what am I to do at his house ? "

" I have had the honour to tell you, my lord, that M. Flageot is your procureur."

" Well! what then ? "

" Well, if he is your procureur, he has certain bags of yours—certain law-suits on hand ; you must go and ask him about them."

" To-morrow ? "

" Yes, my lord marshal, to-morrow."

" But all this is your affair, M. Rafte."

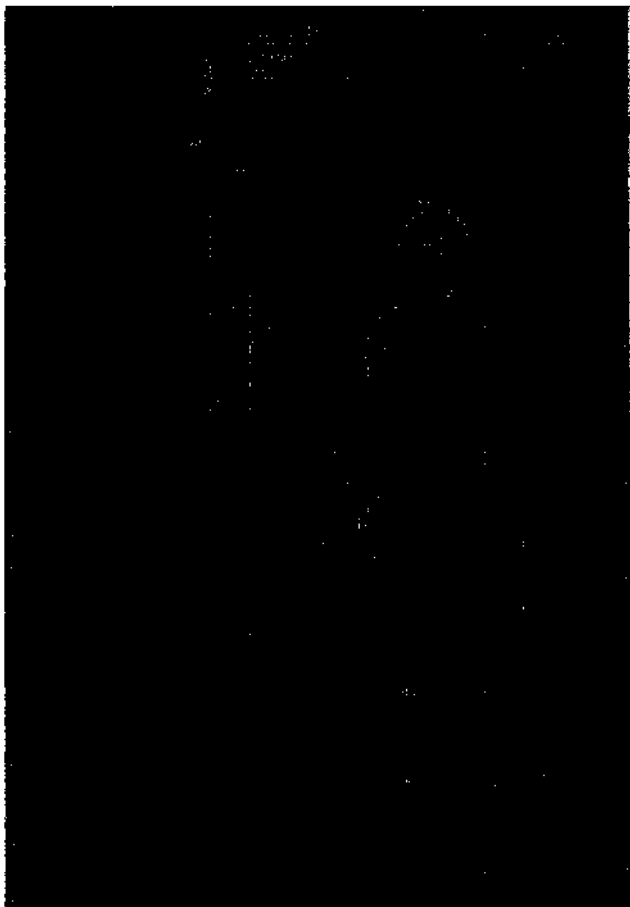
" By no means ! By no means ! When M. Flageot was a simple scribbling drudge, then I could treat with him as an equal; but as, dating from to-morrow, M. Flageot is an Attila, a scourge of kings—neither more nor less—it is not asking too much of a duke, a peer, a marshal of France, to converse with this all powerful man."

" Is this serious, or are we acting a farce ? "

" You will see to-morrow if it is serious, my lord."

" But tell me what will be the result of my visit to your M. Flageot."

" I should be very sorry to do so; you would endeavour to prove to me to-morrow that you had guessed it beforehand. Good-night, my lord-marshal. Remember: a courier to M. d'Aligre immediately—a visit to M. Flageot to-morrow. Oh ! the address ? —The coachman knows it; he has driven me thetfe frequently during the last week."



F,x. Page 37
On the peristyle, the countess stopped, candle in hand
E

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH THE READER WILL MEET M. FLAGEOT

THE reader will no doubt ask why M. Flageot, who is about to play so majestic a part in our story, was called procureur instead of avocat; and as the reader is quite right, we shall satisfy his curiosity.

The vacations had, for some time, been frequent in parliament, and the lawyers spoke so seldom that their speeches were not worth speaking of. Master Flageot, foreseeing the time when there would be no pleading at all, made certain arrangements with Master Guildou, the procureur, in virtue of which the latter yielded him up office and clients on consideration of the sum of twenty-five thousand livres paid down. That is how Master Flageot became a procureur. But if we are asked how he managed to pay the twenty-five thousand livres, we reply, by marrying Madame Marguerite, to whom this sum was left as an inheritance about the end of the year 1770—three months before M. de Choiseul's exile.

Master Flageot had been long distinguished for his persevering adherence to the opposition party. Once a procureur, he redoubled his violence, and by this violence succeeded in gaining some celebrity. It was this celebrity, together with the publication of an incendiary pamphlet on the subject of the conflict between M. d'Aiguillon and M. de la Chalotais, which attracted the attention of M. Raffe, who had occasion to keep himself well informed concerning the affairs of parliament.

But notwithstanding his new dignity and his increasing importance, Master Flageot did not leave the

Rue du Petit-Lion-Saint-Sauveur. It would have been too cruel a blow for Madame Marguerite not to have heard the neighbours call her Madame Flageot, and not to have inspired respect in the breasts of M. Guildou's clerks, who had entered the service of the new procureur.

The reader may readily imagine what M. de Richelieu suffered in traversing Paris—the filthy Paris of that region—to reach the disgusting hole which the Parisian magistrate dignified with the name of street.

In front of M. Flageot's door, M. de Richelieu's carriage was stopped by another carriage which pulled up at the same moment. The marshal perceived a woman's head-dress protruding from the window of this carriage; and as his sixty-five years of age had not quenched the ardour of his gallantry, he hastily jumped out on the muddy pavement, and proceeded to offer his hand to the lady, who was unaccompanied.

But this day the marshal's evil star was in the ascendant. A long, withered leg which was stretched out to reach the step betrayed the old woman. A wrinkled face, adorned with a dark streak of rouge, proved further that the old woman was not only old but decrepit.

Nevertheless, there was no room for retreat; the marshal had made the movement, and the movement had been seen. Besides, M. de Richelieu himself was no longer young. In the meantime, the litigant—for what woman with a carriage would have entered that street had she not been a litigant?—the litigant, we say, did not imitate the duke's hesitation; with a ghastly smile she placed her hand in Richelieu's.

"I have seen that face somewhere before," thought Richelieu; then he added,—

"Does madame also intend to visit M. Flageot?"

"Yes, duke," replied the old lady.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" Oh, I have the honour to be known 'to you, madame! " exclaimed the duke, disagreeably surprised, and stopping on the threshold of the dark passage.

" Who does not know the Duke de Richelieu ? " was the reply. " I should not be a woman if I did not."

" This she-ape thinks she is a woman ! " murmured the conqueror of Mahon, and he made a most graceful bow.

" If I may venture to ask the question," added he, " to whom have I the honour of speaking ? "

"I am the Countess de Bearn, at your service, replied the old lady, curtsying with courtly reverence upon the dirty floor of the passage, and about three inches from the open trap-door of a cellar, into which the marshal wickedly awaited her disappearance at the third bend.

" I am delighted, madame—enchanted," said he, " and I return a thousand thanks to fate. You also have law-suits on hand, countess ? "

" Oh ! duke, I have only one; but what a law-suit. Is it possible that you have never heard of it ? "

"Oh, frequently, frequently—that great law-suit. True; I entreat your pardon. How the deuce could I have forgotten that ? "

" Against the Saluces I "

" Against the Saucers, yes, countess; the lawsuit about which the song was written."

" A song ? " said the old lady, piqued, " what song?"

" Take care, madame, there is a trap-door here," said the duke, who saw that the old woman was decided not to throw herself into the cellar: " take hold of the balustrade—I mean the cord."

The old lady mounted the first steps. The duke followed her.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" Yes,' a very humorous song," said he.

" A humorous song on my lawsuit! "

" *Dame!* I shall leave you to judge—but perhaps you know it ? "

" Not at all! "

" It is to the tune of the Bourbonnaise ; it runs so:—

" ' Embarrassed, countess, as I stand,
Give me, I pray, a helping hand,
And I am quite at your command.

It is Madame Dubarry who speaks, you must understand."

" That is very impertinent towards her."

" Oh ! what can you expect ?—the ballad-mongers respect no one. Heavens I how greasy this cord is ! Then you reply as follows :—

" ' I'm very old and stubborn too ;
Fin forced at law my rights to sue ;
Ah, who can help me ? tell me who ! "

" Oh ! sir, it is frightful ! " cried the countess ;
" a woman of quality is not to be insulted in this manner."

" Madame, excuse me if I have sung out of tune ; these stairs heat me so. Ah ! here we are at last. Allow me to pull the bell."

The old lady, grumbling all the {ime, made way for the duke to pass.

The marshal rang, and Madame Flageot, who in becoming a procureur's wife had not ceased to fill the functions of portress and cook, opened the door. The two litigants were ushered into M. Flageot's study, where they found that worthy in a state of furious excitement, and with a pen in his mouth, hard at work dictating a terrible plea to his head-clerk.

" Good Heavens, Master Flageot! what is the matter ? " cried the countess, at whose the attorney turned round.

" Ah ! madame, your most humble servant—a chair here for the Countess de Beam. This gentleman is a friend of yours, madame, I presume. But surely—oh ! I cannot be mistaken—the Duke de Richelieu in my house ! Another chair, Bernardet—another chair."

" Master Flageot," said the countess, " how does my lawsuit get on, pray ? "

" Ah, madame ! I was just now working for you."

" Very good, Master Flageot, very good."

" And after a fashion, my lady, which will make some noise, I hope."

" Hum ! Take care ! "

" Oh ! madame, there is no longer any occasion for caution."

" Then if you are busy about my affair, you can give an audience to the duke."

" Excuse me, my lord duke," said Master Flageot; " but you are too gallant not to understand——"

" I understand, Master Flageot; I understand."

" But now I can attend to you exclusively,"

" Don't be uneasy; I shall not abuse your good-nature ; you are aware what brings me here ? "

" The bags which M. Rafté gave me the other day."

" Some papers relative to my lawsuit of—my suit about—deuce take it ! You must know what suit I mean, Master Flageot ? "

" Your lawsuit about the lands of Chapenat/'

" Very probably; and will you gain it for me ? That would be very kind on your part."

" My lord, it is postponed indefinitely."

" Postponed I And why ? "

" It will not be brought forward in less than a year, at the Itaxliest."

" For what reason, may I ask ? "

" Circumstances, my lord, circumstances ; you have heard of his majesty's decree ? "

" I think so ; but which one ? His majesty publishes so many."

" The one which annuls ours."

" Very well ; and what then ? "

" Well ! my lord duke, we shall reply by burning our ships."

" Burning your ships, my dear friend ?—you will burn the ships of the parliament ? I do not quite comprehend you ; I was not aware that the parliament had ships."

" The first chamber refuses to register, perhaps ? " inquired the Countess de Beam, whom Richelieu's lawsuit in no way prevented from thinking of her own.

" Better than that."

" The second one also ? "

" That would be a mere nothing. Both chambers have resolved not to give any judgments until the king shall have dismissed M. d'Aiguillon."

" Bah ! " exclaimed the marshal, rubbing his hands.

" Not adjudicate ! on what ? " asked the countess, alarmed.

" On the lawsuits, madame."

" They will not adjudicate on my lawsuit," exclaimed the Countess de Beam, with a dismay which she did not even attempt to conceal.

" Neither on yours, madame, nor the duke's."

" It is iniquitous ! It is rebellion against his majesty's orders, that !"

" Madame," replied the procureur majestically " the king has forgotten himself, we shall forget also*"

" Monsieur Flageot, you will be sent to the Bastille; remember, I warn you."

" I shall go singing, madame, and if I am sent thither all my fellow-members of parliament will follow me, carrying palms in their hands."

" He is mad ! " said the countess to Richelieu.

" We are all the same," replied the procureur.

" Oh, oh ! " said the marshal, " that is becoming rather curious."

" But, sir, you said just now that you were working for me," replied Madame de Beam.

" I said so, and it is quite true. You, madame, are the first example I cite in my narration; here is the paragraph which relates to you."

He snatched the draft from his clerk's hand, fixed his spectacles upon his nose, and read with emphasis,—

" Their position ruined, their fortune compromised, their duties trampled under foot! His majesty will understand how much they must have suffered. Thus the petitioner had entrusted to his care a very important suit, upon which the fortune of one of the first families in the kingdom depends; by his zeal, his industry, and, he ventures to say his talents, this suit was progressing favourably, and the rights of the most noble and most powerful lady, Angelique Charlotte Veronique, Countess de Beam, were on the point of being recognised, proclaimed, when the breath of discord—engulfing——"

" I had just got so far, madame," said the procureur, drawing himself up; " but I think the simile is not amiss."

" M. Flageot," said the countess, " it is forty years ago since I first employed your father, who proved most worthy of my patronage ; I continued that patronage to you ; you have gained ten or twelve thousand

livres bV my suit, and you would probably have gained as many' more."

" Write down all that," said M. Flageot eagerly to his clerk ; " it is a testimony, a proof. It shall be inserted in the confirmation."

" But now," interrupted the countess, " I take back all my papers from your charge ; from this moment you have lost my confidence."

Master Flageot, thunderstruck with this disgrace, remained for a moment almost stupefied ; but, all at once, rising under the blow like a martyr who dies for his religion :

" Be it so," said he. " Bernadet, give the papers back to madame; and you will insert this fact," added he, " that the petitioner preferred his conscience to his fortune."

" I beg your pardon, countess," whispered the marshal in the countess's ear, " but it seems to me that you have acted without reflection."

" In what respect, my lord duke ? "

" You take back your papers from this honest procureur, but for what purpose ? "

" To take them to another procureur, to another avocat! " exclaimed the countess.

Master Flageot raised his eyes to heaven, with a mournful smile of self-denial and stoic resignation.

" But," continued the marshal, still whispering in the countess's ear, " if it has been decided that the chambers will not adjudicate, my dear madame, another procureur can do no more than Master Flageot."

" It is a league, then ? "

" *Pardieu* I do you think Master Flageot fool enough to protest alone, to lose his practice alone, if his fellow lawyers were not agreed to do the same, and consequently support him ? "

" But you, my lord duke, what will you do? "

" For my part, I declare that I think Maste Flageot a very honest procureur, and that my papers are as safe in his possession as in my own. Consequently I shall leave them with him, of course paying him as if my suit were going on."

" It is well said, my lord marshal, that you are a generous, liberal-minded man! " exclaimed Master Flageot; "I shall spread your fame far and wide, my lord."

" You absolutely overwhelm me, my dear procureur," replied Richelieu, bowing.

" Bernadet," cried the enthusiastic procureur to his clerk, ". you will insert in the peroration a eulogy on the Marshal de Richelieu."

" No, no! by no means, Master Flageot! I beg you will do nothing of the kind," replied the marshal hastily. " Diable ! that would be a pretty action ! I love secrecy in what it is customary to call good actions. Do not disoblige me, Master Flageot—I shall deny it, look you—I shall positively contradict it—my modesty is susceptible. Well, countess, what say you ? "

" I say, my suit *shall* be judged. I must have a judgment, and I will."

" And I say, madame, that if your suit is judged, the king must first send the Swiss guards, the light horse and twenty pieces of cannon into the great hall," replied Master Flageot with a belligerent air, which completed the consternation of the litigant.

" Then you do not think his majesty can get out of this scrape," said Richelieu in a low voice to Flageot.

" Impossible, my lord marshal. It is an unheard-of case. No more justice in France I It is as if you were to say no more bread . "

" Do you think so ? "

"You will see."

" But the king will be angry."

" We are resolved to brave everything."

" Even exile ? "

" Even death, my lord marshal! We have a heart, although we wear the gown."

And M. Flageot struck his breast vigorously.

" In fact, madame," said Richelieu to his companion, " I believe that this is an unfortunate step for the ministry/'

" Oh, yes! " replied the old countess after a pause, " it is very unfortunate for me, who never meddle in anything that passes, to be dragged into this conflict."

" I think, madame," said the marshal, " there is some one who could help you in this affair—a very powerful person. But would that person do it ? "

" Is it displaying too much curiosity, duke, to ask the name of this powerful person ? "

" Your goddaughter/' said the duke.

" Oh ! Madame Dubarry ? "

" The same."

" In fact, that is true ; I am obliged to you for the hint."

The duke bit his lips.

" Then you will go to Luciennes ? " asked he.

" Without hesitation."

" But the Countess Dubarry cannot overcome the opposition of Parliament."

" I will tell her I must have my suit judged, and as she can refuse me nothing, after the service I have rendered her, she will tell the king she wishes it. His majesty will speak to the chancellor, and the chancellor has a long arm, duke. Master Flageot, be kind enough

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

to continue to study my case well; it may come on sooner than you think. Mark my words."

Master Flageot turned away his head with an air of incredulity which did not shake the countess in the least. In the meantime the duke had been reflecting.

" Well, madame, since you are going to Luciennes, will you have the goodness to present my most humble respects ? "

" Most willingly, duke."

" We are companions in misfortune ; your suit is in abeyance, and mine also. In supplicating for yourself you will do so for me too. Moreover, you may express *yonder* the sort of pleasure these stubborn-headed parliament men cause me; and you will add that it was I who advised you to have recourse to the divinity of Luciennes."

" I will not fail to do so, duke. Adieu, gentlemen."

" Allow me the honour of conducting you to your carriage."

" Once more, adieu, Monsieur Flageot; I leave you to your occupations." The marshal handed the countess to her carriage.

" Rafte was right," said he, " the Flageots **will** cause a revolution. Thank heaven! I am supported on both sides—I am of the court, and of the parliament. Madame Dubarry will meddle with politics and fall alone; if she resists, I have my little pretty-face at Trianon. Decidedly Rafte is of my school, **and when I am** minister he shall be **my** chief-secretary."

CHAPTER XIV

THE CONFUSION INCREASES

MADAME DE BEARN followed Richelieu's advice literally. Two hours and a half after the duke had left her, she was waiting in the antechamber at Luciennes in the company of M. Zamore.

It was some time since she had been seen at Madame Dubarry's, and her presence therefore excited a feeling of curiosity in the countess's boudoir when her name was announced.

M. d'Aiguillon had not lost any time either, and he was plotting with the favourite when Chon entered to request an audience for Madame de Bearn. The duke made a movement to retire, but the countess detained him.

"I would rather you would remain," said she, "In case my old alms-giver comes to ask a loan, you would be most useful to me, for she will ask less."

The duke remained. Madame de Bearn, with a face composed for the occasion, took the chair opposite the countess, which the latter offered to her, and after the first civilities were exchanged,—

"May I ask to what fortunate chance I am indebted for your presence, madame?" said Madame Dubarry.

"Ah! madame," said the old litigant, "a great misfortune."

"What! madame—a misfortune?"

"A piece of news which will deeply afflict his majesty."

"I am all impatience, madame——"

"The parliament——"

" Oh, ho ! " grumbled the Duke d'Aiguilldi.

" The Duke d'Aiguillon," said the countess hastily introducing her guest to her lady visitor, for fear of some unpleasant contretemps. But the old countess was as cunning as all the other courtiers put together, and never caused a misunderstanding, except wittingly, and when the misunderstanding seemed likely to benefit her.

" I know," said she, " all the baseness of these lawyers, and their want of respect for merit of high birth."

This compliment, aimed directly at the duke, drew a most graceful bow from him, which the litigant returned with an equally graceful curtsy.

" But," continued she, " it is not the duke alone who is now concerned, but the entire population : the parliament refuse to act."

" Indeed ! " exclaimed Dubarry, throwing herself back upon the sofa; " there will be no more justice in France ! Well! What change will that produce ? "

The duke smiled. As for Madame de Beam, instead of taking the affair pleasantly, her morose features darkened still more. " It is a great calamity, madame," said she.

" Ah ! indeed ? " replied the favourite.

" It is evident, madame, that you are happy enough to have no law-suits."

" Hem ! " said D'Aiguillon, to recall the attention of Madame Dubarry, who at last comprehended the insinuation of the litigant.

" Alas ! madame," said she, " it is true ; you remind me that if I have no lawsuit, you have a very important one."

" Ah, yes ! madame, and delay will be ruinous to me."

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" *Poo*: lady ! "

"Un,ess, countess, the king takes some decided step."

" Oh ! madame, the king is right well inclined to do so. He will exile the councillors, and all will be right/

" But, madame, that would be an indefinite adjournment/

" Do you see any remedy, then ? Will you be kind enough to point it out to us ? "

The litigant concealed her face beneath her hood, like Caesar expiring under his toga.

" There is one remedy, certainly/' said D'Aiguillon, " but perhaps his majesty might shrink from employing it."

" What is it ? " asked the plaintiff with anxiety.

" The ordinary resource of royalty in France, when it is rather embarrassed. It is to hold a bed of justice and to say, ' I will!' when all the opponents say, I will not.' "

" An excellent idea ! " exclaimed Madame de Beam with enthusiasm.

" But which must not be divulged," replied D'Aiguillon diplomatically, and with a gesture which Madame de Beam fully comprehended.

" Oh ! madame," said she instantly, " you who have so much influence with the king, persuade him to say, ' I will have the suit of Madame de Beam judged/ Besides, you know, it was promised long ago."

M.d'Aiguillon bit his lips, glanced an adieu to Madame Dubarry, and left the boudoir. He had heard the sound of the king's carriage in the court-yard.

" Here is the king ! " said Madame Dubarry, rising to dismiss her visitor.

" Oh ! madame, why will you not permit me to throw myself at his majesty's feet ? "

" To ask him for a bed of justice ? " replied the countess quickly. " Most willingly! Remain here, n adame, since such is your desire."

Scarcely had Madame de Beam adjusted her head-dress when the king entered.

" Ah ! " said he, " you have visitors, countess I "

" Madame de Beam, sire."

" Sire, justice ! " exclaimed the old lady, making a most profound reverence.

" Oh ! " said Louis XV. in a bantering tone, imperceptible to those who did not know him ; " has any one offended you, madame ? "

" Sire, I ask for justice."

" Against whom ? "

" Against the parliament."

" Ah ! good," said the king, nibbling his hands, " you complain of my parliament. Well! do me the pleasure to bring them to reason. I too have to complain of them, and I beg you to grant me justice also," added he, imitating the curtseys of the old countess.

" But, sire, you are the king—the master."

" The king—yes ; the master—not always."

" Sire, proclaim your will."

" I do that every evening, madame; and they proclaim theirs every morning. Now, as these two wills are diametrically opposed to each other, it is with us as with the earth and the moon, which are ever running after each other without meeting."

" Sire, your voice is powerful enough to drown all the bawlings of these fellows."

" There you are mistaken. I am not a lawyer, as they are. If I say yes, they say no; it is impossible for us to come to any arrangement. If, when I have said yes, you can find any means to prevent their saying no, I will make an alliance with you."

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" Sire-, I have the means."

" Let me hear it quickly."

" I will, sire. Hold a bed of justice."

" That is another embarrassment," said the king; " a bed of justice—remember, madam—is almost a revolution."

" It is simply telling these rebellious subjects that you are the master. You know, sire, that when the king proclaims his will in this manner, he alone has a right to speak : no one answers. You say to them, / *will*, and they bow their assent."

" The fact is," said the Countess Dubarry, " the idea is a magnificent one."

" Magnificent it may be, but not good," replied Louis.

" But what a noble spectacle ! " resumed Madame Dubarry, with warmth ; " the procession, the nobles, the peers, the entire military staff of the king ! Then the immense crowd of people ; then the bed of justice, composed of five cushions, embroidered with golden fleur-de-lys—it would be a splendid ceremony! "

" You think so ? " said the king, rather shaken in his resolution.

" Then the king's magnificent dress—the cloak lined with ermine, the diamonds in the crown, the golden sceptre—all the splendour which so well suits an august and noble countenance ! Oh ! how handsome you would look, sire ! "

" It is a long time since we had a bed of justice," said Louis, with affected carelessness.

" Not since your childhood, sire," said Madame de Beam. " The remembrance of your brilliant beauty on that occasion has remained engraven on the hearts of all."

" And then," added Madame Dubarry, " there would

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

be an excellent opportunity for the chancellor to display his keen and concise eloquence—to crush these people with his truth, dignity, and power."

" I must wait for the parliament's next misdeed,' said Louis ; " then I shall see/'

" What can you wait for, sire, more outrageous than what they have just committed ? "

" Why, what have they done ? "

" Do you not know ? "

" They have teased M. d'Aiguillon a little, but that is not a hanging offence ; although," said the king, looking at Madame Dubarry, " although this dear duke is a friend of mine. Besides, if the parliament has teased the duke a little, I have punished them for their ill-nature by my decree of yesterday or the day before—I do not remember which. We are now even/'

" Well, sire," said Madame Dubarry, with warmth.

" Madame de Beam has just informed us that this morning these black-gowned gentlemen have taken the start of you."

" How so ? " said the king, frowning.

" Speak, madame, the king permits it," said the favourite.

" Sire, the councillors have determined not to hold a court of parliament until your majesty yields to their wishes."

" What say you," said the king. " You mistake, madame; that would be an act of rebellion, and my parliament dares not revolt, I hope."

" Sire, I assure you——"

" Oh ! madame, it is a mere rumour."

" Will your majesty deign to hear me ?"

" Speak, countess."

" Well, my procureur has this morning returned me

all the papers relating to my lawsuit. He can no longer plead, since they will no longer judge."

"Mere reports, I tell you—attempts at intimidation.

But while he spoke, the king paced up and down the boudoir in agitation.

"Sire, will your majesty believe M. de Richelieu, if you will not believe me? In my presence his papers were returned to him also, and the duke left the house in a rage."

"Some one is tapping at the door/" said the king, to change the conversation.

"It is Zamore, sire/"

Zamore entered.

"A letter, mistress," said he.

"With your permission, sire," said the countess.

"Ah! good heavens!" exclaimed she suddenly.

"What is the matter?"

"From the chancellor, sire. M. de Maupeou, knowing that your majesty has deigned to pay me a visit, solicits my intervention to obtain an audience for him."

"What is in the wind, now?"

"Show the chancellor in," said Madame Dubarry. The Countess de Beam rose to take her leave.

"You need not go, madame," said the king. "Good-day, M. de Maupeou. What news?"

"Sire," said the chancellor, bowing, "the parliament embarrassed you; you have no longer a parliament."

"How so? Are they all dead? Have they taken arsenic?"

"Would to heaven they had! No, sire, they live; but they will not sit any longer, and have sent in their resignations. I have just received them in a mass."

"The counsellors?"

"No, sire, the resignations."

" I told you, sire, that it was a serious matter," said the countess, in a low voice.

" Most serious," replied Louis impatiently. " Well, chancellor, what have you done ? "

" Sire, I have come to receive your majesty's orders."

" We shall exile these people, Maupeou."

" Sire, they will not judge any better in exile."

" We shall command them to judge. Bah ! injunctions are out of date—letters of order likewise——"

" Ah ! sire, this time you must be determined."

" Yes, you are right."

" Courage! " said Madame de Beam aside to the countess.

" And act the master, after having too often acted only the father," said the countess.

" Chancellor," said the king slowly, " I know only one remedy ; it is serious, but efficacious. I will hold a bed of justice ; these people must be made to tremble once for all."

" Ah ! sire," exclaimed the chancellor, " that is well spoken ; they must bend or break ! "

" Madame," added the king, addressing Madame de Beam, " if your suit be not judged, you see it will not be my fault."

" Sire, you are the greatest monarch in the world! "

" Oh, yes," echoed the Countess, Chon, and the chancellor.

" The world does not say so, however," murmured the king."

CHAPTER XV

THE BED OF JUSTICE

THIS famous bed of justice took place with all the ceremonies which royal pride, on the one hand, and the intrigues which drove the master to this step, on the other, demanded.

The household of the king was placed under arms; an abundance of short-robed archers, soldiers of the watch, and police officers were commissioned to protect the lord chancellor who, like a genera upon the decisive day, would have to expose his sacred person to secure the success of the enterprise.

The chancellor was execrated. Of this he was well aware, and if his vanity made him fear assassination, those better versed in the sentiments of the public towards him could without exaggerating have predicted some downright insults, or at least hootings, as likely to fall to his share. The same perquisites were promised to M. d'Aiguillon, who was equally obnoxious to the popular instincts, improved perhaps by parliamentary debates. The king affected serenity yet he was not easy. But he donned with great satisfaction his magnificent robes, and straightway came to the conclusion that nothing protects so surely as majesty. He might have added, "and the love of the people." But this phrase had been so frequently repeated to him at Metz during his illness that he imagined he could not repeat it now without being guilty of plagiarism.

The dauphiness, for whom the sight was a new one, and who at heart perhaps wished to see it, assumed her plaintive look, and wore it during the whole day

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

to the ceremony—which disposed public opinion very favourably towards her.

Madame Dubarry was brave. She possessed that confidence which is given by youth and beauty. Besides, had not everything been said that could be said of her? What could be added now? She appeared radiant with beauty, as if the splendour of her august lover had been reflected upon her.

The Duke d'Aiguillon marched boldly among the peers who preceded the king. His noble and impressive countenance betrayed no symptoms of grief or discontent, nor did he bear himself triumphantly. To see him walking thus, none would have guessed that the struggle of the king with his parliament was on his account.

The crowd pointed him out in the crowd, terrible glances were darted at him from the parliament, and that was all. The great hall of the Palais was crammed to overflowing; actors and spectators together made a total of more than three thousand persons.

Outside the Palais the crowd, kept in order by the staves of the officers, and the batons and maces of the archers, gave token of its presence only by that indescribable hum which is not a voice, which articulates nothing, but which nevertheless makes itself heard, and which may justly be called the sound of the popular flood.

The same silence reigned in the great hall, when, the sound of footsteps having ceased, and every one having taken his place, the king, majestic and gloomy, had commanded his chancellor to begin the proceedings.

The parliament knew beforehand what the bed of justice held in reserve for them. They fully understood why they had been convoked. They were to hear the unmitigated expression of the royal will; but they

knew the patience, not to say the timidity, of the king, and if they feared, it was rather for the consequences of the bed of justice than for the sitting itself.

The chancellor commenced his address. He was an excellent orator ; his exordium was clever, and the amateurs of a demonstrative style found ample scope for study in it. As it proceeded, however, the speech degenerated into a tirade so severe, that all the nobility had a smile on their lips, while the parliament felt very ill at ease.

The king, by the mouth of his chancellor, ordered them to cut short the affairs of Brittany, of which he had had enough. He commanded them to be reconciled to the Duke d'Aiguillon, whose services pleased him; and not to interrupt the service of justice, by which means everything should go on as in that happy period of the golden age, when the flowing streams murmured judicial or argumentative discourses, when the trees were loaded with bags of law papers, placed within reach of the lawyers and attorneys, who had the right to pluck them as fruit belonging to them.

These flippancies did not reconcile the parliament to the Lord Chancellor, nor to the Duke d'Aiguillon. But the speech had been made, and all reply was impossible.

The members of the parliament, although scarcely able to contain their vexation, assumed, with that admirable unity which gives so much strength to constituted bodies, a calm and indifferent demeanour, which highly displeased his majesty and the aristocratic world upon the platform.

The dauphiness turned pale with anger. For the first time she found herself in the presence of popular resistance, and she colily calculated its power. She had come to this bed of justice with the intention of

opposing, at least by her look, the resolution which was about to be adopted there, but gradually she felt herself drawn to make common cause with those of her own caste and race, so that in proportion as the chancellor attacked the parliament more severely, this proud young creature was indignant to find his words so weak. She fancied she could have found words which would have made this assembly start like a troop of oxen under the goad. In short, she found the chancellor too feeble and the parliament too strong.

Louis XV. was a physiognomist, as all selfish people would be if they were not sometimes idle as well as selfish. He cast a glance around to observe the effect of his will, expressed in words which he thought tolerably eloquent. The paleness and the compressed lips of the dauphiness showed him what was passing in her mind. As a counterpoise, he turned to look at Madame Dubarry; but instead of the victorious smile he hoped to find there, he only saw an anxious desire to attract the king's looks, as if to judge what he thought.

Nothing intimidates weak minds so much as being forestalled by the wills and minds of other. If they find themselves observed by those who have already taken a resolution, they conclude that they have not done enough—that they are about to be, or have been, ridiculous—that people had a right to expect more than they have done.

Then they pass to extremes; the timid man becomes furious, and a sudden manifestation betrays the effect of this reaction produced by fear upon a fear less powerful than itself.

The king had no need to add a single word to those his chancellor had already spoken; it was not according to etiquette—it was not even necessary. But on

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

this occasion he was possessed of the babbling demon, and, making a sign with his hand, he signified that he intended to speak.

Immediately attention was changed to stupor.

The heads of the members of parliament were all seen to wheel round towards the bed of justice, with the precision of a file of soldiers upon drill. The princes, peers, and military felt uneasy. It was not impossible that after so many excellent things that had been said, his most Christian majesty might add something which, to say the least, would be quite useless. Their respect prevented them from *giving* any other title to the words which might fall from the royal lips.

M. de Richelieu, who had affected to keep aloof from his nephew, was now seen to approach the most stubborn of the parliamentarians, and exchange a glance of mysterious intelligence. But his glances, which were becoming rebellious, met the penetrating eye of Madame Dubarry. Richelieu possessed, as no one else did, the precious power of transition; he passed easily from the satirical to the admiring tone, and chose the beautiful countess as the point of intersection between these two extremes. He sent a smile of gallantry and congratulation, therefore, to Madame Dubarry in passing, but the latter was not duped by it; the more so that the old marshal, who had commenced a correspondence with the parliament and the opposing princes, was obliged to continue it, that he might not appear what he really was.

What sights there are in a drop of water—that ocean for an observer! What centuries in a second—that indescribable eternity! All we have related took place while Louis was preparing to speak, and was opening his lips.

" You have heard," said he, in a firm voice, " what

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

my chancellor has told you of my wishes. Prepare, therefore, to execute them, for such are my intentions, and I shall never change them."

Louis XV. uttered these last words with the noise and force of a thunderbolt. The whole assembly was literally thunderstruck.

A shudder passed over the parliament, and was quickly communicated like an electric spark to the crowd. A like thrill was felt by the partisans of the king. Surprise and admiration were on every face and in every heart.

The dauphiness involuntarily thanked the king by a lightning glance from her beautiful eyes. Madame Dubarry, electrified, could not refrain from rising, and would have clapped her hands, but for the very natural fear of being stoned as she left the house, or of receiving hundreds of couplets the next morning each more odious than the other.

Louis could from this moment enjoy his triumph. The parliament bent low, still with the same unanimity. The king rose from his embroidered cushions. Instantly the captain of the guards, the commandant of the household, and all the gentlemen of the king's suite, rose. Drums beat and trumpets sounded outside. The almost silent stir of the people on the arrival was now changed into a deep murmur, which died away in the distance, repressed by the soldiers and archers.

The king proudly crossed the hall, without seeing anything on his way but humbled foreheads. The Duke d'Aiguillon still preceded his majesty, without abusing his triumph.

The chancellor, having reached the door of the hall, saw the immense crowd of people extending on all sides, and heard their execrations, which reached his

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

ears notwithstanding the distance. He trembled and said, to the archers,—

"Close around me."

M. de Richelieu bowed low to the Duke d'Aiguillon as he passed, and whispered,—

"These heads are very low, duke—some day or other they will rise devilish high. Take care!"

Madame Dubarry was passing at the moment, accompanied by her brother, the Marchioness de Mirepoix, and several ladies. She heard the marshal's words, and as she was more inclined to repartee than malice, she said,—

"Oh, there is nothing to fear, marshal; did you not hear his majesty's words? The king, I think, said he would never change."

¹¹Terrible words, indeed, madame," replied the duke with a smile; "but happily for us, these poor parliament men did not remark that whilst saying he would never change, the king looked at you."

And he finished this compliment with one of those inimitable bows which are no longer seen, even upon the stage.

Madame Dubarry was a woman, and by no means a politician. She only saw the compliment, where D'Aiguillon detected plainly the epigram and the threat. Therefore, she replied with a smile, while her ally turned pale and bit his lips with vexation, to see the marshal's anger endure so long.

The effect of the bed of justice was for the moment favourable to the royal cause. But it frequently happens that a great blow only stuns, and it is remarked that after the stunning effect has passed away, the blood circulates with more vigour and purity than before. Such at least were the reflections made by a little group of plainly-dressed persons, who were

stationed as spectators at the corner of the **Quai aux Fleurs** and the **Rue de la Barillerie**, on seeing the king attended by his brilliant cortege leave the hall.

They were three in number. Chance had brought them together at this corner, and from thence they seemed to study with interest the impressions of the crowd ; and, without knowing each other, after once exchanging a few words, they had discussed the sitting even before it was over.

" These passions are well ripened," said one of them, an old man with bright eyes, and a mild and honest expression. " A bed of justice is a great work."

" Yes," replied a young man, smiling bitterly ; "yes, if the work realise the title."

" Sir," replied the old man, turning round, " I think I should know you—I fancy I have seen you before."

" On the night of the 31st May. You are not mistaken, Monsieur Rousseau."

" Oh ! you are that young surgeon—my countryman, Monsieur Marat! "

" Yes, sir ; at your service."

The two men exchanged salutations. The third had not yet spoken. He was also young, eminently handsome, and aristocratic in his appearance, and during the whole ceremony had unceasingly observed the crowd. The young surgeon moved away first, and plunged into the densest masses of the people, who, less grateful than Rousseau, had already forgotten him, but whose memory he calculated upon refreshing one day or other.

The other young man waited until he was gone, and then, addressing Rousseau.

" Sir," said he, " you do not go ! "

" Oh ! I am too old to venture amongst such a mob."

" In that case," said the unknown, lowering his

voice, " . I will see you again this evening in the Rue Pla\trier\$, Monsieur Rousseau—do not fail."

The philosopher started as if a phantom had risen before him. His complexion, always pale, became livid. He made an effort to reply to this strange appeal, but the man had already disappeared.

CHAPTER XVI

THE INFLUENCE OF THE WORDS OF THE UNKNOWN UPON J. J. ROUSSEAU

ON hearing these singular words spoken by a man whom he did not know, Rousseau, trembling and unhappy, plunged into the crowd, and without remembering that he was old and naturally timid, elbowed his way through it. He soon reached the bridge of Notre-Dame; then, still plunged in his reverie, and muttering to himself, he crossed the quarter of La Greve, which was the shortest way to his own dwelling.

" So," said he to himself, " this secret, which the initiated guard at the peril of their lives, is in possession of the first comer. This is what mysterious associations gain by passing through the popular sieve. A man recognises me, who knows that I shall be his associate, perhaps his accomplice, yonder. Such a state of things is absurd and intolerable."

And, while he spoke, Rousseau walked forward quickly—he, usually so cautious, especially since his accident in the Rue Menil-Montant.

" Thus," continued the philosopher, " I must wish, forsooth, to sound to the bottom these plans of human regeneration which some spirits who boast of the title of 'illuminati' propose to carry out. I was foolishly

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

enough to imagine that any good ideas could come from Germany—the land of beer and fog— and may have compromised my name by joining it to those of fools or plotters, whom it will serve as a cloak to shelter their folly. Oh, no ! it shall not be thus. No ; a flash of lightning has shown me the abyss, and I will not cheerfully throw myself into it."

And Rousseau paused to take breath, resting upon his cane, and standing motionless for a moment.

" Yet it was a beautiful chimera/" pursued the philosopher. " Liberty in the midst of slavery—the future conquered without noise and struggle—the snare mysteriously woven while earth's tyrants slept. It was too beautiful! I was a fool to believe it! I will not be the sport of fears, of suspicions, of shadows, which are unworthy of a free spirit and an independent body."

He had got thus far, and was continuing his progress, when the sight of some of M. de Sartines' agents gazing round with their ubiquitous eyes frightened the free spirit, and gave such an impulse to the independent body, that it plunged into the deepest shadows of the pillars under which it was walking.

From these pillars it was not far to the Rue Platriere. Rousseau accomplished the distance with the speed of lightning, ascended the stairs to his domicile—breathing like a stag pursued by the hunters—and sank upon a chair," unable to utter a word in answer to all Therese's questions.

At last he recovered sufficiently to account for his emotion ; it was the walk, the heat, the news of the king's angry remarks at the bed of justice, the commotion caused by the popular terror—a sort of panic, in short, which had spread amongst all who witnessed what had happened.

Therese, his wife, grumblingly replied that all that was no reason for allowing the dinner to cool; and, moreover, that a man ought not to be such a soft chicken-hearted wretch as to be frightened at the least noise.

Rousseau could make no reply to this last argument, which he himself had so frequently stated in other terms.

Therese added, that these philosophers, these imaginative people, were all the same; that they always talked very grandly in their writings; they said that they feared nothing; that God and man were very little to them; but, at the slightest barking of the smallest poodle, they cried, "Help!"—at the least feverishness they exclaimed, "Oh! heavens! I am dead."

This was one of Therese's favourite themes, that which most excited her eloquence, and to which Rousseau, who was naturally timid, found it most difficult to reply. Rousseau, therefore, pursued his own thoughts to the sound of this discordant music—thoughts which were certainly well worth Therese's, notwithstanding the abuse the latter showered so plentifully on him.

"Happiness," said he, "is composed of perfume and music; now, noise and odour are conventional things. Who can prove that the onion smells less sweet than the rose, or the peacock sings less melodiously than the nightingale?"

After which axiom, which might pass for an excellent paradox, they sat down to table.

After dinner, Rousseau did not, as usual, sit down to his harpsichord. He paced up and down the apartment, and stopped a hundred times to look out of the window, apparently studying the physiognomy of the Rue P&tri6re. Therese was forthwith seized

with one of those fits of jealousy which peevish people—that is to say, the least really jealous people in the world—often indulge in for the sake of opposition. For if there is a disagreeable affectation in the world, it is the affectation of a fault; the affectation of virtue may be tolerated.

Therese, who held Rousseau's age, complexion, mind, and manners in the utmost contempt—who thought him old, sickly, and ugly—and did not fear that any one should run off with her husband; she never dreamed that other women might look upon him with different eyes from herself. But as the torture of jealousy is woman's most dainty punishment, Therese sometimes indulged herself in this treat. Seeing Rousseau, therefore, approach the window so frequently, and observing his dreaming and restless air, she said,—

" Very good! I understand your agitation—you have just left some one."

Rousseau turned to her with a startled look which served as an additional proof of the truth of her suspicions.

" Some one you wish to see again," she continued.

" What do you say ? " asked Rousseau.

" Yes, we make assignations, it seems ! "

" Oh ! " said Rousseau, comprehending that Therese was jealous; " an assignation! You are mad, Therese! "

" I know perfectly well that it would be madness in you," said she; " but you are capable of any folly. Go—go, with your papier-mache complexion, your palpitations, and your coughs—go, and make conquests! It is one way of getting on in the world ! "

" But, Therese, you know there is not a word of truth in what you are saying," said Rousseau angrily, " let me think in peace."

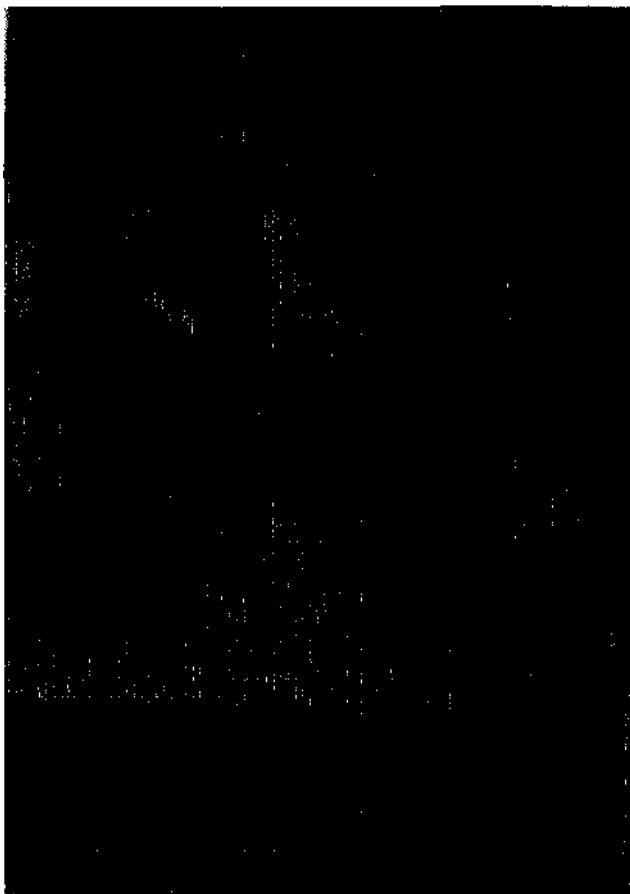
" You are a libertine," said Therese, with the utmost seriousness.

Rousseau reddened as if she had hit the truth, or as if he had received a compliment.

Therese forthwith thought herself justified in putting on a terrible countenance, turning the whole household upside down, slamming the doors violently, and playing with Rousseau's tranquillity, as children with those metal rings which they shut up in a box and shake to make a noise. Rousseau took refuge in his closet; this uproar had rather confused his ideas.

He reflected that there would doubtless be some danger in not being present at the mysterious ceremony of which the stranger had spoken at the corner of the Quai.

O If there are punishments for traitors, there will also be punishments for the lukewarm or careless," thought he. " Now I have always remarked that great dangers mean in reality nothing, just like loud threats. The cases in which either are productive of any result are extremely rare ; but petty revenges, underhand attacks, mystifications, and other such small coin—these we must be on our guard against. Some day the masonic brothers may repay my contempt by stretching a string across my staircase; I shall stumble over it and break a leg or the six or eight teeth I have left. Or else they will have a stone ready to fall upon my head when I am passing under a scaffolding ; or, better still, there may be some pamphleteer belonging to the fraternity, living quite near me, upon the same floor perhaps, looking from his windows into my room. That is not impossible, since the reunions take place even in the Rue Platriere. Well! This wretch will write stupid lampoons on me, which will make me ridiculous all over Paris. Have I not enemies everywhere ? "



EL.

" I have lost my love___
Colin leaves me."

Page 261

'osed in. Therese, wearied with her vain endeavours to torment her captive, had fallen asleep won her chair. Rousseau, with beating heart, took his new coat, as if to go out on a pleasure excursion, glanced for a moment in the glass at the play of his black eyes, and was charmed to find that they were sparkling and expressive.

He grasped his knotted stick in his hand, and slipped out of the room without wakening Therese. But when he arrived at the foot of the stairs, and had drawn back the bolt of the street door, Rousseau paused and looked out, to assure himself as to the state of the locality.

No carriage was passing; the street, as usual, was full of idlers gazing at each other, as they do at this day, while many stopped at the shop windows to ogle the pretty girls. A new-comer would therefore be quite unnoticed in such a crowd. Rousseau plunged into it; he had not far to go. A ballad-singer, with a cracked violin, was stationed before the door which had been pointed out to him. This music, to which every true Parisian's ear is extremely sensitive, filled the street with echoes which repeated the last bars of the air sung by the violin or by the singer himself. Nothing could be more unfavourable, therefore, to the free passage along the street than the crowd gathered at this spot, and the passers-by were obliged to turn either to the right or left of the group. Those who turned to the left took the centre of the street, those to the right brushed along the side of the house indicated, and *vice versa*.

Rousseau remarked that several of these passers-by disappeared on the way as if they had fallen into son# trap. He concluded that these people had come with the same purpose as himself, and determined to

imitate their manoeuvre. It was not difficult to accomplish. Having stationed himself in the rear of the assembly of listeners, as if to join their number, he watched the first person whom he saw entering the open alley. More timid than they, probably because he had more to risk, he waited until a particularly favourable opportunity should present itself.

He did not wait long. A cabriolet which drove along the street divided the circle, and caused the two hemispheres to fall back upon the houses on either side. Rousseau thus found himself driven to the very entrance of the passage; he had only to walk on. Our philosopher observed that all the idlers were looking at the cabriolet and had turned their backs on the house; he took advantage of this circumstance, and disappeared in the dark passage.

After advancing a few steps he perceived a lamp, beneath which a man was seated quietly, like a stall-keeper after the day's business was over, and read or seemed to read, a newspaper. At the sound of Rousseau's footsteps this man raised his head and visibly placed his finger upon his breast, upon which the lamp threw a strong light. Rousseau replied to this symbolic gesture by raising his finger to his lips.

The man then immediately rose, and, pushing open a door at his right hand, which door was so artificially concealed in the wooden panel of which it formed a part as to be wholly invisible, he showed Rousseau a very steep staircase, which descended underground. Rousseau entered, and the door closed quickly but noiselessly after him.

The philosopher descended the steps slowly, assisted by his cane. He thought it rather disrespectful that the brothers should cause him, at this, his first interview, to run the risk of breaking his neck or his legs.

with the stair, if steep, was not long. Roussquau covxified seventeen steps and then felt as if suddenly plunged into a highly-heated atmosphere.

This moist heat proceeded from the breath of a conquerable number of men who were assembled in the low hall. Rousseau remarked that the walls were tapestried with red and white drapery on which figures of various implements of labour, rather symbolic doubtless than real, were depicted. A single lamp hung from the vaulted ceiling, and threw a gloomy light upon the faces of those present, who were conversing with each other on the wooden benches, and who wore the appearance of honest and respectable citizens.

The floor was neither polished nor carpeted, but was covered with a thick mat of plaited rushes which deadened the sound of the footsteps. Rousseau's entrance, therefore, produced no sensation. No one seemed to have remarked it.

Five minutes previously Rousseau had longed for nothing so much as such an entrance ; and yet, when he had entered, he felt annoyed that he had succeeded so well. He saw an unoccupied place on one of the back benches, and installed himself as modestly as possible on this seat, behind all the others.

He counted thirty-three heads in the assembly. A desk, placed upon a platform, seemed to wait for a president.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HOUSE IN THE RUE PLATRIERE

ROUSSEAU remarked that the conversation of those present was very cautious and reserved. Many did not open their lips; and scarcely three or four couples exchanged a few words.

Those who did not speak endeavoured *even tu* conceal their faces, which was not difficult—thanks to the great body of shadow cast by the platform of the expected president. The refuge of these last, who seemed to be the timid individuals of the assembly, was behind this platform. But, in return, two or three members of this corporation gave themselves a great deal of trouble to recognise their colleagues. They came and went, talked among themselves and frequently disappeared through a door before which was drawn a black curtain, ornamented with red flames.

In a short time a bell was rung. A man immediately rose from the end of the bench upon which he was seated, and where he was previously confounded with the other freemasons, and took his place upon the platform.

After making some signs with the hands and fingers, which were repeated by all those present, and adding a last sign more explicit than the others, he declared the sitting commenced.

This man was entirely unknown to Rousseau. Beneath the exterior of a working man in easy circumstances, he concealed great presence of mind, aided by an elocution as flowing as could have been wished for in an orator.

His speech was brief, and to the point. He declared that the lodge had been assembled to proceed to the election of a new brother.

"You will not be surprised," said he, "that we have assembled you in a place where the usual trials cannot be attempted. These trials have seemed useless to the chiefs; the brother whom we are to receive to-day is one of the lights of contemporary philosophy—a thoughtful spirit who will be devoted to us from conviction, not from fear. One who has discovered

all these miseries of nature and of the human heart
Could not be treated in the same manner as the simple
nigritia from whom we demand the help of his arm,
his will, and his gold. In order to have co-operation
of his distinguished mind, of his honest and energetic
character, his promise and his assent are sufficient/

The speaker, when he had concluded, looked round
to mark the effect of his words.

Upon Rousseau the effect had been magical; the
Genevese philosopher was acquainted with the pre-
paratory mysteries of freemasonry, and looked upon
them with the repugnance natural to enlightened
minds. The concessions, absurd because they were
useless, which the chiefs required from the candidates,
this simulating fear when every one knew there was
nothing to fear, seemed to him to be the acme of
puerility and senseless superstition.

Besides this, the timid philosopher, an enemy to
all personal exhibitions and manifestations, would have
felt most unhappy had he been obliged to serve as a
spectacle for people whom he did not know, and who
would have certainly mystified him more or less.

To dispense with these trials in his case was there-
fore more than a satisfaction to him. He knew the
strictness with which equality was enforced by the
masonic principles, therefore an exception in his
favour constituted a triumph.

He was preparing to say some words in reply to
the gracious address of the president, when a voice
was heard among the audience.

"At least," said this voice, which was sharp and
discordant, "since you think yourself obliged to treat
in this princely fashion a man like ourselves, since you
dispense in his case with physical pains, as if the pur-
suit of liberty through bodily suffering were not one

of our symbols, we hope you will not confer a precious title upon an unknown person without having questioned him according to the usual ritual, and without having received his profession of faith."

Rousseau turned round to discover the features of the aggressive person who so rudely jostled his triumphant car, and with the greatest surprise recognised the young surgeon whom he had that morning met upon the Quai aux Fleurs. A conviction of his own honesty of purpose, perhaps also a feeling of disdain for the *precious title*, prevented him from replying.

"You have heard?" said the president, addressing Rousseau.

"Perfectly," replied the philosopher, who trembled slightly at the sound of his voice as it echoed through the vaulted roof of the dark hall, "and I am the more surprised at the interpellation when I see from whom it proceeds. What! A man whose profession it is to combat what is called physical suffering, and to assist his brethren, who are common men as well as freemasons, preaches the utility of physical suffering! He chooses a singular path through which to lead the creature to happiness, the sick to health,"

"We do not here speak of this or that person," replied the young man warmly; "I am supposed to be unknown to the candidate, and he to me. I am merely the utterer of an abstract truth, and I assert that the chief has done wrong in making an exception in favour of any one. I do not recognise in him," pointing to Rousseau, "the philosopher, and he must not recognise the surgeon in me. We shall perhaps walk side by side through life, without a look or gesture betraying our intimacy, which nevertheless, thanks to the laws of the association, is more binding than all vulgar friendships, I repeat, therefore, that if

it has been thought well to spare this candidate the usual trials, he ought at least to have the usual questions put to him."

Rousseau made no reply. The president saw depicted on his features disgust at this discussion, and regret at having engaged in the enterprise.

"Brother," said he authoritatively to the young man, "you will please be silent when the chief speaks, and do not venture on light grounds to blame his actions, which are sovereign here/'

"I have a right to speak," replied the young man, more gently.

"To speak, yes; but not to blame. The brother who is about to enter our association is so well known that we have no wish to add to our masonic relations a ridiculous and useless mystery. All the brothers here present know his name, and his name itself is a perfect guarantee. But as he himself, I am certain, loves equality, I request him to answer the question which I shall put to him merely for form:—

"What do you seek in this association?"

Rousseau made two steps forward in advance of the crowd, and his dreamy and melancholy eye wandered over the assembly.

"I seek," said he, "that which I do not find—truths, not sophisms. Why should you surround me with poniards which do not wound, with poisons which are only clear water, and with traps under which mattresses are spread? I know the extent of human endurance. I know the vigour of my physical frame. If you were to destroy it, it would not be worth your while to **elect me** a brother, for when dead I could be of no **use** to you. Therefore **you** do not wish to kill me, still **less to wound** me; **and all** the doctors **in** the world *would not make me* approve of an initiation in the

course of which my limbs had been broken. I have served a longer apprenticeship to pain than any of you ; I have sounded the body, and probed even to me soul. If I consented to come amongst you when I was *solicited* "—and he laid particular emphasis on the word—" it was because I thought I might be useful. I give, therefore ; I do not receive. Alas ! before you could do anything to defend me, before you could restore me to liberty were I imprisoned—before you could give me bread if I were starving or consolation if I were afflicted—before, I repeat, you could do anything—the brother whom you admit to-day, if this gentleman," turning to Marat, " permits it—this brother will have paid the last tribute of nature ; for progress is halting, light is slow, and **from** the grave into which he will be thrown, none of **you** can raise him."

" You are mistaken, illustrious brother," said a mild and penetrating voice which charmed Rousseau's ear ; " there is more than you think in the association into which you are about to enter ; there is the whole future destiny of the world. The future, you are aware, is hope—is science ; the future is God, who will give His light to the world, since He has promised to give it, and God cannot lie."

Astonished at this elevated language, Rousseau looked around and recognised the young man who had made the appointment with him in the morning at the Bed of Justice. This man, who was dressed in black with great neatness, and, above all, with **a marked** air of distinction in his appearance, was leaning against the side of the platform, and his face, illumined by **the** lamp, shone in all its beauty, grace, and **expressiveness**.

" **Ah !** " said Rousseau, " science—the **bottomless** abyss! *You* speak to me of science, consolation*

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

futi My hope; another speaks of matter, of rigour, an I of violence ; whom shall I believe ? Shall it be tncn, in this assembly of brothers, as it is amongst the devouring wolves of the world which stirs above us ? Wolves and sheep ! Listen to my profession of faith, since you have not read it in my books/'

" Your books ! " exclaimed Marat. " They are sublime—I confess it—but they are Utopias. You are useful in the same point of view as Pythagoras, Solon, and Cicero the sophist. You point out the good, but it is an artificial, unsubstantial, unattainable good. You are like one who would feed a hungry crowd with air-bubbles, more or less illumined by the sun."

" Have you ever seen," said Rousseau, frowning, " great commotions of nature take place without preparation ? Have you seen the birth of a man—that common and yet sublime event ? Have you not seen him collect substance and life in the womb of his mother for nine months ? All ! you wish me to regenerate the world with actions. That is not to regenerate, sir ; it is to revolutionise ! "

" Then," retorted the young surgeon violently, " you do not wish for independence ; you do not wish for liberty ! "

" On the contrary," replied Rousseau, " independence is my idol—liberty is my goddess. But I wish for a mild and radiant liberty—a liberty which warms and vivifies. I wish for an equality which will connect men by ties of friendship, not by fear. I wish for education, for the instruction of each element of the social body, as the mechanic wishes for harmonious movement—as the cabinet-maker wishes for the perfect exactness, for the closest fitting, in each piece of his work. I repeat it, I wish for that which I have written—progress, concord, devotion."

A smile of disdain flitted over Marat's lips.

"Yes," he said, "rivulets of milk and honey, Elysian fields like Virgil's poetic dreams, which philosophy would make a reality."

Rousseau made no reply. It seemed to him too hard that he should have to defend his moderation—he, whom all Europe called a violent innovator.

He took his seat in silence, after having satisfied his ingenuous and timid mind by appealing for and obtaining the tacit approbation of the person who had just before defended him.

The president rose.

"You have all heard?" said he.

"Yes," replied the entire assembly.

"Does the candidate appear to you worthy of entering the association, and does he comprehend its duties?"

"Yes," replied the assembly again; but this time with a reserve which did not evince much unanimity.

"Take the oath," said the president to Rousseau.

"It would be disagreeable to me," said the philosopher with some pride, "to displease any members of this association; and I must repeat the words I made use of just now, as they are the expression of my earnest conviction. If I were an orator, I would put them in a more eloquent manner; but my organ of speech is rebellious, and always betrays my thoughts when I ask it for an immediate translation. I wish to say that I can do more for the world and for you out of this assembly, than I could were I strictly to follow your usages. Leave me, therefore, to my work, to my weakness, to my loneliness. I have told you I am descending to the grave; grief, infirmity, and want hurry me on. You cannot delay this great work of nature. Abandon me; I am not made for the society of men; I hate and fly them. Nevertheless,

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

I Serve then, because I am a man myself; and in seiving them I fancy them better than they are. Now you have my whole thoughts ; I shall not say another word."

" Then you refuse to take the oath ? " said Marat with some emotion.

" I refuse positively ; I do not wish to join the association. I see too many convincing proofs to assure me that I should be useless to it."

" Brother," said the unknown personage, with the conciliatory voice, " allow me to call you so, for we are brothers, independently of all combinations of the human mind—brother ! do not give way to a very natural feeling of irritation ; sacrifice your legitimate pride ; do for us what is repulsive to yourself. Your advice, your ideas, your presence, are light to our paths. Do not plunge us in the two-fold darkness of your absence and your refusal."

" You are in error," said Rousseau : " I take nothing from you, since I should never have given you more than I have given to the whole world—to the first chance reader—to the first consulter of the journals. If you wish for the name and essence of Rousseau——"

" We do wish for them!" said several voices politely.

" Then make a collection of my books, place them upon the table of your presidert; and when you are taking the opinions of the meeting, and my turn to give one comes, open my books—you will find my counsel and my vote there."

Rousseau made a step towards the door.

" Stop one moment!" said the surgeon ; " mind is free, and that of the illustrious philosopher more than any other ; but it would not be regular to have allowed a stranger even to enter our sanctuary, who, not being

bound by any tacit agreement, might, without dishonesty, reveal our mysteries."

Rousseau smiled compassionately.

" You want an oath of secrecy ? " said he.

" You have said it. "

" I am ready. "

" Be good enough to read the formula, venerable brother, " said Marat.

The venerable brother read the following form of oath :~

" I swear in the presence of the Eternal God, the Architect of the Universe, and before my superiors, and the respectable assembly which surrounds me, never to reveal or to make known, or write anything which has happened in my presence, under penalty, in case of indiscretion, of being punished according to the laws of the Great Founder, of my superiors, and the anger of my fathers. "

Rousseau had already raised his hand to swear, when the unknown, who had followed the progress of the debate with a sort of authority which no one seemed to dispute, although he was not distinguished from the crowd, approached the president and whispered some words in his ear.

" True, " said the venerable chief, and he added,—

" You are a man, not a brother; you are a man of honour, placed towards us only in the position of a fellow-man. We here abjure, therefore, our distinguishing peculiarity, and ask from you merely your word of honour to forget what has passed between us. "

" Like a dream of the morning—I swear it upon my honour, " said Rousseau, with emotion.

With these words he retired, and many of the members followed him.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

CHAPTER XVIII

THE REPORT

WHEN the members of the second and third orders had gone, seven associates remained in the lodge. They were the seven chiefs. They recognised each other by means of signs which proved their initiation to a superior degree.

Their first care was to close the doors. Then their president made himself known by displaying a ring, on which were engraved the mysterious letters, " L. P. D." ¹

This president was charged with the most important correspondence of the order. He was in communication with the six other chiefs, who dwelt in Switzerland, Russia, America, Sweden, Spain, and Italy.

He brought with him some of the most important documents he had received from his colleagues, in order to communicate their contents to the superior circles of initiated brothers, who were above the others but beneath him.

We have already recognised this chief; it was Ealsamo.

The most important of the letters contained a threatening advice. It was from Sweden, and written by Swedenborg.

" Watch the south, brothers/¹ he said; " under its burning rays has been hatched a traitor who will ruin you/'

" Watch in Paris, brothers—the traitor dwells there; he possesses the secrets of the order, a feeling of hatred urges him on.

¹ Lilia pedibus deslruet.

"A munnuring voice, a rustling flight, "whispers the denunciation in my ear. I see a terrible vengeance coming, but perhaps it will be too late. In the meantime, brothers, watch ! watch ! A traitorous tongue, even though it be uninstructed, is sometimes sufficient to overthrow our most skilfully-constructed plans."

The brothers looked at each other in mute surprise. The language of the fierce old sage. His prescience, which had acquired an imposing authority from many striking examples, contributed in no small degree to cast a gloom over the meeting at which Balsamo presided. Balsamo himself, who placed implicit faith in Swedenborg's second sight, could not resist the saddening influence which this letter had on the assembly.

" Brothers," said he, " the inspired prophet is rarely deceived. Watch, then, as he bids you. You know now, as I do, that the struggle commences. Let us not be conquered by these ridiculous enemies, whose power we sap in the utmost security. You must not forget that they have mercenary swords at their command. It is a powerful weapon in this world, among those who do not see beyond the limits of our terrestrial life. Brothers, let us distrust these hired traitors."

" These fears seem to me puerile," said a voice ; " we gather strength daily, and we are directed by brilliant genius and powerful hands."

Balsamo bowed his thanks for the flattering eulogy.

" Yes, but as our illustrious president has said, treason creeps everywhere," replied a brother, who was no other than the surgeon Marat, promoted, notwithstanding his youth, to a superior grade, in virtue of which he now sat for the first time on a consulting committee. " Remember, brothers, that by

doubling the bait, you make a more important capture. If M. de Sartines with a bag of crown-pieces can purchase the revelations of one of our obscurer brothers, the minister, with a million, or with holding out the hope of advancement, may buy over one of our superiors. Now, with us, the obscurer brother knows nothing. At the most he is cognisant of the names of some of his colleagues, and these names signify nothing. Ours is an excellent constitution, but it is an eminently aristocratic one ; the inferiors know nothing, can do nothing. They are called together to say or to hear trifles, and yet they contribute their time and their money to increase the solidity of our edifice. Reflect that the workman brings only the stone and the mortar, but without stone and mortar could you build the house ? Now, the workman receives a very small salary, but I consider him equal to the architect who plans, creates, and superintends the whole work ; and I consider him equal because he is a man, and in the eyes of a philosopher, one man is worth as much as another, seeing that he bears his misfortunes and his fate equally, and because, even more than another man, he is exposed to the fall of a stone or the breaking of a scaffold."

" I must interrupt you, brother," said Balsamo. " You diverge from the question which alone ought to occupy our thoughts. Your failing, brother, is that you are over zealous, and apt to generalise discussions. Our business on the present occasion is not to decide whether our constitution be good or bad, but to uphold the integrity of that constitution in all its strength. If I wished, however, to discuss the point with you, I would answer no; the instrument which receives the impulse is not equal to the architect; the brain is not the equal of the arm/'

"Suppose M. de Sartines, should seize, one of our least important brethren," cried Maiat warmly, "would he not send him to rot in the Bastille equally with you or me ? "

"Granted; but the misfortune in that case is for the individual only, not for the order, which is with us the all-important point. If, on the contrary, the chief were imprisoned, the whole conspiracy is at an end. When the general is absent, the army loses the battle. Therefore, brother, watch over the safety of the chiefs."

"Yes, but let them in return watch over ours."

"That is their duty."

"And let their faults be doubly punished."

"Again, brother, you wander from the constitution of the order. Have you forgotten that the oath which binds all the members of the associations is the same, and threatens all with the same punishment ? "

"The great ones always escape."

"That is not the opinion of the great themselves, brother. Listen to the conclusion of the letter which one of the greatest among us, our prophet Swedenborg, has written. This is what he adds,—

" 'The blow will come from one of the mighty ones, one of the mightiest of the order; or, if it comes not directly from him, the fault will be traceable to him. Remember that fire and water may be accomplices; one gives light, the other revelation.

" 'Watch, brothers, over all and over each, watch ! "

"Then," said Marat, seizing upon those points in Balsamo's speech and Swedenborg's letter which suited his purpose, "let us repeat the oath which binds us together, and let us pledge ourselves to maintain it in its utmost vigour, whosoever he may be who shall betray us, or be the cause of our betrayal."

Balsamo paused for a moment, and then, rising

from his seat, he pronounced the consecrated words, in a slow, solemn, terrible voice :—

" In the name of the crucified Son, I swear to break all the bonds of nature which unite me to father, mother, brother, sister, wife, relation, friend, mistress, king, benefactor, and to any being whatsoever to whom I have promised faith, obedience, gratitude, or service.

" I swear to reveal to the chief, whom I acknowledge according to the statutes of the order, all that I have seen or done, read or guessed, and even to search out and penetrate that which may not of itself be openly present to my eyes.

" I will honour poison, steel, and fire, as a means of ridding the world, by death or idiocy, of the enemies of truth and liberty.

" I subscribe to the law of silence. I consent to die, as if struck by lightning, on the day when I shall have merited this punishment, and I await, without murmuring, the knife which will reach me in whatsoever part of the world I may be."

Then, the seven men who composed this solemn assembly repeated the oath, word for word, standing, and with uncovered heads.

When the words of the oath had been repeated by all :—

" We are now guaranteed against treachery," said Balsamo ; "let us no longer mingle extraneous matter with our discussion. I have to make my report to the committee of the principal events of the year.

" My summary of the affairs of France may have interest for enlightened and zealous minds like yours; I will commence with it.

" France is situated in the centre of Europe, as the heart in the centre of the body ; it lives, and radiates

life. It is hi its palpitations that we must look for the cause of all the disorder in the general organisation.

" I came to France, therefore, and approached Paris as a physician approaches the heart. I listened I felt, I experimented. When I entered it a year ago, the monarchy harassed it; to-day, vices kill it. I required to hasten the effect of these fatal debauches and therefore I assisted them.

" An obstacle was in my way; this obstacle was a man, not only the first, but the most powerful man in the state, next to the king.

" He was gifted with some of those qualities which please other men. He was too proud, it is true, but his pride was applied to his works. He knew how to lighten the hardships of the people by making them believe and even feel sometimes that they were a portion of the state; and by sometimes consulting them on their grievances, he raised a standard around which the mass will always rally—the spirit of nationality.

" He hated the English, the natural enemies of the French; he hated the favourite, the natural enemy of the working classes. Now, if this man had been a usurper—if he had been one of us—if he would have trodden in our path, acted for our ends—I would have assisted him, I would have kept him in power, I would have upheld him by the resources I am able to create for my proteges; for, instead of patching up decayed royalty, he would have assisted us in overthrowing it on the appointed day. But he belonged to the aristocracy; he was born with a feeling of respect for that first rank to which he could not aspire, for the monarchy, which he dared not attack; he served royalty while despising the king; he did worse—he acted as a shield to this royalty against which our blows were directed. The parliament and the people, full

of respect for this living dyke which opposed itself to any encroachment on the royal prerogative, limited themselves to a moderate resistance, certain as they were of having in him a powerful assistant when the moment should arrive.

" I understood the position—I undertook M. de Choiseul's fall.

" This laborious task, at which for ten years so much hatred and interest had laboured in vain, commenced and terminated in a few months, by means which it would be useless to reveal to you. By a secret, which constitutes one of my powers—a power the greater, because it will remain eternally hidden from the eyes of all, and will manifest itself only by its effects—I overthrew and banished M. de Choiseul, and attached to his overthrow a long train of regret, disappointment, lamentations, and anger.

" You see now that my labour bears its fruit; all France asks for Choiseul, and rises to demand him back, as orphans turn to heaven when God has taken away their earthly parents.

" The parliament employs the only right it possesses—inertia ; it has ceased to act. In a well-organised body, as a state of the first rank ought to be, the paralysis of any essential organ is fatal. Now, the parliament in the social, is what the stomach is in the human body. When the parliament ceases to act, the people—the intestines of the state—can work no longer ; and, consequently, must cease to pay, and the gold—that is, the blood—will be wanting.

" There will be a struggle, no doubt; but who can combat against the people ? Not the army—that daughter of the people—which eats the bread of the labourer, and drinks the wine of the vine-grower. There remain then the king's household, the privileged

classes, the guards, the Swiss, the musketeers—in all, scarce five or six thousand men. What can this handful of pigmies do when the nation shall rise like a giant?"

"Let them rise, then—let them rise!" cried several voices.

"Yes, yes! to the work!" exclaimed Marat.

"Young man, I have not yet consulted you," said Balsamo coldly. "This sedition of the masses," continued he, "this revolt of the weak, become strong by their number, against the powerful single handed—less thoughtful, less ripened, less experienced minds would stimulate immediately, and would succeed with a facility which terrifies me; but I have reflected and studied—I have mixed with the people, and, under their dress, with their perseverance, even their coarseness, I have viewed them so closely, that I have made myself, as it were, one of themselves. I know them now; I cannot be deceived in them* They are strong, but ignorant; irritable, but not revengeful. In a word, they are not yet ripe, for sedition such as I mean and wish for. They want the instruction which will make them see events in the double light of example and utility; they want the memory of their past experience.

"They resemble those daring young men whom I have seen in Germany, at the public festivals, eagerly climb a vessel's mast, at the top of which hung a ham and a silver cup. They started at first burning with eagerness, and mounted with surprising rapidity; but when they had almost reached the goal—when they had only to extend the arm to seize their prize—their strength abandoned them, and they slipped to the bottom amid the hootings of the crowd.

"The first time it happened as I told you; the second time they husbanded their strength and their

breatfi-; but, taking more time, they failed by their slowness, as they had before failed from too great haste. At last—the third time, they took a middle course between precipitation and delay, and this time they succeeded. This is the plan I propose; efforts—never-ceasing efforts—which gradually approach the goal, until the day arrives when infallible success will crown our attempts/

Balsamo ceased, and looked around upon his audience, among whom the passions of youth and inexperience were boiling over.

"Speak, brother/" said he to Marat, who was more agitated than the others.

"I will be brief," said he. "Efforts soothe the people when they do not discourage them. Efforts ! that is the theory of M. Rousseau, citizen of Geneva, a great poet, but a slow and timid genius—a useless citizen, whom Plato would have driven from his republic ! Wait ! Ever wait ! Since the emancipation of the commons, since the revolt of the *maillotins*—for seven centuries we have waited i Count the generations which have died in the mean time, and then dare to pronounce the fatal word *wait!* as your motto of the future ! M. Rousseau speaks to us of opposition, as it was practised in the reign of the Grand Monarque—as Moliere practised it in his comedies, Boileau in his satires, and La Fontaine in his fables—whispering it in the ears of marchionesses, and prostrating it at the feet of kings. Poor and feeble opposition, which has not advanced the cause of humanity one jot I Lispering children recite these hidden theories without understanding them, and go to sleep while they recite. Rabelais also was a politician in your sense of the word; but at such politics people laugh, and correct nothing. Have you seen one single abuse

redressed for the last three hundred years ? . Enough of poets and theoreticians ! Let us have deeds', not words. We have given France up to the • care of physicians for three hundred years, and it is time now that surgery should enter in its turn, the scalpel and saw in hand. Society is gangrened : let us stop the gangrene with the steel. He may wait who rises from his table to recline upon a couch of roses, from which the ruffled leaves are blown by the breath of his slaves ; for the satisfied stomach exhales grateful vapours which mount into the brain and recreate and vivify it. But hunger, misery, despair, are not satiated nor consoled with verses, with sentences and fables. They cry out loudly in their sufferings ; deaf indeed must be lie who does not hear their lamentations—accursed he who does not reply to them ! A revolt, even should it be crushed, will enlighten the minds more than a thousand years of precepts, more than three centuries of examples. It will enlighten the kings, if it do not overthrow them. That is much !—that is enough ! "

A murmur of admiration rose from several lips.

" Where are our enemies ? " pursued Marat. " Above us ! Above us ! They guard the doors of the palaces, they surround the steps of the throne. Upon this throne is their palladium, which they guard with more care and with more fear than the Trojans did theirs. This palladium, which makes them all-powerful, rich and insolent, is royalty. This royalty cannot be reached, save by passing over the bodies of those who guard it, as one can only reach the general by overthrowing the battalion by which he is surrounded. Well ! History tells us of many battalions which have been captured—many generals who have been overthrown

—from Darins down to King John, from Regulus down to Duguesclin.

" If we overthrow the guard we reach the idol. Let us begin by striking down the sentinels—we can afterwards strike down the chief. Let the first attack be on the courtiers, the nobility, the aristocracy; the last will be upon the kings. Count the privileged heads; there are scarcely two hundred thousand. Walk through this beautiful garden called France, with a sharp switch in your hand, and cut down these two hundred thousand heads as Tarquin did the poppies of Latium, and all will be done. There will then be only two powers opposed to each other, the people and the kingship. Then let this kingship, the emblem, try to struggle with the people, this giant—and you will see! When dwarfs wish to overthrow a colossus, they commence with the pedestal. When the woodmen wish to cut down the oak, they attack it at the foot. Woodmen! woodmen! seize the hatchet—attack the oak at its roots—and the ancient tree with its proud branches will soon bite the dust! "

" And will crush you like pigmies in its fall, unfortunate wretches that you are! " exclaimed Balsamo, in a voice of thunder. " Ah! you rail against the poets, and you speak in metaphors even more poetical and more imaginative than theirs! Brother! brother! " continued he, addressing Marat, " I tell you, you have quoted these sentences from some romance which you are composing in your garret! "

Marat reddened.

" Do you know what a revolution is? " continued Balsamo; " I have seen two hundred, and can tell you. I have seen that of ancient Egypt, that of Assyria, those of Rome and Greece, and that of the Netherlands. I have seen those of the middle ages, when the nations

rushed one against the other—East against West, West against East—and murdered without knowing why. From the Shepherd Kings to our own time there have been perhaps a hundred revolutions, and yet now you complain of being slaves. Revolutions, then, have done no good. And why? Because those who caused the revolution were all struck with the same vertigo—they were too hasty. Does God, who presides over the revolutions of the world, as genius presides over the revolutions of men—does He hasten?

" 'Cut down the oak!' you cry. And you do not calculate that the oak, which needs but a second to fall, covers as much ground when it falls as a horse at a gallop would cross in thirty seconds. Now, those who throw down the oak, not having time to avoid the unforeseen fall, would be lost, crushed, killed, beneath its immense trunk. That is what you want, is it not? You will never get that from me. I shall be patient. I carry my fate—yours—the world's—in the hollow of this hand. No one can make me open this hand, full of overwhelming truth, unless I wish to open it. There is thunder in it, I know. Well! the thunderbolt shall remain in it, as if hidden in the murky cloud. Brethren! brethren! descend from these sublime heights and let us once more walk upon the earth.

" Sirs, I tell you plainly, and from my inmost soul, that the time has not yet come. The king who is on the throne is the last reflection of the great monarch whom the people still venerate; and in this fading monarchy there is yet something dazzling enough to outweigh the lightning shafts of your petty anger. This man was born a king and will die a king. His race is insolent but pure. You can read his origin on his brow, in his gestures, in his words—he will

always be a king. Overthrow him, and the same will happen to him as happened to Charles the First—his executioners will kneel before him, and the courtiers who accompanied him in his misfortune, like Lord Capel, will kiss the axe which struck off the head of their master.

" Now, sirs, you all know that England was too hasty. King Charles the First died upon the scaffold, indeed ; but King Charles the Second, his son, died upon the throne.

" Wait, wait, brethren ! for the time will soon be propitious. You wish to destroy the lilies. That is our motto—' *Lilia pedibus destrue.*' But not a single root must leave the flower of Saint Louis the hope of blooming again. You wish to destroy royalty ! to destroy royalty for ever ! You must first weaken her *prestige* as well as her essence. You wish to destroy royalty ! Wait till royalty is no longer a sacred office, but merely a trade—till it is practiced in a shop, not in a temple. Now, what is most sacred in royalty—viz., the legitimate transmission of the throne, authorised for centuries by God and the people—is about to be lost for ever. Listen, listen ! This invincible, this impervious barrier between us nothings and these *quasi* divine creatures—this limit which the people have never dared to cross, and which is called legitimacy—this word, brilliant as a lighted watch-tower, and which until now has saved the royal family from shipwreck—this word will be extinguished by the breath of a mysterious fatality !

"The dauphiness—called to France to perpetuate the race of kings by the admixture of imperial blood—the dauphiness, married now for a year to the heir of the French crown—approach, brethren, for I fear to let the sound of my words pass beyond your circle——"

Well ? " asked the six chiefs, with anxiety,

"Well, brethren, the dauphiness will never have an heir, or if one be born to her, he will die-early! "

A sinister murmur, which would have frozen the monarchs of the world with terror had they heard it—such deep hatred, such revengeful joy, did it breathe—escaped like a deadly vapour from the little circle of six heads, which almost touched each other, Balsamo's being bent over them from his rostrum.

" Now, gentlemen, you know this year's work; you see the progress of our mines. Be assured that we shall only succeed by the genius and the courage of some, who will serve as the eyes and the brain—by the perseverance and labour of others, who will represent the arms—by the faith and the devotion of others again, who will be the heart.

" Above all, remember the necessity of a blind submission, which ordains that even your chief must sacrifice himself to the will of the statutes of the order, whenever those statutes require it.

" After this, gentlemen and beloved brothers, I would dissolve the meeting, if there were not still a good act to perform, an evil to point out.

" The great writer who came among us this evening, and who would have been one of us but for the stormy zeal of one of our brothers who alarmed his timid soul—this great author proved himself in the right before our assembly, and I deplore it as a misfortune that a stranger should be victorious before a majority of brothers who are imperfectly acquainted with our rules, and utterly ignorant of our aim.

" Rousseau, triumphing over the truths of our association with the sophisms of his books, represents a fundamental vice which I would extirpate by steel and fire, if I had not the hope of curing it by persuasion.

The self-love of one of our brothers has developed itself most unfortunately. He has given us the worst in the discussion. No similar fact, I trust, will again present itself, or else I shall have recourse to the laws of discipline.

" In the meantime, gentlemen, propagate the faith by gentleness and persuasion. Insinuate it, do not impose it—do not force it into rebellious minds with wedges and blows, as the inquisitors tortured their victims. Remember that we cannot be great until after we have been acknowledged good; and that we cannot be acknowledged good but by appearing better than those who surround us. Remember too that among us, the great, the good, the best, are nothing without science, art, and faith; nothing, in short, compared with those whom God has marked with a peculiar stamp, as if giving them an authority to govern over men and rule empires.

" Gentlemen, the meeting is dissolved/

After pronouncing these words, Balsamo put on his hat and folded himself in his cloak.

Each of the initiated left in his turn, alone and silently, in order not to awaken suspicion.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BODY AND THE SOUL

THE last who remained beside the master was Marat, the surgeon. He was very pale, and humbly approached the terrible orator, whose power was unlimited.

" Master," said he, " have I indeed committed a fault ? "

" A great one, sir," said Balsamo; " and, what is worse, you do not believe that you hav© committed one."

" Well! yes, I confess that not only do I not believe that I committed a fault, but I think that I spoke* as J ought to have done."

" Pride, pride ! " muttered Balsamo ; " pride—destructive demon ! Men combat the fever in the blood of the patient—they dispel the plague from the water and the air—but they let pride strike such deep roots in their hearts that they cannot exterminate it."

" Oh, master ! " said Marat, " you have a very despicable opinion of me. Am I indeed so worthless that I cannot count for anything among my fellows ? Have I gathered the fruits of my labour so ill that I cannot utter a word without being taxed with ignorance. Am I such a lukewarm adept that my earnestness is suspected ? If I had no other good quality, at least I exist through my devotion to the holy cause of the people."

" Sir," replied Balsamo, " *it* is because the principle of good yet struggles in you against the principle of evil, which appears to me likely to carry you away one day, that I will try to correct these defects in you. If I can succeed — if pride has not yet subdued every other sentiment in your breast—I shall succeed in one hour."

" In one hour ? " said Marat.

" Yes ; will you grant me that time ? "

" Certainly."

" Where shall I see you ? "

" Master, it is my place to seek you in any place you may choose to point out to your servant."

" Well! " said Balsamo, " I will come to your house."

" Mark the promise you are making, master. I live in an attic in the Rue des Cordeliers. An attic, remember ! " said Marat, with an affectation of proud simplicity, with a boasting display of poverty, which did not escape Balsamo, " while you——"

" Well! while I ? "

" While you, it is said, inhabit a palace/'

Balsamo shrugged his shoulders, as a giant who looks down with contempt on the anger of a dwarf.

" Well, even so, sir," he replied ; " I will come to see you in your garret."

" And when, sir ? "

" To-morrow."

" At what time ? "

" In the morning."

" At daybreak I go to my lecture-room, and from thence to the hospital."

" That is precisely what I want. I would have asked you to take me with you, had you not proposed it."

" But early, remember," said Marat; " I sleep little."

" And I do not sleep at all," replied Balsamo.

" At daybreak, then."

" I shall expect you."

Thereupon they separated, for they had reached the door opening on the street, now as dark and solitary as it had been noisy and populous when they entered. Balsamo turned to the left, and rapidly disappeared. Marat followed his example, striding toward the right with his long meagre limbs.

Balsamo was punctual; the next morning, at six o'clock, he knocked at Marat's door, which was the centre one of six, opening on a long corridor which formed the topmost story of an old house in the Rue des Cordeliers.

It was evident that Marat had made great preparations to receive his illustrious guest. The small bed of walnut-tree, and the wooden chest of drawers beside it, shone bright beneath the sturdy arm of the charwoman, who was busily engaged scrubbing the decayed furniture.

Marat himself lent a helping hand to the old woman, and was refreshing the withered flowers which were arranged in a blue delft pot, and which formed the principal ornament of the attic. He still held a duster underneath his arm, which showed that he had not touched the flowers until after having given a rub to the furniture.

As the key was in the door, and as Balsamo had entered without knocking, he interrupted Marat in his occupation. Marat, at the sight of the master, blushed much more deeply than was becoming in a true stoic.

" You see, master," said he, stealthily throwing the tell-tale cloth behind a curtain, " I am a domestic man, and assist this good woman. It is from preference that I choose this task, which is, perhaps, not quite plebeian, but it is still less aristocratic/'

" It is that of a poor young man who loves cleanliness/' said Balsamo coldly, " nothing more. Are you ready, sir ? You know my moments are precious."

" I have only to slip on my coat, sir. Dame Grivette, my coat ! She is my portress, sir—my footman, my cook, my housekeeper, and she costs me one crown a month."

" Economy is praiseworthy," said Balsamo; " it is the wealth of the poor, and the wisdom of the rich."

" My hat and cane ! " said Marat.

" Stretch out your hand," said Balsamo ; " there is your hat, and no doubt this cane which hangs beside your hat is yours."

" Oh, I beg your pardon, sir ; I am quite confused."

" Are you ready ? "

" Ye?, sir. My watch, Dame Grivette ! "

Dame Grivette bustled about the room as if in search of something, but did not reply.

" You have no occasion for a watch, sir, to go to the amphitheatre and the hospital; it will perhaps not be easily found, and that would cause some delay/'

" But, sir, I attach great value to my watch, which is an excellent one, and which I bought with my savings."

" In your absence, Dame Grivette will look for it," replied Balsamo with a smile; " and if she searches carefully, it will be found when you return."

" Oh, certainly," said Dame Grivette, " it will be found unless monsieur has left it somewhere else. Nothing is lost here."

" You see," said Balsamo- " Come, sir, come ! "

Marat did not venture to persist, and followed Balsamo, grumbling.

When they reached the door, Balsamo said,—

" Where shall we go first ? "

" To the lecture-room, if you please, master ; I have marked a subject which must have died last night of acute meningitis. I want to make some observations on the brain, and I do not wish my colleagues to take it from me."

"Then let us go to the amphitheatre, Monsieur Marat."

" Moreover, it is only a few yards from here ; the amphitheatre is close to the hospital, and I shall only have to go in for a moment; you may even wait for me at the door."

" On the contrary, I wish to accompany you inside, and hear your opinion of this subject."

" When it was alive, sir ? "

" No, since it has become a corpse/

" Take care," said Marat smiling ; " I may gain a point over you, for I am well acquainted with this part of my profession, and am said to be a skilful anatomist."

" Pride ! pride ! ever pride ! " murmured Balsamo.

" What do you say ? " asked Balsamo Marat ; " I say that we shall see, sir," replied Balsamo.
3 Let us enter."

Marat preceded Balsamo in the narrow alley leading to the amphitheatre, which was situated at the extremity of the Rue Hautefeuille. Balsamo followed him unhesitatingly until they reached a long narrow room, where two corpses, a male and a female, lay stretched upon a marble table.

The woman had died young ; the man was old and bald. A soiled sheet was thrown over their bodies, leaving their faces half uncovered.

They were lying side by side upon this cold bed ; they who had perhaps never met before in the world, and whose souls, then voyaging in eternity, must, could they have looked down on earth, have been struck with wonderment at the proximity of their mortal remains.

Marat, with a single movement, raised and threw aside the coarse linen which covered the two bodies, whom death had thus made equal before the anatomist's scalpel.

" Is not the sight oi the dead repugnant to your feelings ? " asked Marat in his usual boasting manner.

" It makes me sad," replied Balsamo.

" Want of custom," said Marat. " I, who see this sight daily, feel neither sadness nor disgust. We practitioners live with the dead, and do not interrupt any of the functions of our existence on their account."

" It is a sad privilege of your profession, sir."

" Besides," added Marat, " why should I be sad, or feel disgust' ? In the first case, reflection forbids it ; in the second, custom/'

" Explain your ideas/" said Balsamo; " I do not understand you clearly. Reflection first/"

TWfett/^hy should I be afraid ? Why should I fear an inert mass—a statue of flesh instead of stone, marble, or granite ? "

" In short, you think there is nothing in a corpse."

" Nothing,—absolutely nothing."

" Do you believe that ? "

" I am sure of it."

" But in the living body."

" There is motion," said Marat proudly.

" And the soul ?—you do not speak of it, sir."

" I have never found it in the bodies which I have dissected."

" Because you have only dissected corpses."

" Oh no, sir! I have frequently operated upon living bodies/"

" And you have found nothing more in them than in the corpses ? "

" Yes, I have found pain. Do you call pain the soul ? "

" Then you do not believe in it ? "

" In what ? "

" In the soul ? "

" I believe in it, because I am at liberty to call it motion if I wish."

" That is well. You believe in the soul; that is all I asked ; I am glad you believe in it."

" One moment, master. Let us understand each other, and above all, let us not exaggerate," said Marat with his serpent smile. " We practitioners are rather disposed to materialism. "

" These bodies are very cold/' said Balsamo dreamily, " and this woman was very beautiful."

" Why, yes."

" A lovely soul would have been suitable in this lovely body."

" Ah ! there is the mistake in Him who created her. A beautiful scabbard, but a vile sword. This corpse, master, is that of a wretched woman who had just left Saint Lazarus, when she died of cerebral inflammation in the Hdtel Dieu. Her history is long, and tolerably scandalous. If you call the motive power which impelled this creature soul you wrong our souls, which must be of the same essence, since they are derived from the same source."

" Her soul should have been cured," said Balsamo; " it was lost for want of the only Physician who is indispensable—the Physician of the Soul."

" Alas, master, that is another of your theories. Medicine is only for the body," replied Marat with a bitter smile. " Now you have a word on your lips which Moliere has often employed in his comedies, and it is this word which makes you smile."

" No," said Balsamo, " you mistake; you cannot guess why I smile. What we concluded just now was, that these corpses are void, was it not ? "

" And insensible," added Marat, raising the young woman's head, and letting it fall noisily upon the marble while the body neither moved nor shuddered.

" Very well," said Balsamo; " let us now go to the hospital."

" Wait one moment, master, I entreat you, until I have separated from the trunk this head, which I am most anxious to have, as it was the seat of a very curious disease. Will you allow me ? "

" Do you ask ? " said Balsamo.

Marat opened his case, took from it a bistoury, and picked up in a corner a large wooden mallet stained with blood. Then with a practised hand he made a circular incision which separated all the flesh and the muscles of the neck, and having thus reached the bone, he slipped his bistoury between the juncture of the vertebral column, and struck a sharp blow upon it with the mallet.

The head rolled upon the table, and from the table upon the floor ; Marat was obliged to seize it with his damp hands. Balsamo turned away, not to give too much joy to the triumphant operator.

" One day/' said Marat, who thought he had hit the master in a weak point—" one day some philanthropist will occupy himself with the details of death as others do of life, and will invent a machine which shall sever a head at a single blow, and cause instantaneous annihilation, which no other instrument of death does. The wheel, quartering, and hanging, are punishments suitable for savages, but not for civilised people. An enlightened nation, as France is, should punish, but not revenge. Those who condemn to the wheel, who hang or quarter, revenge themselves upon the criminal by inflicting pain before punishing him by death, which, in my opinion, is too much by half."

" And in mine, also, sir. But what kind of an instrument do you mean ? "

" I can fancy a machine cold and impassible as the law itself. The man who is charged with fulfilling the last office is moved at the sight of his fellow man, and sometimes strikes badly, as it happened to the Duke of Monmouth and to Chalais. This could not be the case with a machine—with two arms of oak wielding a cutlass, for instance/'

" And do you believe, sir, that because the knife would pass with the rapidity of lightning between the base of the occiput and the trapezoid *rfuscles, that death would be instantaneous, and the pain momentary ? "

" Certainly; death would be instantaneous, for the iron would sever the nerves which cause motion at a blow. The pain would be momentary, for the blade would separate the brain, which is the seat of the feelings, from the heart, which is the centre of life."

" Sir," said Balsamo, " the punishment of decapitation exists in Germany/'

" Yes, but by the sword ; and, as I said before, a man's hand may tremble."

" Such a machine exists in Italy; an arm of oak wields it. It is called the *mannaja*."

" Well ? "

" Well, sir, I have seen criminals, decapitated by the executioner, raise their headless bodies from the bench on which they were seated, and stagger five or six paces off, where they fell. I have picked up heads which had rolled to the foot of the *mannaja*, as that head you are holding by the hair has just rolled from the marble table, and on pronouncing in their ears the name by which those persons had been called, I have seen the eyes open again and turn in their orbit, in their endeavours to see who had called them back again to earth."

" A nervous movement—nothing else."

" Are the nerves not the organs of sensibility ? "

" What do you conclude from that, sir ? "

" I conclude that it would be better, instead of inventing a machine which kills to punish, that man should seek a means of punishing without killing."

The society which will invent this means will assuredly be the best and the most enlightened of societies.¹

" Utopias again ! always Utopias ! " said Marat.

" Perhaps you are right," said Balsamo; " time will show. But did you not speak of the hospital ? Let us go ! "

" Come, then," said Marat; and he tied the woman's head in his pocket-handkerchief, carefully knotting the four corners. " Now, I am sure, at least," said he, as he left the hall, " that my comrades will only have my leavings."

They took the way to the Hotel Dieu—the dreamer and the practician, side by side.

" You have cut off this head very coolly and very skilfully, sir," said Balsamo ; " do you feel less emotion when you operate upon the living than the dead ? Does the sight of suffering affect you more than that of immobility ? Have you more pity for living bodies than for corpses ? "

" No; that would be as great a fault as for the executioner to be moved. You may kill a man by cutting his thigh unskilfully, just as well as by severing the head from the body. A good surgeon operates with his hand, not with his heart; though he knows well at the same time in his heart, that for one moment of suffering he gives years of life and health. That is the fair side of our profession, master."

" Yes, sir; but in the living bodies you meet with the soul, I hope."

" Yes, if you will agree with me that the soul is motion, or sensibility. Yes, certainly, I meet with it ; and it is very troublesome, too; for it kills far more patients than any scalpel."

They had by this time arrived at the threshold of the Hotel Dieu, and now entered the hospital. Guided

by Marat, who still earned his ominous Burden, Balsamo penetrated to the hall where the operations were performed, in which the head-surgeon and the students in surgery were assembled. The attendant had just brought in a young man who had been run over the preceding week by a heavy carriage, the wheel of which had crushed his foot. A hasty operation, performed upon the limb when benumbed by pain, had not been sufficient; the inflammation had rapidly extended, and the amputation of the leg had now become urgent.

The unfortunate man, stretched upon his bed of anguish, looked with a horror which would have melted tigers at the band of eager students who were watching for the moment of his martyrdom, perhaps of his death, that they might study the science of life—that marvellous phenomenon behind which lies the gloomy phenomenon of death.

He seemed to implore a pitying look, a smile, or a word of encouragement from each of the students and attendants, but the beatings of his heart were responded to only by indifference, his beseeching looks with glances of iron. A surviving emotion of pride kept him silent. He reserved all his strength for the cries which pain would soon wring from him. But when he felt the heavy hand of the attendant upon his shoulder, when the arms of the assistants twined around him like the serpents of Laocoon, when he heard the operator's voice cry, "Courage!" the unfortunate man ventured to break the silence, and asked in a plaintive voice,—

"Shall I suffer much?"

"Oh, no, make your mind easy," replied Marat, with a hypocritical smile, which was affectionate to the patient, but ironical to Balsamo.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

Macrkt saw that *Balsamo* had understood him ; he approached and whispered,—

"•It is a dreadful operation. The bone is full of cracks and fearfully sensitive. He will die, not of the wound, but of the pain. That is what the soul does for this poor man."

" Then why do you operate ? why do you not let him die in peace ? "

" Because it is the surgeon's duty to attempt a cure, even when the cure seems impossible."

" And you say he will suffer ? "

" Fearfully/'

" And that his soul is the cause ? "

" His soul, which has too much sympathy with the body/'

" Then, why not operate upon the soul ? Perhaps the tranquillity of the one would cause the cure of the other/'

" I have done so," said *Marat*, while the attendants continued to bind the patient.

" You have prepared his soul ? "

" Yes."

" How so ? "

" As one always does, by words. I spoke to his soul, his intelligence, his sensibility—to that organ which caused the Greek philosopher to exclaim, ' Pain, thou art no evil'—the language suitable for it. I said to him : ' You will not suffer/ That is the only remedy hitherto known, as regards the soul—falsehood! "Why is this she-devil of a soul connected with the body ? When I cut off this head just now the body said nothing, yet the operation was a serious one. But motion had ceased, sensibihty was extinguished, the soul **had fled**, as you spiritualists say. This is **the reason why the head I severed said** nothing, why the body

which I mutilated allowed me to do so ; while this body which is yet inhabited by a soul—for a short time indeed, but still inhabited—will cry out fearfully. Stop your ears well, master, you who are moved by this union of body and soul, which will always destroy your theory until you succeed in isolating the body from the soul."

" And you believe we shall never arrive at this isolation ? "

" Try," said Marat, " this is an excellent opportunity."

" Well, yes, you are right," said Balsamo; " the opportunity is a good one, and I will make the attempt."

" Yes, try."

" I will."

" How so ? "

" This young man interests me ; he shall not sutler."

" You are an illustrious chief," said Marat, " but you are not the Almighty, and you cannot prevent this wretch from suffering."

" If he were not to feel the pain, do you think he would recover ? "

" His recovery would be more probable but not certain."

Balsamo cast an inexpressible look of triumph upon Marat, and placing himself before the young patient, whose frightened eyes, already dilated with the anguish of terror, met his,—

" Sleep," said he, not alone with his lips, but with his look, with his will—with all the heat of his blood, all the vital energy of his body.

The head-surgeon was just commencing to feel the injured leg, and to point out the aggravated nature of the case to his students ; but, at Balsamo's

command, the young man, who had raised himself upon his seat, oscillated for a moment in the arms of his attendants, his head drooped, and his eyes closed.

"He is ill," said Marat.

"No, sir."

"But do you not see that he loses consciousness?"

"He is sleeping."

"What! he sleeps?"

"Yes."

Every one turned to look at the strange physician, whom they took for a madman. An incredulous smile hovered on Marat's lips,

"Is it usual for people to talk whilst in a swoon?" asked Balsamo.

"No."

"Well! question him—he will reply."

"Hallo! young man!" cried Marat.

"You need not speak so loud," said Balsamo; "speak in your usual voice."

"Tell us what is the matter with you."

"I was ordered to sleep, and I do sleep," replied the patient.

His voice was perfectly calm, and formed a strange contrast to that they had heard a few moments before.

All the attendants looked at each other.

"Now," said Balsamo, "release him."

"That is impossible," said the head-surgeon; "the slightest movement will spoil the operation."

"He will not stir."

"Who can assure me of that?"

"I, and he also—ask him."

"Can you be left untied, my friend?"

"Yes."

"And will you promise not to move?"

"I will promise it, if you command me."

" I command it. "

" Faith ! sir, you speak so positively that I am tempted to make the trial. "

" Do so, sir ; and fear nothing. "

" Untie him. "

The assistants obeyed.

Balsamo advanced to the bedside.

" From this moment, " said he, " do not stir until I - order you. "

A carved statue upon a tombstone could not have been more motionless than the patient, upon this injunction.

" Now, operate, sir, " said Balsamo ; " the patient is quite ready. "

The surgeon took his bistoury ; but, when upon the point of using it, he hesitated.

" Cut, sir ! cut ! " said Balsamo, with the air of an inspired prophet.

And the surgeon, yielding—like Marat, like the patient, like every one present—to the irresistible influence of Balsamo's words, raised the knife. The sound of the knife passing through the flesh was heard, but the patient never stirred, nor even uttered a sigh.

" From what country do you come, my friend ? " asked Balsamo.

" I am a Breton, sir, " replied the patient, smiling.

" And you love your country. "

" Oh ! sir, it is so beautiful ! "

In the meantime the surgeon was making the circular incisions in the flesh, by means of which, in amputations, the bone is laid bare.

" You quitted it when young ? " asked Balsamo.

" At ten years of age, sir. "

The incisions were made—the surgeon placed the saw on the bone.

" My friend," said Balsamo, " sing me that song which the salt-makers of Batz chant as they return to their homes after the day's work is over. I can only remember the first line :—

" ' My salt covered o'er with its mantle of foam/ "

The saw was now severing the bone; but at Balsamo's command the patient smiled, and commenced, in a low, melodious, ecstatic voice, like a lover or like a poet, the following verses :—

" ' My salt covered o'er with its mantle of foam,
The lake of pure azure that mirrors my home.
My stove where the peats ever cheerfully bum,
And the honeyed wheat-cake which awaits my
return,—

" ' The wife of my bosom—my silver-haired sire—
My urchins who sport round the clear evening
fire—
And there, where the wild flowers, in brightest
of bloom,
Their fragrance diffuse round my loved
mother's tomb,—

" ' Blest, blest be ye all!—Now the day's task
is o'er.
And I stand once again at my own cottage
door;
And richly will love my brief absence repay,
And the calm joys of eve the rude toils of the
day/ "

The leg fell upon the bed while the patient was still singing.

CHAPTER XX

BODY AND SOUL

EVERY "one looked with astonishment at the patient—with admiration at the surgeon. Some said that both were mad. Marat communicated this opinion to Balsamo in a whisper.

"Terror has made the poor devil lose his senses," said he; "that is why he feels no pain/

"I think not," replied Balsamo; "and far from having lost his senses, I am sure that if I asked him he could tell us the day of his death, if he is to die, or the period of his convalescence, if he is to recover."

Marat was almost inclined to adopt the general opinion—that Balsamo was as mad as his patient. In the meantime, however, the surgeon was tying up the arteries, from which spouted streams of blood.

Balsamo drew a small phial from his pocket, poured a few drops of the liquid it contained upon a little ball of lint, and begged the chief surgeon to apply the lint to the arteries. The latter obeyed with a certain feeling of curiosity. He was one of the most celebrated practitioners of that period—a man truly enamoured of his profession, who repudiated none of its mysteries, and for whom chance was but the makeshift of doubt.

He applied the lint to the artery, which quivered, bubbled, and then only allowed the blood to escape drop by drop. He could now tie up the artery with the greatest facility.

This time Balsamo obtained an undoubted triumph, and all present asked him where he had studied, and of what school he was.

" I am a German physician of the school of Gottmgen/' replied he, " and I have made this discovery you hare just witnessed. However, gentlemen and fellow practitioners, I wish this discovery to remain a secret for the present, as I have a wholesome terror of the stake, and the parliament of Paris might perhaps resume their functions once more for the pleasure of condemning a sorcerer."

The chief surgeon was still plunged in a reverie. Marat also seemed thoughtful, but he was the first to break the silence.

" You said just now," said he, " that if you were to question this man about the result of this operation he would reply truly, though the result is still veiled in futurity."

" I assert it again," replied Balsamo.

" Well, let us have the proof,"

" What is this poor fellow's name ? "

" Havard," replied Marat.

Balsamo turned to the patient, whose lips were yet murmuring the last words of the plaintive air.

" Well, my friend," asked he, " what do you augur from the state of this poor Havard ? "

" What do I augur from his state! " replied the patient; " stay, I must return from Brittany, where I was, to the Hdteel Dieu, where he is."

" Just so ; enter, look at him and tell me the truth respecting him."

" Oh! he is very ill; his leg has been cut off."

" Indeed ? " said Balsamo. " And has the operation been successful ? "

" Exceedingly so ; but——"

The patient's face darkened.

" But what ? " asked Balsamo.

" But," resumed the patient, " he has, a terrible trial to pass through. The fever——"

" When will it commence."

" At seven o'clock this evening."

All the spectators looked at each other.

" And this fever ? " asked Balsamo.

" Oh ! it will make him very ill ; but he will recover from the first attack."

" Are you sure ? "

" Oh, yes."

" Then, after this first attack, will he be saved ? "

" Alas ! no," said the wounded man, sighing.

" Will the fever return, then ? "

" Oh, yes ! and more severely than before. Poor Havard ! poor Havard ! " he continued, " he has a wife and several children." And his eyes filled with tears.

" Must his wife be a widow, then, and his children orphans ? " asked Balsamo.

" Wait ! wait ! "

He clasped his hands.

" No, no," he exclaimed, his features lighting up with an expression of sublime faith ; " no, his wife and children have prayed, and their prayers have found favour in the sight of God ! "

" Then he will recover ? "

" Yes."

" You hear, gentlemen," said Balsamo, " he will recover."

" Ask him in how many days," said Marat.

" In how many days, do you say ? "

" Yes ; you said he could indicate the phases, and the duration of his convalescence."

" I ask nothing better than to question him on the subject."

" Well, then, question him now."

" And when do you think Havard will recover ? " said Balsamo.

" Oh! his cure will take a long time—a month, six weeks, two months. He entered this hospital five days ago, and he will leave it two months and fourteen days after having entered."

" And he will leave it cured ? "

" Yes,"

" But," said Marat, " unable to work, and consequently to maintain his wife and children."

Havard again clasped his hands.

" Oh ! God is good ; God will provide for him ! "

" And how will God provide for him ? " asked Marat. " As I am in the way of hearing something new to-day, I might as well hear that."

" God has sent to his bedside a charitable man who has taken pity upon him, and who has said to himself, ' Poor Havard shall not want/ "

The spectators were amazed; Balsamo smiled.

" Ha! this is in truth a strange scene," said the chief surgeon, at the same time taking the patient's hand, feeling his chest and forehead; " this man is dreaming."

" Do you think so ? " said Balsamo.

Then, darting upon the sick man a look of authority and energy:

" Awake, Havard ! " said he.

The young man opened his eyes with some difficulty, and gazed with profound surprise upon all these spectators, who had so soon laid aside their threatening character, and assumed an inoffensive one towards him.

" Well," said he sadly, " have you not operated yet ? Are you going to make me suffer still more ? "

Balsamo replied hastily. He feared the invalid's emotion. But there was no need for Such haste; the surprise of all the spectators was so gr?at that none would have anticipated him.

" My friend/' said he, " be calm. The head-surgeon has operated upon your leg in such a manner as to satisfy all the requirements of your position. It seems, my poor fellow, that you are not very strong-minded, for you fainted at the first incision/'

" Oh ! so much the better," said the Breton smilingly; " I felt nothing, and my sleep was even sweet and refreshing. What happiness—my leg will not be cut off !"

But just at that moment the poor man looked down, and saw the bed full of blood, and his amputated leg lying near him. He uttered a scream, and this time fainted in reality.

" Now, question him/' said Balsamo coldly to Marat; " you will see if he replies/'

Then, taking the head-surgeon aside, while the nurses carried the poor young man back to his bed.

" Sir/' said Balsamo, " you heard what your poor patient said ? "

" Yes, sir, that he would recover."

" He said something else : he said that God would take pity upon him, and would send him wherewithal to support his wife and children."

" Well ? "

" Well, sir, he tuld the truth on this point, as on the others. Only you must undertake to be the charitable medium of affording him this assistance. Here is a diamond, worth about twenty thousand livres; when the poor man is cured, sell it and give him the proceeds. In the meantime, since the soul, as your pupil M. Marat said very truly, has a great influence upon the body, tell Havard as soon as he is restored

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

to consciousness that his future comfort and that of his children is secured."

" But, sir' said the surgeon, hesitating to take the ring which Balsamo offered him, " if he should not recover ? "

" He will recover/

" Then allow me at least to give you a receipt."

" Sir ! "

" That is the only condition upon which I can receive a jewel of such value."

" Do as you think right, sir."

" Your name, if you please ? "

" The Count de Fenix."

The surgeon passed into the adjoining apartment, while Marat, overwhelmed, confounded, but still struggling against the evidence of his senses, approached Balsamo.

In five minutes the surgeon returned, holding in his hand the following receipt, which he gave Balsamo :

" I have received from the Count de Fenix a diamond which he affirms to be worth twenty thousand livres, the price of which is to be given to the man Havard when he leaves the Hdtel Dieu.

" This 15th of September, 1771.

" GUILLOTIN, MJD."

Balsamo bowed to the doctor, took the receipt, and left the room, followed by Marat.

" You are forgetting your head," said Balsamo, for whom the wandering of the young student's thoughts was a great triumph.

" Ah ! true," said he.

And he again picked up his dismal burden. When they emerged into the street, both walked forward

very quickly without uttering a word; then, ^Mhaving reached the Rue des Cordeliers, they ascended the steep stairs which led to the attic.

Marat, who had not forgotten the disappearance of his watch, stopped before the lodge of the portress, if the den which she inhabited deserved that name, and asked for Dame Grivette.

A thin, stunted, miserable-looking child, of about seven years old, replied in a whining voice,—

"Mamma is gone out; she said that when you came home I was to give you this letter."

"No, no, my little friend/" said Marat; "tell her to bring it me herself."

"Yes, sir."

And Marat and Balsamo proceeded on their way.

"Ah!" said Marat, pointing out a chair to Balsamo, and falling upon a stool himself, "I see the master has some noble secrets."

"Perhaps I have penetrated farther than most men into the confidence of nature and into the works of God," replied Balsamo.

"Oh!" said Marat, "how science **proves man's** omnipotence, and makes us proud to be a man I"

"True; and a physician, you should have added."

"Therefore I am proud of you, master," said Marat.

"And yet," replied Balsamo, smiling, "I am but a poor physician of souls."

"Oh! do not speak of that, sir—**you, who stopped** the patient's bleeding by material means."

"I thought my best cure was that of having prevented him from suffering. True, you assured me **he** was mad."

"He was so for a moment, certainly."

"What do you call madness? Is it not an abstraction of **the** soul?"

" Or of the mind'.' said Marat.

" We will not discuss the point. The soul serves me as a term for what I mean. When the object is found, it matters little how you call it."

" There is where we differ, sir; you pretend you have found the thing and seek only the name; I maintain that you seek both the object and the name."

⁴⁴ " We shall return to that immediately. You said, then, that madness was a temporary abstraction of the mind? "

" Certainly."

" Involuntary, is it not."

" Yes; I have seen a madman at Bicetre, who bit the iron bars of his cell, crying out all the time, ' Cook, your pheasants are very tender, but they are badly dressed/ "

" But you admit, at least, that this madness passes over the mind like a cloud, and that when it has passed, the mind resumes its former brightness? "

" That scarcely ever happens."

" Yet you saw our patient recover his senses perfectly after his insane dream."

" I saw it, but I did not understand what I saw. It is an exceptional case—one of those strange events which the Israelites called miracles."

" No, sir," said Balsamo; " it is simply the abstraction of the soul—the twofold isolation of spirit and matter. Matter—that inert thing—dust—which will return to dust; and soul, the divine spark which was enclosed for a short period in that dark lantern called the body, and which, being the child of heaven, will return to heaven after the body has sunk to earth."

" Then you abstracted the soul momentarily from the body? "

" Yes, sir; I commended it to quit the miserable

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

abode which it occupied. I raised it from the abyss of suffering in which pain had bound it, and transported it into pure and heavenly regions. What, then, remained for the surgeon? The same that remained for your dissecting knife, when you severed that head you are carrying from the dead body—nothing but inert flesh, matter, clay."

"And in whose name did you command the soul?"

"In His name Who created all the souls by His breath—the souls of the world of men—in the name of God."

"Then," said Marat, "you deny free will?"

"I?" said Balsamo; "on the contrary, what am I doing at this moment? I show you, on the one hand, free will; on the other, abstraction. I show you a dying man a prey to excruciating pain; this man has a stoical soul, he anticipates the operation, he asks for it, he bears it, but he suffers. That is free will. But when I approach the dying man—I, the ambassador of God, the prophet, the apostle—and taking pity upon this man who is my fellow-creature, I abstract, by the powers which the Lord has given me, the soul from the suffering body, this blighted, inert, insensible body becomes a spectacle which the soul contemplates with a pitying eye from the height of its celestial sphere. Did you not hear Havard, when speaking of himself say, 'this poor Havard?' He did not say '*myself*.' It was because this soul had in truth no longer any connection with the body—it was already winging its way to heaven."

"But, by this way of reckoning, man is nothing," said Marat, "and I can no longer say to the tyrant, 'You have power over my body, but none over my soul/'"

"Ah! now you pass from truth to sophism; I have already told you, sir, it is your failing. God

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

lends the soul to the bod}', it is true ; but it is no less true that during the time the soul animates this body, there is a union between the two—an influence of one over the other—a supremacy of matter over mind, or mind over matter, according as, for some purpose hidden from us, God permits either the body or the soul to be the ruling power. But it is no less true that the soul which animates the beggar is as pure as that which reigns in the bosom of the king. That is the dogma which you, an apostle of equality, ought to preach. Prove the equality of the spiritual essences in these two cases, since you can establish it by the aid of all that is most sacred in the eyes of men, by holy books and traditions, by science and faith. Of what importance is the equality of matter ? With physical equality you are only men ; but spiritual equality makes you gods. Just now, this poor wounded man, this ignorant child of the people, told you things concerning his illness which none amongst the doctors would have ventured to pronounce. How was that ? It was because his soul, temporarily freed from earthly ties, floated above this world and saw from on high a mystery which our opaqueness of vision hides from us."

Marat turned his dead head back and forward upon the table, seeking a reply which he could not And. " Yes," muttered he at last ; " yes, there is something supernatural in all this."

" Perfectly natural, on the contrary, sir. Cease to call supernatural what has its origin in the functions and destiny of the soul. These functions are natural, although perhaps not known."

" But though unknown to us, master, these functions cannot surely be a mystery to you. The horse, unknown to the Peruvians, was yet perfectly familiar to the Spaniards, who had tamed him."

" It would be presumptuous in me to say ' I know/ I am more humble, sir ; I say, ' I believe.' " ' ' "

" Well! what do you believe ? "

" I believe that the first, the most powerful, of all laws is the law of progress. I believe that God has created nothing without having a beneficent design in view ; only, as the duration of this world is uncalculated and incalculable, the progress is slow. Our planet, according to the Scriptures, was sixty centuries old when printing came like some vast lighthouse to illuminate the past and the future. With the advent of printing, obscurity and forgetfulness vanished. Printing is the memory of the world. Well! Gutenberg invented printing, and my confidence returned/ "

" Ah ! " said Marat ironically, " you will, perhaps, be able at last to read men's hearts. "

" Why not ? "

" Then you will open that little window in men's breasts which the ancients so much desired to see ? "

" There is no need for that, sir. I shall separate the soul from the body ; and the Soul—the pure immaculate daughter of God—will reveal to me all the turpitudes of the mortal covering *it* is condemned to animate. "

" Can you reveal material secrets ? "

" Why not! "

" Can you tell me, for instance, who has stolen my watch ? "

" You lower science to a base level, sir. But, no matter. God's greatness is proved as much by a grain of sand as by the mountain—by the flesh-worm as by the elephant. Yes, I will tell you who has stolen your watch. "

" Just then a timid knock was heard at the door. It was Marat's servant who had returned, and who

came, according to the young surgeon's order, to bring the letter.

CHAPTER XXI

MARAT'S PORTRESS

THE door opened and Dame Grivette entered. This woman, whom we have not before taken the trouble to sketch, because she was one of those characters whom the painter keeps in the background, so long as he has no occasion for them—this woman now advances in the moving picture of this history, and demands her place in the immense picture we have undertaken to unroll before the eyes of our readers, in which, if our genius equalled our good-will, we would introduce all classes of men, from the beggar to the king, from Caliban to Ariel.

We shall now therefore attempt to delineate Dame Grivette, who steps forth out of the shade, and advances towards us.

She was a tall withered creature, of from thirty to five-and-thirty years of age, with dark, sallow complexion, and blue eyes encircled with black rings—the fearful type of that decline, that wasting-away which is produced in densely-populated towns by poverty, bad air, and every sort of degradation, mental as well as bodily, amongst those creatures whom God created so beautiful, and who would otherwise have become magnificent in their perfect development, as all living denizens of earth, air, and sky are when man has not made their life one long punishment—when he has not tortured their limbs with chains and their stomachs with hunger, or with food almost as fatal.

Thus Marat's portress would have been a "beautiful woman, if from her fifteenth year she had not dwelt in a den without air or light—if the fire of her natural instincts, fed by this oven-like heat, or by the icy cold, had not ceaselessly burned. She had long, thin hands, which the needle of the sempstress had furrowed with little cuts, which the suds of the wash-house had cracked and softened—which the burning coals of the kitchen had roasted and tanned—but in spite of all, hands which, by their form, that indelible trace of the divine mould, would have been called royal, if, instead of being blistered by the broom, they had wielded the sceptre. So true is it that this poor human body is only the outward sign of our profession.

But in this woman, the mind, which rose superior to the body, and which consequently had resisted external circumstances better, kept watch like a lamp ; it illumined, as it were, the body by a reflected light, and at times a ray of beauty, youth, intelligence, and love was seen to glance from her dulled and stupid eyes—a ray of all the finest feelings of the human heart.

Balsamo gazed attentively at the woman, or rather at this singular nature, which had from the first struck his observing eye.

The portress entered holding the letter in her hand, and in a soft insinuating voice, like that of an old woman—for women condemned to poverty are old at thirty—said,—

" M. Marat, here is the letter you asked for."

" It was not the letter I wanted," said Marat; " I wished to see you."

" Well! here I am at your service, Monsieur Marat " (Dame Grivette made a curtsy) " what do you want with me ? '-

" You know very well what I want. I wish to know something about my watch."

" Ah, *dame!* I can't tell what has become of it. J Saw it all day yesterday hanging from the nail over the mantelpiece/

" You mistake; all day yesterday it was in my fob ; but when I went out at six o'clock in the evening I put it under the candlestick, because I was going among a crowd, and I feared it might be stolen."

" If you put it under the candlestick, it must be there yet."

And with feigned simplicity, which she was far from suspecting to be so transparent, she raised the very candlestick, of the pair which ornamented the mantelpiece, under which Marat had concealed his watch.

" Yes, that is the candlestick, sure enough," said the young man ; " but where is the watch ? "

" No ; I see it is no longer there. Perhaps you did not put it there, M. Marat."

" But when I tell you I did."

" Look for it carefully."

" Oh, I have looked carefully enough," said Marat, with an angry glance.

" Then you have lost it."

" But I tell you that yesterday I put it under that candlestick myself."

" Then some one must have entered," said Dame Grivette; " you see so many people, so many strangers."

" All an excuse ! " cried Marat, more and more enraged. " You know very well that no one has been here since yesterday. No, no ; my watch is gone where the silver top of my last cane went, where the little silver spoon you know of is gone to, and my knife

with the six blades. I am robbed, Dame Grivette! I have borne much, but I shall not tolerate this": so take notice/'

" But, sir," said Dame Grivette, " do you mean to accuse me ? "

" You ought to take care of my effects."

" I have not even the key."

" You are the portress."

" You give me a crown a month, and you expect to be as well served as if you had ten domestics."

"I do not care about being badly served; but I do care whether I am robbed or not."

" Sir, I am an honest woman."

" Yes, an honest woman whom I shall give in charge to the police if my watch is not found in an hour."

" To the police ? "

" Yes."

" To the police—an honest woman like me? "

" An honest woman, do you say ? Honest! that's good."

" Yes; and of whom nothing bad can be said! do you hear that ? "

" Come,, come ! enough of this, Dame Grivette."

" Ah ! I thought that you suspected me, when you went out."

" I have suspected you ever since the top of my cane disappeared."

" Well! M. Marat, I will tell you something, in my turn."

" What will you tell me ? "

" While you were away I have consulted my neighbours."

" Your neighbours !—for what purpose ? "

" Respecting your suspicions."

" I had said nothing of them to you at the time."

" But I saw them plainly."

" Arid the neighbours ? I am curious to know what they said."

" They said that if you suspect me, and have even gone so far as to impart your suspicions to another person, you must pursue the affair to the end."

" Well! "

" That is to say, you must prove that the watch has been taken."

" It has been taken, since it was there and is now gone."

" Yes, but taken by me—taken by me ; do you understand ? Oh ! justice requires proofs ; your word will not be sufficient, M. Marat; you are no more than one of ourselves, M. Marat."

Balsamo, calm as ever, looked on during this scene. He saw that though Marat's conviction was not altered he had, nevertheless, lowered his tone.

" Therefore," continued the portress, " if you do not render justice to my probity—if you do not make some reparation to my character—it is I who will send for the police, as our landlord just now advised me to do."

Marat bit his lips. He knew there was a real danger in this. The landlord was an old, rich, retired merchant. He lived on the third story ; and the scandal-mongers of the quarter did not hesitate to assert that, some ten years before, he had not been indifferent to the charms of the portress, who was then kitchen-maid to his wife.

Now, Marat attended mysterious meetings. Marat was a young man of not very settled habits, besides being addicted to concealment and suspected by the police ; and, for all these reasons, he was not anxious to have an affair with the commissary, seeing that it

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

might tend to place him in the hands of M. de Sartines, who liked much to read the papers of 'young' men such as Marat, and to send the authors of such noble writings to houses of meditation, such as Vincennes, the Bastille, Charenton, and Bicetre.

Marat, therefore, lowered his tone ; but, in proportion as he did so, the portress raised hers. The result was that this nervous and hysterical woman raged like a flame which suddenly meets with a current of fresh air.

Oaths, cries, tears—she employed all in turn ; it was a regular tempest.

Then Balsamo judged that the time had come for him to interfere. He advanced towards the woman, and looking at her with an ominous and fiery glance, he stretched two fingers towards her, uttering, not so much with his lips as with his eyes, his thought, his whole will, a word which Marat could not hear.

Immediately Dame Grivette became silent, tottered and, losing her equilibrium, staggered backwards, her eyes fearfully dilated, and fell upon the bed without uttering a word.

After a short interval her eyes closed and opened again, but this time the pupil could not be seen ; her tongue moved convulsively, but her body was perfectly motionless, and yet her hands trembled as if shaken by fever.

" Ha ! " said Maiat ; " like the wounded man in the hospital ! "

" Yes."

" Then she is asleep ? "

" Silence ! " said Balsamo.

Then, addressing Marat,—

" Sir," said he, " the moment has now come when all your incredulity must cease. Pick up that letter

which this woman was bringing you, and which she dropped when she fell."

Marat obeyed.

"Well?" he asked.

"Wait!"

And taking the letter from Marat's hands,—

"You know from whom this letter comes?" asked Balsamo of the somnambulist.

"No, sir," she replied.

Balsamo held the sealed letter close to the woman. "Read it to M. Marat, who wishes to know the contents."

"She cannot read," said Marat.

"Yes, but you can read?"

"Of course."

"Well, read it, and she will read it after you in proportion as the words are engraven upon your mind."

Marat broke the seal of the letter and read it, while Dame Grivette, standing, and trembling beneath the all-powerful will of Balsamo, repeated word for word, as Marat read them to himself, the following words:

"MY DEAR HYPOCRATES,—

"Apelles has just finished his portrait; he has sold it for fifty francs, and these fifty francs are to be eaten to-day at the tavern in the Rue Saint Jacques. Will you come?"

"P.S.—It is understood that part is to be drunk.

"Your friend,

"L. DAVID."

It was word for word what was written.

Marat let the paper fall from his hand.

"Well," said Balsamo, "you see that Dame Grivett also has a soul, and that this soul wakes while she sleeps."

" And a strange soul," said Marat; "a soul which can read when the body cannot."

" Because the soul knows everything—because the soul can reproduce by reflection. Try to make her read this when she is awake—this is to say, when the body has wrapped the soul in its shadow—and you will see."

Marat was dumb; his whole material philosophy rebelled within him, but he could not find a reply.

" Now," continued Balsamo, " we shall pass on to what interests you most; that is to say, as to what has become of your watch. Dame Grivette," said he, turning to her, " who has taken M. Marat's watch ? "

The somnambulist made a violent gesture of denial.

" I do not know," said she.

" You know perfectly well," persisted Balsamo, " and you shall tell me."

Then, with a more decided exertion of his will,—

" Who has taken M. Marat's watch ?—speak ! Dame Grivette has not stolen M. Marat's watch. Why does M. Marat believe she has ? "

" If it is not she who has taken it, tell me who has ? "

" I do not know."

" You see," said Marat, " conscience is an impenetrable refuge."

" Well, since you have only this last doubt," said Balsamo, " you shall be convinced."

Then, turning again to the portress,—

" Tell me who took the watch ; I insist upon it."

" Come, come," said Marat, " do not ask an impossibility ! "

" You heard ? " said Balsamo ; " I have said you must tell me."

Then, beneath the pressure of this imperious command, the unhappy woman began to wring her hands

and arms as if she were mad; a shudder like that of an epileptic fit ran through her whole body; her mouth was distorted with a hideous expression of terror and weakness; she threw herself back, rigid as if she were in a painful convulsion, and fell upon the bed.

"No, no," said she; "I would rather die!"

"Well," said Balsamo, with a burst of anger which made the fire flash from his eyes, "you shall die if necessary, but you shall speak. Your silence and your obstinacy are sufficient indications for me; but for an incredulous person we must have irrefragable proofs. Speak!—I will give it: who has taken the watch?"

The nervous excitement was at its height; all the strength and power of the somnambulist struggled against Balsamo's will; inarticulate cries escaped from her lips, which were stained with a reddish foam.

"She will fall into an epileptic fit," said Marat.

"Fear nothing; it is the demon of falsehood which is in her, and who refuses to come out."

Then, turning towards the woman, and throwing in her face as much fluid as his hands could contain.

"Speak," said he; "who has taken the watch?"

"Dame Grivette," replied the somnambulist, in an almost inaudible voice.

"When did she take it?"

"Yesterday evening."

"Where was it?"

"Underneath the candlestick."

"What has she done with it?"

"She has taken it to the Rue Saint Jacques."

"Where in the Rue Saint Jacques?"

"To No. 29."

"Which story?"

"The fifth."

"To whom did she give it?"

"To a shoemaker's apprentice "

"What is his name ? "

"Simon."

"What is this man to her."

The woman was silent.

"What is this man to her ? "

The somnambulist was again silent.

"What is this man to her ? " repeated Balsamo.

The same silence.

Balsamo extended towards her his hand, impregnated with the fluid, and the unfortunate woman, overwhelmed by this terrible attack, had only strength to murmur,—

"Her lover."

Marat utter an exclamation of astonishment.

"Silence ! " said Balsamo ; "allow conscience to speak."

Then, continuing to address the woman, who was trembling all over, and bathed in perspiration,—

"And who advised Dame Grivette to steal the watch ? " asked he.

"No one. She raised the candlestick by accident, she saw the watch, and the demon tempted her."

"Did she do it from want ? "

"No ; for she did not sell the watch."

"She gave it away, then ? "

"Yes."

"To Simon ? "

The somnambulist made a violent effort.

"To Simon," said she.

Then she covered her face with her hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

Balsamo glanced at Marat, who, with gaping mouth, disordered hair, and dilated eyes, was gazing at the fearful spectacle.

" Well-, sir ! " said he ; " you see, at last, the struggle between the body and the soul. You see conscience forced to yield, even in a redoubt which it had believed impregnable. Do you confess now that God has forgotten nothing in this world, and that He is in everything. Then deny no longer that there is a conscience—deny no longer that there is a soul—deny no longer the unknown, young man ! Above all, do not deny faith, which is power supreme; and since you are ambitious, M. Marat, study ; speak little, think much, and do not judge your superiors lightly. Adieu ! My words have opened a vast field before you; cultivate this field which contains hidden treasures. Adieu ! Happy will you be if you can conquer the demon of incredulity which is in you, as I have conquered the demon of falsehood which was in this woman."

And with these words, which caused the blush of shame to tinge the young man's cheeks, he left the room.

Marat did not even think of taking leave of him. But after his first stupor was over, he perceived that Dame Grivette was still sleeping. This sleep struck terror to his soul. Marat would rather have seen a corpse upon his bed, even if M. de Sartines should interpret the fact after his own fashion.

He gazed on this lifeless form, these turned-up eyes, these palpitations, and he felt afraid. His fear increased when the living corpse rose, advanced towards him, took his hand, and said,—

" Come with me, M. Marat."

" Where to ? "

" To the Rue St. Jacques."

" Why ? "

" Come, come; he commands me to take you."

Marat, who had fallen upon a chair, rose.

Then Dame Grivette, still asleep, opened the door,

and descended the stairs with the stealthy pace of a cat, scarcely touching the steps.

Marat followed, fearing every moment that she would fall, and in falling break her neck.

Having reached the foot of the stairs, she crossed the threshold, and entered the street, still followed by the young man whom she led in this manner to the house and the garret she had pointed out.

She knocked at the door ; Marat felt his heart beat so violently that he thought it must be audible.

A man was in the garret; he opened the door. In this man Marat recognised a workman of from nve-and-twenty to thirty years of age, whom he had several times seen in the porter's lodge.

Seeing Dame Grivette followed by Marat, he started back.

But the somnambulist walked straight to the bed, and putting her hand under the thin bolster, she drew out the watch, which she gave to Marat, whilst the shoemaker Simon, pale with terror, dared not utter a word, and watched with alarmed gaze the least movements of this woman, whom he believed to be mad.

Scarcely had her hand touched Marat's, in returning him the watch, than she gave a deep sigh and murmured,—

" He awakes me ! He awakes me ! "

Her nerves relaxed like a cable freed from the capstan, the vital spark again animated her eyes, and finding herself face to face with Marat, her hand in his, and still holding the watch—that is to say the irrefragable proof of her crime—she fell upon the floor of the garret in a deep swoon.

" Does conscience really exist, then ? " asked Marat of himself, as he left the room, doubt in his heart and reverie in his eyes.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MAN AND HIS WORKS

WHILE Marat was employing his time so profitably in philosophising on conscience and a dual existence, another philosopher in the Rue Platriere was also busy in reconstructing, piece by piece, every part of the preceding evening's adventures, and asking himself if he were or were not a very wicked man. Rousseau, with his elbows leaning upon the table, and his head drooping heavily on his left shoulder, was deep in thought.

His philosophical and political works, *Emilius* and the *Social Contract* were lying open before him.

From time to time, when his reflections required it, he stooped down to turn over the leaves of these books, which he knew by heart.

" Ah ! good heavens ! " said he, reading a paragraph from *Emilius* upon liberty of conscience, " what incendiary expressions ! What philosophy ! Just heaven ! was there ever in the world a firebrand like me ?

" What ! " added he, clasping his hands above his head, " have I written such violent outbursts against the throne—the altar of society ! I can no longer be surprised if some dark and brooding minds have outstripped my sophisms, and have gone astray in the paths which I have strewed for them with all the flowers of rhetoric. I have acted as the disturber of society ! "

He rose from his chair and paced the room in great agitation.

" I have," continued he, " abused those men in power who exercise tyranny over authors. Fool ! barbarian that I was ! Those people are right—a

thousand times right! What am I, if not, a man dangerous to the state? My words, written to enlighten the masses at least, such was the pretext I gave myself—have become a torch which will set the world on fire. I have sown discourses on the inequality of ranks, projects of universal fraternity, plans of education—and now I reap a harvest of passions so ferocious that they would overturn the whole framework of society, of intestine wars capable of depopulating the world, and of manners so barbarous that they would roll back the civilisation of ten centuries!—Oh! I am a great criminal! "

He read once more a page of his *Savoyard Vicar*.

" Yes, that is it! *Let us unite to form plans for our happiness.*

" I have written it! *Let us give our virtues the force which others give to their vices.* I have written that also!"

And Rousseau became still more agitated and unhappy than before.

" Thus, by my fault," said he, " brothers are united to brothers, and one day or other some of these concealed places of meeting will be invaded by the police; the whole nest of these men, who have sworn to eat one another in case of treachery, will be arrested, and one bolder than the others will take my book from his pocket and will say—' What do you complain of? We are disciples of M. Rousseau; we are going through a course of philosophy!' Oh! how Voltaire will laugh at that! There is no fear of that courtier's ever getting into such a wasp's nest! "

The idea that Voltaire would ridicule him put the Genevese philosopher into a violent rage.

" I a conspirator! " muttered he; " I must be in my dotage, certainly! Am I not, in truth, a famous conspirator? "

He was at this point when Therese entered with the breakfast, but he did not see her. She perceived that he was attentively reading a passage in the *Reveries of a Recluse*.

"Very good/" said she, placing the hot milk noisily upon the very book; "my peacock is looking at himself in the glass! Monsieur reads his books! M. Rousseau admires himself!"

"Come, Therese," said the philosopher, "patience—leave me; I am in no humour for laughing."

"Oh, yes, it is magnificent! is it not?" said she mockingly. "You are delighted with yourself. What vanity authors have!—and how angry they are to see it in us poor women!—If I only happen to look in my little mirror, monsieur grumbles and calls me a coquette."

She proceeded in this strain, making him the most unhappy man in the world, as if Rousseau had not been richly enough endowed by nature in this respect. He drank his milk without steeping his bread. He reflected.

"Very good," said she; "there you are thinking again. You are going to write another book full of horrible things."

Rousseau shuddered.

"You dream," continued Therese, "of your ideal women, and you write books which young girls ought not to read, or else profane works which will be burnt by the hands of the common executioner."

The martyr shuddered again. Therese had touched him to the quick.

"No," replied he; "I will write nothing more which can cause an evil thought. On the contrary, I wish to write a book which all honest people will read with transports of joy."

" Oh ! oh ! " said Therese, taking away the cup ; " that is impossible ; your mind is full' of obscene thoughts. Only the other day I heard you read some passage or other, and in it you spoke of women whom you adored. You are a satyr ! a magus ! "

This word " magus " was one of the most abusive in Therese's vocabulary ; it always made Rousseau shudder.

" There, there, now ! " said he ; " my dear woman, you will find that you shall be satisfied. I intend to write that I have found the means of regenerating the world without causing pain to a single individual by the changes which will be affected. Yes, yes ; I will mature this project. No revolutions ! Great heavens ! my good Therese, no revolutions ! "

" Well, we shall see/" said the housekeeper.

" Stay ! some one rings/"

Therese went out and returned almost immediately with a handsome young man, whom she requested to wait in the outer apartment, Then, rejoining Rousseau, who was already taking notes with his pencil,—

" Be quick/" said she, " and lock all these infamous things fast. There is some one who wishes to see you."

" Who is it ? "

" A nobleman of the court,"

" Did he not tell you his name ? "

" A good idea ! as if I would receive a stranger ! "

" Tell it me, thea."

" M. de Coigny."

" M. de Coigny ! " exclaimed Rousseau ; " M. de Coigny, gentleman-in-waiting to the dauphin ? "

" It must be the same ; a charming youth, a most amiable young man."

" I will go, Therese."

Rousseau gave a glance at himself in the mirror,

dusted his coat, wiped his slippers, which were only old shoes, trodden down in the heels by long wear, and entered the dining-room, where the gentleman was waiting.

The latter had not sat down. He was looking, with a sort of curiosity, at the dried plants pasted by Rousseau upon paper, and enclosed in frames of black wood. At the noise Rousseau made in entering, he turned, and bowing most courteously,—

"Have I the honour," said he, "of speaking to M. Rousseau?"

"Yes, sir," replied the philosopher, in a morose voice, not unmingled, however, with a kind of admiration for the remarkable beauty and unaffected elegance of the person before him.

M. de Coigny was, in fact, one of the handsomest and most accomplished gentlemen in France. It must have been for him, and such as him, that the costume of that period was invented. It displayed to the greatest advantage the symmetry and beauty of his well-turned leg, his broad shoulders and deep chest; it gave a majestic air to his exquisitely-formed head, and added to the ivory whiteness of his aristocratic hands.

His examination satisfied Rousseau, who, like a true artist, admired the beautiful wherever he met with it.

"Sir," said he, "what can I do for you?"

"You have been perhaps informed, sir," replied the young nobleman, "that I am the Count de Coigny. I may add that I come from her royal highness the duchess."

Rousseau reddened and bowed. Therese, who was standing in a corner of the dining-room, with her hands *in* her pockets, gazed with complacent eyes at the handsome messenger of the greatest princess in France.

" Her royal highness wants me—for what purpose ?" asked Rousseau. " But take a chair, if you please, sir."

Rousseau sat down, and M. de Coigny drew ibrward a straw-bottomed chair, and followed his example.

" Monsieur, here is the fact. The other day, when his majesty dined at Trianon, he expressed a good deal of admiration for your music, which is indeed charming. His majesty sang your prettiest airs, and the dauphiness, who is always anxious to please his majesty in every respect, thought that it might give him pleasure to see one of your comic operas performed in the theatre at Trianon."

Rousseau bowed low.

" I come, therefore, to ask you, from the dauphiness——"

" Oh, sir," interrupted Rousseau, " my permission has nothing to do in the matter. My pieces, and the airs belonging to them, are the property of the theatre where they are represented. The permission must therefore be sought from the comedians, and her royal highness will, I am assured, find no obstacles in that quarter. The actors will be too happy to play and sing before his majesty and the court."

" That is not precisely what I am commissioned to request, sir," said M. de Coigny. " Her royal highness the dauphiness wishes to give a more complete and more recherche* entertainment to his majesty. He knows all your operas, sir."

Another bow from Rousseau.

" And sings them charmingly."

Rousseau bit his lips.

" It is too much honour," stammered he.

" Now," pursued M. de Coigny, " as several ladies of the court are excellent musicians, and sing delightfully, and as several gentlemen also have studied

music with some success, whichever of your operas the dauphiness may choose shall be performed by this company of ladies and gentlemen, the principal actors being their royal highnesses."

Rousseau bounded in his chair.

"I assure you, sir," said he, "that this is a signal honour conferred upon me, and I beg you will offer my most humble thanks to the dauphiness."

"Oh! that is not all," said M. de Coigny, with a smile.

"Ah!"

"The troupe thus composed is more illustrious, certainly, than that usually employed, but also more inexperienced. The superintendence and the advice of a master are therefore indispensable. The performance ought to be worthy of the august spectator who will occupy the royal box, and also of the illustrious author."

Rousseau rose to bow again. This time the compliment had touched him, and he saluted M. de Coigny most graciously.

"For this purpose, sir," continued the gentleman-in-waiting, "her royal highness requests your company at Trianon, to superintend the general rehearsal of the work."

"Oh!" said Rousseau, "her royal highness cannot surely think of such a thing. I at Trianon?"

"Well!" said M. de Coigny, with the most natural air possible.

"Oh, sir, you are a man of taste and judgment, you have more tact than the majority of men; answer me, on your conscience, is not the idea of Rousseau—the philosopher, the outlaw, the misanthrope, attending at court, enough to make the whole cabal split their sides with laughter?"

" I do not see," replied M. de Coigny coldly, " how the laughter and the remarks of that foolish 'set' which persecutes you should disturb the repose of a gallant man, and an author who may lay claim to be the first in the kingdom. If you have this weakness, M. Rousseau, conceal it carefully ; it alone would be sufficient to raise a laugh at your expense. As to what remarks may be made, you will confess that those making them had better be careful on that point, when the pleasure and the wishes of her royal highness the dauphiness, presumptive heiress of the French kingdom, are in question."

" Certainly," said Rousseau ; " certainly."

" Can it be, possibly, a lingering feeling of false shame ? " said M. de Coigny, smiling. " Because you have been severe upon kings, do you fear to humanise yourself ? Ah ! Monsieur Rousseau, you have given valuable lessons to the human race, but I hope you do not hate them. And, besides, you certainly except the ladies of the blood-royal."

" Sir, you are very kind to press me so much ; but think of my position—I live retired, alone, unhappy/" Therese made a grimace.

" Unhappy ! " said she ; " he is hard to please ! *"

" Whatever effort I may make, there will always be something in my features and manner displeasing to the eyes of the king and the princesses, who seek only joy and happiness. What should I do there—what should I say ? "

" One would think you distrusted yourself. But sir, do you not think that he who has written the *Nouvelle Helo'ise* and the *Confessions*, must have more talent for speaking and acting than all of us others put together, no matter what position we occupy ? "

¹¹ I assure you, sir, it is impossible."

," That word, sir, is not known to princes."

" And for that very reason, sir, I shall remain at home." ••

" Sir, fy you would not inflict the dreadful disappointment of returning vanquished and disgraced to Versailles on me, the venturous messenger who undertook to satisfy her royal highness ? It would be such a blow to me, that I should immediately retire into voluntary exile. Come, my dear M. Rousseau, grant to me, a man full of the deepest sympathy for your works, this favour—a favour which you would refuse to supplicating kings."

" Sir, your kindness gains my heart; your eloquence is irresistible; and your voice touches me more than I can express."

" Will you allow yourself to be persuaded ? "

" No, I cannot—no, decidedly ; my health forbids such a journey."

" A journey! oh, Monsieur Rousseau, what are you thinking of ? An hour and a quarter in a carriage !"

¹¹ Yes, for you and your prancing horses."

" But all the equipages of the court are at your disposal, M. Rousseau. The dauphiness charged me to tell you that there is an apartment prepared for you at Trianon ; for she is unwilling that you should have to return so late to Paris. The dauphin, who knows all your works by heart, said, before the whole court, that he would be proud to show the room in his palace where M. Rousseau had slept."

Therese uttered a cry of admiration, not for Rousseau but for the good prince.

Rousseau could not withstand this last mark of goodwill

" I must surrender," said he, " for never have I been so well attacked/'

"Your heart only is vanquished, sir," replied Do Coigny; "your mind is impregnable."

"I shall go, then, sir, in obedience to the wishes of her royal highness."

"Oh! sir, receive my personal thanks. As regards the dauphiness's, permit me to abstain. She would feel annoyed at being forestalled, as she means to pay them to you in person this evening. Besides, you know, it is the man's part to thank a young and adorable lady who is good enough to make advances to him."

"True, sir," replied Rousseau smiling; "but old men have the privilege of pretty women—they are sought after."

"If you will name your hour, M. Rousseau, I shall send my carriage for you; or, rather, I will come myself to take you up."

"No, thank you, sir. I must positively refuse your kind offer. I will go to Trianon, but let me go in whatever manner I may choose. From this moment leave me to myself. I shall come, that is all. Tell me the hour."

"What, sir! you will not allow me to introduce you? I know I am not worthy of the honour, and that a name like yours needs no announcement——"

"Sir, I am aware that you are more at court than I am anywhere in the world. I do not refuse your offer, therefore, from any motives personal to yourself; but I love my liberty. I wish to go as if I were merely taking a walk, and—in short, that is my ultimatum."

"Sir, I bow to your decision, and should be most unwilling to displease you in any particular. The rehearsal commences at six o'clock."

"Very well. At a quarter before six I shall be at Trianon."

" But by what conveyance ? "

" That is my affair ; these are my horses."

He pumted to his legs, which were still well formed, and displayed with some pretension.

" Five leagues! " said M. de Coigny, alarmed, " you will be knocked up—take care, it will be a fatiguing evening ! "

" In that case, I have my carriage and my horses also—a fraternal carriage—the popular vehicle—which belongs to my neighbour as well as to myself, and which costs only fifteen sous/'

" Oh ! good heavens ! The stage-coach ! You make me shudder/'

" Its benches, which seem to you so hard, are to me like the Sybarite's couch. To me they seem stuffed with down or strewn with rose-leaves. Adieu, sir, till this evening."

M. de Coigny, seeing himself thus dismissed, took his leave after a multitude of thanks, indications more or less precise, and expressions of gratitude for his services. He descended the dark staircase, accompanied by Rousseau to the landing, and by Therese half-way down the stairs.

M. de Coigny entered his carriage, which was waiting in the street, and drove back to Versailles, smiling to himself.

Therese returned to the apartment, slamming the door with angry violence, which foretold a storm for Rousseau.

CHAPTER XXIII

ROUSSEAU'S TOILET

WHEN M. de Coigny was gone, Rousseau, whose ideas this visit had entirely changed, threw himself into a little arm-chair, with a deep sigh, and said in a sleepy tone,—

" Oh ! how tiresome this is ! How these people weary me with their persecutions ! "

Therese caught the last words as she entered, and placing herself before Rousseau,—

" How proud we are ! " said she.

" I ? " asked Rousseau, surprised.

" Yes ; you are a vain fellow—a hypocrite ! "

" I ? "

" Yes, you ! you are enchanted to go to court, and you conceal your joy under this false indifference/ "

" Oh ! good heavens ! " replied Rousseau, shrugging his shoulders, and humiliated at being so truly described.

" Do you not wish to make me believe that it is not a great honour for you to perform for the king the airs you thump here upon your spinet, like a good-for-nothing as you are ? "

Rousseau looked angrily at his wife.

" You are a simpleton/ " said he ; " it is no honour for a man such as I am to appear before a king. To what does this man owe that he is on the throne ? To a caprice of nature, which gave him a queen as his mother ; but I am worthy of being called before the king to minister to his recreations. It is to my works I owe it, and to the fame acquired by my works. "

Therese was not a woman to be so easily conquered.

" I wish M. de Sartines heard you talking in this styie; he would give you a lodging in Bicetre, or a cell at Charenton."

" Bcause this M. de Sartines is a tyrant in the pay of another tyrant, and because man is defenceless against tyrants with the aid of his genius alone. But if M. de Sartines were to persecute me——"

" Well, what then ? " asked Therese.

" Ah ! yes," sighed Rousseau, " yes, I know that would delight my enemies."

" Why have you enemies ? " continued Therese. " Because you are ill-natured, and because you have attacked every one. Ah, M. de Voltaire knows how to make friends, he does ! "

" True," said Rousseau, with an angelic smile.

" But, *dame!* M. de Voltaire is a gentleman—he is the intimate friend of the King of Prussia—he has horses, he is rich, and lives in his chateau at Ferney. And all that he owes to his merit. Therefore, when he goes to court, he does not act the disdainful man—he is quite at home there."

" And do you think," said Rousseau, " that I shall not be at home there ? Think you that I do not know where all the money that is spent there comes from, or that I am duped by the respect which is paid *to* the master ? Oh ! my good woman, who judgest every-thing falsely, remember, if I act the disdainful, it is because I really feel contempt—remember that if I despise the pomp of these courtiers, it is because they have stolen their riches."

" Stolen ! " said Therese, with inexpressible indignation.

" Yes, stolen, from you—from me—from every one. All the gold they have upon their line clothes should be restored to the poor wretches who want bread. That

is the reason why I, who know all these things, go so reluctantly to court." . . .

" I do not say that the people are happy—but the king is always the king."

" Well, I obey him ; what more does he want ? "

" Ah ! you obey because you are afraid. You must not say in my hearing that you go against your will or that you are a brave man, for if so, I shall reply that you are a hypocrite, and that you are very glad to go."

" I do not fear anything," said Rousseau superbly

" Good! Just go and say to the king one quarter of what you have been telling me the last half hour."

" I shall assuredly do so, if my feelings prompt me."

" You ? "

" Yes. Have I ever recoiled ? "

" Bah ! You dare not take a bone from a cat when she is gnawing it, for fear she should scratch you! What would you be if surrounded by guards and swordsmen ? Look you, I know you as well as if I were your mother. You will just now go and shave yourself afresh, oil your hair, and make yourself beautiful; you will display your leg to the utmost advantage; you will put on your interesting little winking expression, because your eyes are small and round, and if you opened them naturally, that would be seen, while, when you wink, you make people believe that they are as large as carriage entrances. You will ask me for your silk stockings, you will put on your chocolate-coloured coat with steel buttons and your beautiful new wig ; you will order a coach, and my philosopher will go and be adored by the ladies! And to-morrow—ah !—to-morrow, there will be such ecstatic reveries, such interesting languor ! You will come back amorous, you will sigh and write verses, and you will dilute your coffee with your tears. Oh ! how well I know you ! "

" You are wrong, my dear/' said Rousseau. " I tell you'I am reluctantly obliged to go to court. I go because, after all, I fear to cause scandal, as every honest 'citizen should do. Moreover, I am not one of those who refuse to acknowledge the supremacy of one citizen in a republic ; but as to making advances, as to brushing my new coat against the gold spangles of these gentlemen of the CEil-de-Boeuf—no, no—I shall do nothing of the sort, and if you catch me doing so, laugh at me as much as you please/'

" Then you will not dress ? " said Therese sarcastically.

" No."

" You will not put on your new wig ? "

" No."

" You will not wink with your little eyes ? "

" I tell you I shall go like a free man, without affectation and without fear. I shall go to court as if I were going to the theatre, and let the actors like me or not, I care not for them."

" Oh! you will at least trim your beard," said Therese, " it is half a foot long."

" I tell you I shall make no change."

Therese burst into so loud and prolonged a laugh that Rousseau was obliged to take refuge in the next room. But the housekeeper had not finished her persecutions; she had them of all colours and kinds.

She opened the cupboard and took out his best coat, his clean linen, and beautifully polished shoes. She spread all these articles out upon the bed and over the chairs in the apartment; but Rousseau did not seem to pay the least attention.

At last Therese said,—

" Come, it is time you should dress. A court toilet

is tedious. You will have barely time to reach Versailles at the appointed hour."

"I have told you, Therese, that I shall do very well as I am. It is the same dress in which I present myself every day amongst my fellow-citizens. A king is but a citizen like myself."

"Come, come!" said Therese, trying to tempt him and bring him to her purpose by artful insinuation; "do not pout, Jacques, and don't be foolish. Here are your clothes. Your razor is ready; I have sent for the barber, in case you have your nervousness to-day."

"Thank you, my dear," replied Rousseau; "I shall only just give myself a brush, and take my shoes because I cannot go out in slippers."

"Is he going to be firm, I wonder?" thought Therese.

She tried to coax him, sometimes by coquetry, sometimes by persuasion, and sometimes by the violence of her raillery. But Rousseau knew her, and saw the snare. He felt that the moment he should give way, he should be unmercifully disgraced and ridiculed by his better-half. He determined, therefore, not to give way, and abstained from looking at the fine clothes, which set off what he termed his natural advantages.

Therese watched him. She had only one resource left; this was the glance which Rousseau never failed to give in the glass before he went out; for the philosopher was neat to an extreme, if there can be an extreme in neatness.

But Rousseau continued to be on his guard, and as he had caught Therese's anxious look, he turned his back to the looking-glass. The hour arrived; the philosopher had filled his head with all the disagreeable remarks he could think of to say to the king.

He repeated some scraps of them to himself while he buckled his shoes, then tucked his hat under his arm, seized his cane, and taking advantage of a moment when Therese could not see him, he pulled down his coat and his waistcoat with both hands, to smooth the creases.

Therese now returned, handed him a handkerchief, which he plunged into his huge pocket, and then accompanied him to the landing-place, saying,—

"Come, Jacques, be reasonable; you look quite frightful; you have the air of some false moneyer."

"Adieu!" said Rousseau.

"You look like a thief, sir," said Therese; "take care!"

"Take care of fire," said Rousseau, "and do not touch my papers."

"You have just the air of a spy, I assure you!" said Therese in despair.

Rousseau made no reply; he descended the steps singing, and favoured by the obscurity, he gave his hat a brush with his sleeve, smoothed his shirt-frill with his left hand, and touched up his toilet with a rapid but skilful movement.

Arrived at the foot of the stairs, he boldly confronted the mud of the Rue Pl&trifere, walking upon tiptoe, and reached the Champs-Elysées, where those honest vehicles which some rather affectedly call *pataches* were stationed, and which, so late as ten years ago, still carried, or rather bundled from Paris to Versailles those travellers who were obliged to use economy.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SIDE SCENES OF TRIANON

THE adventures of the journey are of no importance. A Swiss, an assistant-clerk, a citizen, and an *abbe** were of course amongst his travelling companions.

He arrived at half-past five. The court was already assembled at Trianon, and the performers were going over their parts while waiting for the king; for as to the author, no one thought of him. Some were aware that M. Rousseau of Geneva was to come to direct the rehearsal; but they took no greater interest in seeing M. Rousseau than M. Rameau, or M. Marmontel, or any other of those singular animals, to a sight of which the courtiers sometimes treated themselves in their drawing-rooms or country-houses.

Rousseau was received by the usher-in-waiting, who had been ordered by M. de Coigny to inform him as soon as the philosopher should arrive.

This young nobleman hastened with his usual courtesy, and received Rousseau with the most amiable *etnpressement*. But scarcely had he cast his eyes over his person, than he stared with astonishment and could not prevent himself from recommencing the examination.

Rousseau was dusty, pale, and dishevelled, and his paleness rendered conspicuous such a beard as no master of the ceremonies had ever seen reflected in the mirrors of Versailles.

Rousseau felt deeply embarrassed under M. de Coigny's scrutiny, but more embarrassed still when, approaching the hall of the theatre, he saw the profusion of splendid dresses, valuable lace, diamonds

and blue ribbons, which, with the gilding of the hall, produced the effect of a bouquet of flowers in an immense basket.

Rousseau felt ill at ease also when he breathed this perfumed atmosphere, so intoxicating for plebeian nerves. Yet he was obliged to proceed and put a bold face on the matter. Multitudes of eyes were fixed upon him who thus formed a stain, as it were, on the polish of the assembly. M. de Coigny, still preceding him, led him to the orchestra, where the musicians were awaiting him.

When there, he felt rather relieved, and while his music was being performed, he seriously reflected that the worst danger was past, that the step was taken, and that all the reasoning in the world could now be of no avail.

Already the dauphiness was on the stage, in her costume as Colette ; she awaited for Colin.

M. de Coigny was changing his dress in his box.

All at once the king entered, surrounded by a crowd of bending heads. Louis smiled, and seemed to be in the best humour possible.

The dauphin seated himself at his right hand, and the Count de Provence arriving soon after took his place on the left. On a sign from the king, the fifty persons who composed the assembly, private as it was, took their seats.

" Well, why do you not begin ? " asked Louis.

" Sire," said the dauphiness, " the shepherds and shepherdesses are not yet dressed; we are waiting for them."

" They can perform in their evening-dresses/" said the king.

" No, sire/" replied the dauphiness, " for we wish

to try the dresses and costumes by candle-light, to be certain of the effect."

" You are right, madame," said the king; " then let us take a stroll."

And Louis rose to make the circuit of the corridor and the stage. Besides, he was rather uneasy at not seeing Madame Dubarry.

When the king had left the box, Rousseau gazed in a melancholy mood and with an aching heart at the empty hall and his own solitary position ; it was a singular contrast to the reception he had anticipated.

He had pictured to himself that on his entrance all the groups would separate before him ; that the curiosity of the courtiers would be even more importunate and more significative than that of the Parisians ; he had feared questions and presentations; and, lo ! no one paid any attention to him !

He thought that his long beard was not yet long enough, that rags would not have been more remarked than his old clothes, and he applauded himself for not having been so ridiculous as to aim at elegance. But in the bottom of his heart he felt humiliated at being thus reduced to the simple post of leader of the orchestra. Suddenly an officer approached and asked him if he was not M. Rousseau ?

" Yes, sir," replied he.

" Her royal highness the dauphiness wishes to speak to you, sir," said the officer.

Rousseau rose, much agitated.

The dauphiness was waiting for him. She held in her hand the air of Colette :

" My happiness is gone.

The moment she saw Rousseau, she advanced towards him. The philosopher bowed very humbly,

saying to himself, " that his bow was for the woman, not for the princess/*

The dauphiness, on the contrary, was as gracious towards the savage philosopher as she would have been to the most finished gentleman in Europe.

She requested his advice about the inflection she ought to give to the third strophe,—

" Colin leaves me."

Rousseau forthwith commenced to develop a theory of declamation and melody, which, learned as it was, was interrupted by the noisy arrival of the king and several courtiers.

Louis entered the room in which the dauphiness was taking her lesson from the philosopher. The first impulse of the king's, when he saw this carelessly-dressed person, was the same that M. de Coigny had manifested, only M. de Coigny knew Rousseau, and the king did not.

He stared, therefore, long and steadily at our free-man, whilst still receiving the thanks and compliments of the dauphiness.

This look, stamped with royal authority—this look, not accustomed to be lowered before any one—produced a powerful effect upon Rousseau, whose quick eye was timid and unsteady.

The dauphiness waited until the king had finished his scrutiny, then advancing towards Rousseau, she said,—

" Will your majesty allow me to present our author to you ? "

*' Your author ? " said the king, seeming to consult memory.

During this short dialogue Rousseau was upon burning coals. The king's eye had successively rested

upon and burnt up—like the sun's rays under a powerful lens—the long beard, the dubious shirt-frill, the dusty garb, and the old wig of the greatest writer in his kingdom.

The dauphiness took pity on the latter.

" M.. Jean Jacques Rousseau, sire/' said she, " the author of the charming opera we are going to execute before your majesty/'

The king raised his head.

" Ah ! " said he coldly, " M. Rousseau, I greet you."

And he continued to look at him in such a manner as to point out all the imperfections of his dress.

Rousseau asked himself how he ought to salute the King of France, without being a courtier, but also without impoliteness, for he confessed that he was in the prince's house.

But while he was making these reflections, the king addressed him with that graceful ease of princes who have jaid everything when they have uttered an agreeable or a disagreeable remark to the person before their. Rousseau, petrified, had at first stood speechless. All he phrases he had prepared for the tyrant were forgotten.

" Monsieur Rousseau," said the king, still looking at h s coat and wig, " you have composed some charming nusic, which has caused me to pass several very pleasant moments/'

Then the king, in a voice which was diametrically opposed to all diapason and melody, commenced sin ing;

" Had I turned a willing ear,
The gallants of the town to hear,
Ah ! I had found with ease
Other lovers then to please/'

" It is charming ! " said the king, when he had finished.

Rousseau bowed.

" I do not know if I shall sing it well," said the dauphiness.

Rousseau turned towards the dauphiness to make some remark in reply; but the king had commenced again, and was singing the romance of Colin :

" From my hut, obscure and cold,
Care is absent never ;
Whether storm or sun, or cold,
Suffering, toil, for ever."

His majesty sang frightfully for a musician. Rousseau, half flattered by the monarch's good memory, half-wounded by his detestable execution, looked like a monkey nibbling an onion—crying on one side of his face and laughing on the other.

The dauphiness preserved her composure with that imperturbable self-possession which is only found at court.

The king, without the least embarrassment, continued :

" If thoult come to cast thy lot
In thy Colin's humble cot,
My sweet shepherdess Colette,
I'd bid adieu to all regret."

Rousseau felt the colour rising to his face.

" Tell me, M. Rousseau," said the king, " is it urue that you sometimes dress in the costume of an Armenian ? "

Rousseau blushed more deeply than before and

tongue was so glued to his throat that not for a kingdom could he have pronounced a word at this moment.

The king continued to sing, without waiting *lyr* a reply:

" Ah ! but little, as times go,
Doth love know
What he'd let, or what he'd hinder."

" You live in the Rue Platrière, I believe, M. Rousseau ? " said the king.

Rousseau made a gesture in the affirmative with his head, but that was the *Ultima Thule* of his strength. Never had he called up so much to his support. The king hummed :

" She is a child,
She is a child.'

" It is said you are on bad terms with Voltaire, M. Rousseau ? "

At this blow Rousseau lost the little presence of mind he had remaining, and was totally put out of countenance. The king did not seem to have much pity for him, and, continuing his ferocious melomania, he moved off, singing :

" Come, dance with me beneath the elms ;
Young maidens, come, be merry."

with orchestral accompaniments which would have killed Apollo, as the latter killed Marsyas.

Rousseau remained alone in the centre of the room. The dauphiness had quitted it to finish her toilet.

Rousseau, trembling and confused, regained the corridor ; but on his way he stumbled against a couple dazzling with diamonds, flowers, and lace, who filled up the entire width of the corridor, although the young

man squeezed his lovely companion tenderly to his side.

The young woman, with her fluttering laces, her towefring head-dress, her fan, and her perfumes, was radiant as a star. It was she against whom Rousseau brushed in passing.

The young man, slender, elegant, and charming, with his blue ribbon rustling against his English shirt-frill, every now and then burst into a laugh of most engaging frankness, and then suddenly interrupted it with little confidential whispers, which made the lady laugh in her turn, and showed that they were on excellent terms.

Rousseau recognised the Countess Dubarry in this beautiful lady, this seducing creature ; and the moment he perceived her, true to his habit of absorbing his whole thoughts on a single object, he no longer saw her companion.

The young man with the blue ribbon was no other than the Count d'Artois, who was merrily toying with his grandfather's favourite

When Madame Dubarry perceived Rousseau's dark figure, she exclaimed :

" Ah, good heavens ! "

" What ! " said the Count d'Artois, also looking at the philosopher; and already he had stretched out his hand to make way for his companion.

" M. Rousseau ! " exclaimed Madame Dubarry.

" Rousseau of Geneva ? " said the Count d'Artois, in the tone of a schoolboy in the holidays.

" Yes, my lord, " replied the countess.

" Ah ! good-day, M. Rousseau, " said the young fop, seeing Rousseau making a despairing effort to force a passage—" good-day; we are going to hear your music."

" My lord ! "—stammered Rousseau, seeing the blue ribbon.

" Ah ! most charming music ! " exclaimed the countess ; " and completely in harmony with the heart and mind of the author/ "

Rousseau raised his head, and his eyes met the burning gaze of the countess.

" Madame ! " said he ill-humouredly.

" I will play Colin, madame," cried the Count d'Artois, " and I entreat that you, Madame la Comtesse, will play Colette."

" With all my heart, my lord; but I would never dare—I, who am not an artist—to profane the music of a master."

Rousseau would have given his life to look again at her ; but the voice, the tone, the flattery, the beauty, had each planted a baited hook in his heart. He tried to escape.

" Monsieur Rousseau/ " said the prince, blocking up the passage, " I wish you would teach me the part of Colin/ "

" I dare not ask Monsieur Rousseau to give me his advice respecting Colette," said the countess, feigning timidity, and thus completing the overthrow of the philosopher.

But yet his eyes inquired why.

" Monsieur Rousseau hates me," said she to the prince, with her enchanting voice.

" You are jesting! " exclaimed the Count d'Artois. " Who could hate you, madame ? "

" You see it plainly," replied she.

" M. Rousseau is too great a man, and has written too many noble works to fly from such a charming woman/ " said the Count d'Artois.

Rousseau heaved a sigh as if he were ready to give

up the ghost, and made his escape through a narrow loophole which the Count d'Artois had imprudently left between himself and the wall. But Rousseau was not in luck this evening. He had scarcely proceeded four steps when he met another group, composed of two men, one old, the other young. The young one wore the blue ribbon ; the other, who might be about fifty years of age, was dressed in red, and looked austere and pale. These two men overheard the merry laugh of the Count d'Artois, who exclaimed loudly,—

" Ah ! Monsieur Rousseau, Monsieur Rousseau ! I shall say that the countess put you to flight; and, in truth, no one would believe it."

" Rousseau! " murmured the two men.

" Stop him, brother! " said the prince, still laughing; " stop him, M. de Vauguyon ! "

Rousseau now comprehended on what rock his evil star had shipwrecked him. The Count de Provence and the governor of the royal youths were before him.

The Count de Provence also barred the way.

" Good-day, sir/' said he, with his dry pedantic voice.

Rousseau, almost at his wits' end, bowed, muttering to himself,—

" I shall never get away ! "

" Ah ! I am delighted to have met you' said the prince, with the air of a schoolmaster who finds a pupil in fault.

" More absurd compliments ! " thought Rousseau. " How insipid these great people are ! "

" I have read your translation of Tacitus, sir."

" Ah ! true," thought Rousseau; "this one is a pedant, a scholar."

" Do you know that it is very difficult to translate Tacitus ? "

" My lord, I said so in a short preface."

" Yes, I know, I know; you said in it that you had only a slight knowledge of Latin."

" It is true, my lord."

" Then, M. Rousseau, why translate Tacitus ? "

" My lord, it improves one's style."

" Ah! M. Rousseau, it was wrong to translate 'imperatoria brevitare' by a *grave and concise discourse*"

Rousseau, uneasy, consulted his memory.

" Yes," said the young prince, with the confidence of an old savant who discovers a fault in vSaumaise, " yes, you translated it so. It is in the paragraph where Tacitus relates that Pison harangued his soldiers.

" Well, my lord ? "

" Well, M. Rousseau, 'imperatoria brevitare' means *with the conciseness of a general*, or of a man accustomed to command. *With the brevity of command*; that is the expression, is it not, Monsieur de la Vauguyon ?"

" Yes, my lord," replied the governor.

Rousseau made no reply. The prince added:

" That is an evident mistake, Monsieur Rousseau. Oh ! I will find you another."

Rousseau turned pale.

" Stay, Monsieur Rousseau, there is one in the paragraph relating to Cccina. It commences thus; 'At in superiore Germania.' You know he is describing Cecina, and Tacitus says, 'Cito sermone.' "

" I remember it perfectly, my lord."

" You translated that by *speaking well*"

" Yes, my lord, and I thought——"

" 'Cito sermone' means *speaking quickly*, that is to say *easily*."

" I said *speaking well*"

" Then it should have been ' decoro ' or ' ornato ' or ' eleganti sermone ; ' ' cito ' is a picturesque epithet, Monsieur Rousseau. Just as, in portraying the change in Otho's conduct, Tacitus says—' Delata voluptate dissimulate luxuria, cuncta que ad imperii decorem composita."

" I have translated that—*Dismissing luxury and effeminacy to other times, he surprised the world by industriously applying himself to re-establishing the glory of the empire.*

" Wrong, M. Rousseau, wrong! In the first place, you have run the three little phrases into one, which obliges you to translate ' dissimulate luxurii ' badly. Then you made a blunder in the last portion of the phrase. Tacitus did not mean that the Emperor Otho applied himself *to* re-establishing the glory of the empire: he meant to say that, no longer gratifying his passions, and dissimulating his luxurious habits) Otho accommodated all, made all turn—all, you understand, M. Rousseau—that is to say, even his passions, and his vices—to the glory of the empire. That is the sense—it is rather complex ; yours, however, is too restricted, is it not, Monsieur de la Vauguyon ? "

" Yes, my lord."

Rousseau perspired and panted under this pitiless infliction.

The prince allowed him a moment's breathing-time and then continued,—

" You are much more in your element in philosophy, sir.

Rousseau bowed.

" But your *Emilius* is a dangerous book."

" Dangerous, my lord ? "

" Yes, from the quantity of false ideas it will put into the small citizens' heads! "

" My lord, as soon as a man is a father, he can enter into the spirit of my book, whether he be the first or the last in the kingdom. To be a father—is—is-;— "

" Tell me, Monsieur Rousseau/' asked the satirical prince all at once, " your *Confessions* form a very amusing book. How many children have you had ?

Rousseau turned pale, staggered, and raised an angry and stupefied glance to his young tormentor's face, the expression of which only increased the malicious humour of the Count de Provence.

It was only malice, for, without waiting for a reply, the prince moved away arm-in-arm with his preceptor, continuing his commentaries on the works of the man whom he had so cruelly crushed.

Rousseau, left alone, gradually was recovering from his stupefaction, when he heard the first bars of his overture executed by the orchestra.

He proceeded in that direction with a faltering step, and when he had reached his seat, he said to himself,—

" Fool! coward ! stupid ass that I am ! Now only do I find the answer I should have made the cruel little pedant. ' My lord/ I should have said, ' it is not charitable in a young person to torment a poor old man!' "

He had just reached this point, quite content with his phrase, when the dauphiness and M. de Coigny commenced their duet. The pre-occupation of the philosopher was disturbed by the suffering of the musician—the ear was to be tortured after the heart.

CHAPTER XXV

THE REHEARSAL

THE rehearsal once fairly commenced, and the general attention drawn to the stage, Rousseau was no longer remarked, and it was he, on the contrary, who became the observer. He heard court lords who sang completely out of tune in their shepherd's dresses, and saw ladies arrayed in their court dresses coquetting like shepherdesses.

The dauphiness sang correctly, but she was a bad actress; and her voice, moreover, was so weak that she could scarcely be heard. The king, not to intimidate any one, had retired to an obscure box, where he chatted with the ladies. The dauphin prompted the words of the opera, which went off royally badly.

Rousseau determined not *to* listen, but he felt it very difficult to avoid overhearing what passed. He had one consolation, however, for he had just perceived a charming face among the illustrious figurantes, and the village maiden who was the possessor of this charming face had incomparably the most delightful voice of the entire company.

Rousseau's attention became at once completely riveted, and from his position behind his desk, he gazed with his whole soul at the charming figurante, and listened with all his ears to drink in the enchanting melody of her voice.

When the dauphiness saw the author so deeply attentive, she felt persuaded, from his smile and his sentimental air, that he was pleased with the execution of his work, and, eager for a compliment—for she was a woman—she leaned forward to the desk, saying,—

" Is our performance very bad, Monsieur Rousseau?"

But Rousseau, with lips apart and absent air, did not reply.

" Oh ! we have made some blunders/" said the dauphiness, " and M. Rousseau dares not tell Us! Pray do, Monsieur Rousseau ! "

Rousseau's gaze never left the beautiful personage, who on her side did not perceive in the least the attention which she excited.

" Ah ! " said the dauphiness, following the direction of our philosopher's eyes, " it is Mademoiselle Taverney who has been in fault! "

Andree blushed ; she saw all eyes directed towards her.

" No ! no ! " exclaimed Rousseau ; " it was not mademoiselle, for mademoiselle sings like an angel! "

Madame Dubarry darted at the philosopher a look keener than a javelin.

The Baron de Taverney, on the contrary, felt his heart bound with joy, and greeted Rousseau with a most enchanting smile.

" Do you think that young girl sings well ? " said Madame Dubarry to the king, who was evidently struck by Rousseau's words.

" In a chorus I cannot hear distinctly," said Louis XV., " it requires a musician to be able to distinguish."

Meanwhile Rousseau was busy in the orchestra directing the chorus:

" Colin revient a sa bergere,
Celebrons un retour si beau."

As he turned to resume his seat, he saw M. de Jussieu bowing to him graciously.

It was no slight pleasure for the Genevese to be

seen thus giving laws to the court by a courtier who had wounded him a little by his superiority. He returned his bow most ceremoniously, and continued to gaze at Andree, who looked even more lovely for the praises she had received.

As the rehearsal proceeded, Madame Dubarry became furious ; twice had she surprised Louis XV.'s attention wandering, distracted by the spectacle before him from the sweet speeches she whispered.

The spectacle in the eyes of the jealous favourite meant Andree alone, but this did not prevent the dauphiness from receiving many compliments and being in charmingly gay spirits. M. de Richelieu fluttered around her with the agility of a young man, and succeeded in forming, at the extremity of the stage, a circle of laughers, of which the dauphiness was the centre, and which rendered the Dubarry party extremely uneasy.

" It appears/' said he aloud, " that Mademoiselle de Taverny has a sweet voice."

" Charming ! " said the dauphiness ; " and had I not been too selfish, I should have allowed her to play Colette ; but as it is for my amusement that I undertook the character, I will give it up to no one."

" Oh ! Mademoiselle de Taverny would not sing it better than your royal highness," said Richelieu, " and——"

" Mademoiselle is an excellent musician," said Rousseau, with enthusiasm.

" Excellent ! " responded the dauphiness ; " and, to confess the truth, it is she who teaches me my part ; besides, she dances enchantingly, and I dance very badly."

The effect of this conversation upon the king, upon Madame Dubarry, and the whole crowd of curious

newsmongers and envious intriguers, may be imagined. All either tasted the pleasure of inflicting a wound, or received the blow with shame and grief. There were no indifferent spectators, except perhaps Andree herself.

The dauphiness, incited by Richelieu, ended by making Andree sing the air,—

" I have lost my love—
Colin leaves me/'

The king's head was seen to mark the time with such evident tokens of pleasure, that Madame Dubarry's rouge fell off, from her agitation, in little flakes, as paintings fall to pieces from damp.

Richelieu, more malicious than a woman, enjoyed his revenge. He had drawn near the elder Taverney, and the two old men formed a tableau which might have been taken for Hypocrisy and Corruption sealing a project of union.

Their joy increased the more as Madame Dubarry's features grew by degrees darker and darker. She added the finishing stroke to it by rising angrily, which was contrary to all etiquette, as the king was still seated.

The courtiers, like ants, felt the storm approach, and hastened to seek shelter with the strongest. The dauphiness was more closely surrounded by her own friends, Madame Dubarry was more courted by hers.

By degrees the interest of the rehearsal was diverted from its natural course, and was turned in quite a different direction. Colin and Colette were no more thought of, and m[^]uiy spectators thought that it would soon be Madame Dubarry's turn to sing,—

" I have lost my love—
Colin leaves me."

"Do you mark," whispered Richelieu to Taverney, "your daughter's immense success?"

And he drew him into the corridor, pushing open a glass door, and causing a looker-on, who had been clinging to the framework in order to see into the hall, to fall backwards.

"Plague take the wretch?" grumbled Richelieu, dusting his sleeve, which the rebound of the door had brushed against, and seeming still more angry when he saw that the looker-on was dressed like a workman of the chateau.

It was, in fact, a workman with a basket of flowers under his arm, who had succeeded in climbing up behind the glass, from which position he commanded a view of the entire saloon.

He was pushed back into the corridor, and almost overturned; but, although he himself escaped falling his basket was upset.

"Ah! I know the rascal," said Taverney angrily.

"Who is it?" asked the duke.

"What are you doing here, scoundrel?" said Taverney.

Gilbert—for the reader has doubtless already recognised him—replied haughtily,—

"You see—I am looking."

"Instead of being at your work?" said Richelieu.

"My work is done," said Gilbert, humbly addressing the duke, without deigning to look at Taverney.

"Am I fated to meet this lazy rascal everywhere?" said Taverney.

"Gently, sir," interrupted a voice; "gently. My little Gilbert is a good workman and an industrious botanist."

Taverney turned, and saw M. de Jussieu, who was patting Gilbert on the head. The baron reddened with anger and moved off.

" Valets here/" muttered he.

" Hush ! " said Richelieu, " there is Nicole I^l—look—up there, at the corner of the door. The little buxom witch ! she is not making bad use of her eyes either/"

The marshal was correct. Partially concealed behind a score of the domestics of Trianon, Nicole raised her charming head above all the others, and her eyes, dilated with surprise and admiration, seemed to devour everything she saw.

Gilbert perceived her, and turned another way.

" Come, come!" said the duke to Taverney; " I fancy the king wishes to speak to you. He is looking this way."

And the two friends disappeared in the direction of the royal box.

Madame Dubarry was standing behind the king, and interchanging signs with M. d'Aiguillon, who was also standing, and who did not lose one of his uncle's movements.

Rousseau, now left alone, admired Andree; he was endeavouring, if we may use the expression, to fall in love with her.

The illustrious actors proceeded to disrobe in their boxes, which Gilbert had decorated with fresh flowers.

Taverney, left alone in the passage by M. de Richelieu, who had gone to rejoin the king, felt his heart alternately chilled and elated. At last the duke returned and placed Iris finger upon his lips. Taverney turned pale with joy, and advanced to meet his friend, who drew him beneath the royal box. There they overheard the following conversation, which was quite inaudible to the rest of the company. Madame Dubarry was saying to the king,—

" May I expect your majesty to supper this evening?"

And the king replied,—

" I feel fatigued, countess ; excuse me."

At the same moment, the dauphin entered, treading almost on Madame Dubarry's toes without seeming to see her.

" Sire/' said he, " will your majesty do us the honour of supping with us at Trianon ? "

" No, my son ; I was just this moment saying to the countess that I feel fatigued. Our young people have made me giddy ; I shall sup alone."

The dauphin bowed and retired. Madame Dubarry curtsied almost to the ground, and trembling with rage, left the box. When she was gone, the king made a sign to the Duke de Richelieu.

" Duke," said he, " I wish to speak to you about an affair which concerns }'ou."

"Sire——"

" I am not satisfied. I wish you to explain—stay, I shall sup alone ; you will keep me company."

And the king looked at Tavemey.

" You know this gentleman, I think, duke ? "

" Monsieur de Tavemey ? Yes, sire."

" Ah ! the father of the charming singer ? "

" Yes, sire."

" Listen, duke ! "

And the king stooped to whisper in Richelieu's ears. Tavemey clenched his hands till the nails entered the flesh, to avoid showing any emotion. Immediately afterwards Richelieu brushed past Tavemey, and said,—

" Follow me without making any remark."

" Whither ? " asked Taverney, in the same tone.

" No matter ; follow me."

The duke moved away. Taverney followed him **at a little distance to the king's apartment.** The **duke entered ;** Tavemey waited **in the anteroom.**

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CASKET

M. DE TAVERNEY had not to wait long. Richelieu, having asked the king's valet for something his majesty had left upon his dressing-table, soon returned, carrying something the nature of which the baron could not distinguish on account of the covering of silk which enveloped it.

But the marshal soon relieved his friend from all anxiety. Drawing him into a corner of the gallery,—

" Baron," said he as soon as he saw that they were alone, " you have at times seemed to doubt my friendship for you ? "

" Never since our reconciliation," replied Taverney.

" At least, you doubted your own good fortune and that of your children ? "

" Oh ! as for that—yes."

" Well, you were wrong! Your children's fortune and your own is made with a rapidity which might make you giddy."

" Bah ! " said Taverney, who suspected part of the truth, but who, as he was not quite certain, took care to guard against mistakes, " what do you mean ? "

" M. Philip is already a captain with a company paid for by the king."

" It is true—I owe that to you."

" By no means. Then we shall have Mademoiselle de Taverney a marchionness, perhaps! "

" Come, come ! " exclaimed Taverney ; " how !—my daughter! "

" Listen, Taverney ! the king has great taste ; and beauty, grace, and virtues, when accompanied by

talent, delight his majesty. Now Mademoiselle de Taverney unites all these qualities in a very high degree. The king is therefore delighted with Mademoiselle de Taverney."

"Duke," replied Taverney, assuming an air of dignity at which the marshal could scarcely repress a smile; "duke, what do you mean by 'delighted'?"

Richelieu did not like airs, and replied dryly,—

"Baron, I am not a great linguist. I am not even well versed in orthography. I have always thought that 'delighted' signified 'content beyond measure/ If you are grieved beyond measure to see the king pleased with the beauty, the talent, the merit of your children, you have only to say so. I am about to return to his majesty."

And Richelieu turned on his heel and made a pirouette with truly juvenile grace.

"You misunderstand me, duke," exclaimed the baron, stopping him. "*Ventre Mean I* how hasty you are!"

"Why did you say that you were not satisfied?"

"I did not say so."

"You asked for explanations of the king's pleasure—plague take the fool!"

"But, duke, I did not breathe a syllable of that. I am most certainly content."

"Ah! *you*—well, who will be displeased? Your daughter?"

"**Oh! oh!**"

"My dear friend, you have brought up your daughter like a savage, as you are."

"My dear friend, the young lady educated herself; you may easily imagine that I could not possibly trouble myself with any such matter. I had enough to do to support life in my den at Taverney. Virtue in her has sprung up spontaneously."

" And yet people say that country folks know how to pull up weeds !—In short, your daughter is a prude."

" You mistake ; she is a dove."

Richelieu made a grimace, " Well," said he, " the poor child must only look out for a good husband, for opportunities of making a fortune happen rarely with this defect."

Taverney looked uneasily at the duke.

" Fortunately for her," continued he, " the king is so desperately in love with the Dubarry, that he will never think seriously of another."

Taverney's alarm was changed to anguish.

" Therefore," continued Richelieu, " you and your daughter may make your minds easy. I will state the necessary objections to his majesty, and the king will never bestow another thought on the matter."

" But objections to what ?—good heavens ! " exclaimed Taverney, turning pale, and holding his friend's arm.

" To his making a little present to Mademoiselle Andree, my dear baron."

" A little present!—What is it ? " asked the baron, brimful of hope and avarice.

" Oh ! a mere trifle," said Richelieu carelessly, and he took a casket from its silken covering.

" A casket ! "

" A mere trifle—a necklace worth a few millions of livres, which his majesty, flattered at hearing her sing his favourite air, wished to present to the fair singer. It is the usual custom. But if your daughter is **proud**, we will say no more about it. "

" Duke, you **must** not think of it—that would be to **offend** the king ! "

" **Of** course it **would**; but is it **not** the attribute of virtue always to **offend** some person, or some thing ? "

" But, duke, consider—the child is not so unreasonable/'

" That is to say, it is you, and not your child, who speaks ? "

" Oh ! I know so well what she will do and say."

" The Chinese are a very fortunate nation/' said Richelieu.

" Why ? " asked Taverney, astonished.

" Because they have so many rivers and canals in the country."

" Duke, you turn the conversation—do not drive me to despair ; speak to me."

" I am speaking to you, baron, and am not changing the conversation at all."

" Then why do you speak of China ?—what have its rivers to do with my daughter ? "

" A great deal. The Chinese, I repeat, have the happiness of being able to drown their daughters when they are too virtuous, and no one can forbid it."

" Come, duke, you must be just. Suppose you had a daughter yourself."

" *Pardieu!* I have one; and if any one were to tell me that she is too virtuous, it would be very ill-natured of him—that's all."

" In short, you would like her better otherwise, would you not ? "

" Oh ! for my part, I don't meddle with my children after they are eight years old."

" Listen to me, at least. If the king were to commission me to offer a necklace to your daughter, and if your daughter were to complain to you ? "

" Oh, my dear sir, there is no comparison. I have always lived at court, you have lived like a North American Indian ; there is no similarity. What you call virtue, I think folly. Remember, for the future.

that nothing is more ill-bred than to say to people—'What would you do in this or that case?' 'And besides, your comparisons are erroneous, my friend. It is not true that I am about to present a necklace to your daughter/'

"You said so."

"I said nothing of the sort. I said that the king had directed me to bring him a casket for Mademoiselle de Taverny, whose voice had pleased him; but I did not say that his majesty had charged me to give it to her."

"Then, in truth," said the baron, in despair, "I know not what to think. I do not understand a single word—you speak in enigmas. Why *give* this necklace, if it is not to be given? Why do you take charge of it, if not to deliver it?"

Richelieu uttered an exclamation as if he had seen a spider.

"Ah!" said he; "pouah I—pouah! the Huron—the ugly animal!"

"Who?"

"You, my good friend—you, my trusty comrade—you seem as if you had fallen from the clouds, baron!"

"I am at my wits' end."

"No, you never had any. When a king makes a lady a present, and when he charges M. de Richelieu with the commission, the present is noble and the commission well executed—remember that. I do not deliver caskets, my dear sir—that was M. Lebel's office. Did you know M. Lebel?"

"What is your office, then?"

"My friend," said Richelieu, tapping Taverny on the shoulder, and accompanying this amicable gesture by a sardonic smile, "when I have to do with such paragons of virtue as Mademoiselle Andrée, I

am the most moral man in the world. When I approach a dove, as you call your daughter, I do not display the talons of the hawk. When I am deputed to wait on a young lady, I speak to her father. I speak to you, therefore, Taverney, and give you the casket to present to your daughter. Well! are you willing?"—And he offered the casket. "Or do you decline?"—And he drew it back.

"Oh! say at once!"¹ exclaimed the baron, "say at once that I am commissioned by his majesty to deliver the present! If so, it assumes quite a correct and paternal character—it is, so to speak, purified from——"

"Purified! Why, you must have suspected his majesty of evil intentions!" said Richelieu seriously. "Now, you cannot have dared to do that!"

"Heaven forbid! But the world—that is to say, my daughter——"

Richelieu shrugged his shoulders.

"Will you take it?—yes or no?" asked he.

Taverney rapidly held out his hand.

"You are certain it is moral?" said he to the duke, with a smile, the counterpart of that which the duke had just addressed to him.

"Do you not think it pure morality, baron," said the marshal, "to make the father, who, as you have just said, purifies everything, an intermediate party between the king's delight and your daughter's charms? Let M. Rousseau, of Geneva, who was hovering about here just now, be the judge; he would say that Cato of happy memory was impure compared to me."

Richelieu pronounced these few words with a calmness—an abrupt haughtiness—a precision—which silenced Taverney's objections, and assisted to make him believe that he ought to be convinced. He seized

his illustrious friend's hand, therefore, and pressing it,—

" Thanks to your delicacy," said he, " my daughter can accept this present."

" The source and origin of the good fortune to which I alluded at the commencement of our tiresome discussion on virtue."

" Thanks, dear duke ; most hearty thanks ! "

" One word more. Conceal this favour carefully from the Dubarrys. It might make Madame Dubarry leave the king and take flight."

" And the king would be displeased ? "

" I don't know, but the countess would not thank us. As for me, I should be lost! Be discreet, therefore——"

" Do not fear. But at least present my most humble thanks to the king."

" And your daughter's—I shall not fail. But you have not yet reached the limits of the favours bestowed upon you. It is you who are to thank the king, my dear sir ; his majesty invites you to sup with him this evening."

" Me ? "

" You, Taverney. We shall be a select party. His majesty, you and myself. We will talk of your daughter's virtue. Adieu, Taverney, I see Dubarry with Monsieur d'Aiguillon. We must not be perceived together."

And agile as a page, he disappeared at the farther end of the gallery, leaving Taverney gazing at his casket, like a Saxon child who awakens and finds the Christmas gifts which have been placed in his hands while he slept.

CHAPTER XXVII

KING LOUIS XV.'s PETIT SOUPER

THE marshal found the king in the little salon whither several of the courtiers had followed him, preferring rather to lose their supper than to allow the wandering glance of their sovereign to fall on any others than themselves. But Louis XV. seemed to have something else to do this evening than to look at these gentlemen. He dismissed every one, saying that he did not intend to sup, or that, if he did, it would be alone. All the guests having thus received their dismissal, and fearing to displease the dauphin if they were not present at the fete which he was to give at the close of the rehearsal, instantly flew off like a cloud of parasite pigeons, and winged their way to him whom they were permitted to see, ready to assert that they had deserted his majesty's drawing-room for him.

Louis XV., whom they left so rapidly, was far from bestowing a thought on them. At another time, the littleness of all this swarm of courtiers would have excited a smile, but on this occasion it awoke no sentiment in the monarch's breast—a monarch so sarcastic that he spared neither bodily nor mental defect in his best friends, always supposing that Louis XV. ever had a friend.

No; at that moment Louis XV. concentrated his entire attention on a carriage which was drawn up opposite the door of the offices of Trianon, the coachman seeming to wait only for the step which should announce the owner's presence in the gilded vehicle to urge on his horses. The carriage was Madame Dubarry's, and was lighted by torches. Zamore,

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

m

seated beside the coachman, was swinging his legs backwards and forwards like a child at play.

At last, Madame Dubarry, who had no doubt delayed in the corridors in the hope of receiving some message from the king, appeared, supported on 'M. d'Aiguillon's arm. Her anger, or at least her disappointment, was apparent in the rapidity of her gait. She affected too much resolution not to have lost her presence of mind.

After Madame Dubarry followed Jean, looking gloomy in the extreme, and absently crushing his hat beneath his arm. He had not been present at the representation, the dauphin having forgotten to invite him ; but he had stolen into the anteroom somewhat after the fashion of a lackey, and stood pensive as Hippolytus, with his shirt-frill falling over his vest embroidered with silver and red flowers, and not even looking at his tattered ruffles, which seemed in harmony with his sad thoughts. Jean had seen his sister look pale and alarmed, and had concluded from this that the danger was great. Jean was brave in diplomacy only when opposed to flesh and blood, never when opposed to phantoms.

Concealed behind the window-curtain, the king watched this funereal procession defile before him and engulf themselves in the countess's carriage like a troop of phantoms. Then, when the door was closed, and the footman had mounted behind the carriage; the coachman shook the reins, and the horses started forward at a gallop.

" Oh ! " said the king, " without making an attempt to see me—to speak to me ? the countess is furious ! "

And he repeated aloud,—

" Yes, the countess is furious ! "

Richelieu, who had just glided into the room like an expected visitor, caught these last words,—

"Furious, sire! and for what? Because your majesty is amused for a moment? Oh! that is not amiable of the countess."

"Duke," replied Louis XV., "I am not amused; on the contrary, I am wearied and wish for repose. Music enervates me. If I had listened to the countess, I ought to have supped at Luciennes; I ought to have eaten, and, above all, to have drunk. The countess's wines are too strong; I do not know from what vineyards they come, but they overpower me. 'Sdeath! I prefer to take my ease here."

"And your majesty is perfectly in the right," said the duke.

"Besides, the countess will find amusement elsewhere. Am I such an amiable companion? She may say so as much as she likes, but I do not believe her."

"Ah! this time your majesty is in the wrong," explained the marshal.

"No, duke; no, in truth. I count my years, and I reflect."

"Sire, the countess is well aware that she could not possibly have better company, and it is that which makes her furious."

"In truth, duke, I do not know how you manage. You still lead the women as if you were twenty. At that age it is for a man to choose; but at mine, duke——"

"Well, sire?"

"It is for the woman to make her calculations."

The marshal burst into a laugh.

"Well, sire/' said he, "that is only an additional reason; if your majesty thinks the countess is amused, let us console ourselves as well as we can."

" I do not say she is amused, duke ; J only say that she will, in the end, be driven to seek amusement/'

" Ah ! sire, I dare not assert that such things have never happened."

The king rose, much agitated.

" Who waits outside ? " inquired he.

" All your suite, sire."

The king reflected for a moment.

" But have you any one there ? "

" I have Rafte."

" Very good."

" What shall he do, sire ? "

" He must find out if the countess really returned to Luciennes."

" The countess is already gone, I fancy, sire."

" Yes, ostensibly."

" But whither does your majesty think she is gone ? "

" Who can tell ? Jealousy makes her frantic, duke."

" Sire, is it not rather your majesty—— ? "

" How ?—what ? "

" Whom jealousy——"

" Duke ! "

" In truth, it would be very humiliating for us all sire."

" I jealous ? " said Louis, with a forced laugh ;
" are you speaking seriously, duke ? "

Richelieu did not in truth believe it. It must even be confessed that he was very near the truth in thinking that, on the contrary, the king only wished to know if Madame Dubarry was really at Luciennes, in order to be sure that she would not return to Trianon.

" Then, sire," said he aloud, " it is understood that I am to send Rafte on a voyage of discovery ? "

" Send him, duke."

" In the meantime, what will your majesty do before supper ? "

" Nothing; we shall sup instantly. Have you spoken to the person in question. ? "

" Yes, he is in your majesty's antechamber."

" What did he say ? "

" He expressed his deep thanks."

" And the daughter ? "

" She has not been spoken to yet."

" Duke, Madame Dubarry is jealous, and might readily return."

" Ah ! sire, that would be in very bad taste. I think the countess would be incapable of committing such an enormity."

" Duke, she is capable of anything in such moods, especially when hatred is combined with jealousy, she execrates you; I don't know if you were aware of that ? "

Richelieu bowed.

" I know she does me that honour, sire."

" She execrates M. de Taverney, also."

" If your majesty would be good enough to reckon, I am sure there is a third person whom she hates even more than the baron."

" Whom ? "

" Mademoiselle Andree."

" Ah I" said the king, "I think that is natural enough."

" Then——"

" Yes, but that does not prevent its being necessary to watch that Madame Dubarry does not cause some scandal this evening."

" On the contrary, it proves the necessity of such a measure."

" Here is the maitre-d'hotel; Hush! give your

orders to Rafté and join me in the dining-room with—you know whom ! ”

Louis rose and passed into the dining-room, while Richelieu made his exit by the opposite door. Five minutes afterwards, he rejoined the king, accompanied by the baron.

The king in the most gracious manner bade Taverney good-evening. The baron was a man of talent, and replied in that peculiar manner which betokens a person accustomed to good society, and which puts kings and princes instantly at their ease. They sat down to table. Louis XV. was a bad king, but a delightful companion ; when he pleased, his conversation was full of attraction for boon companions, talkers, and voluptuaries. The king, in short, had studied life carefully, and from its most agreeable side.

He ate heartily, made his guests drink, and turned the conversation on music.

Richelieu caught the ball at the rebound.

“ Sire,” says he, “ if music makes men agree, as our ballet-master says, and as your majesty seems to think, will you say as much of women ? ”

“ Oh, duke ! ” replied the king, “ let us not speak of women. From the Trojan war to the present time, women have always exercised an influence the contrary of music. You, especially, have too many quarrels to compound with them, to bring such a subject on the tapis. Amongst others, there is one, and that not the least dangerous, with whom you are at daggers drawn.”

“ The countess, sire ! Is that my fault ? ”

“ Of course it is.”

“ Ah ! indeed ! Your majesty, I trust, will explain.”

“ In two words, and with the greatest pleasure/” said the king slyly.

" I am all ears, sire."

" What! she offers you the portfolio of I don't know which department, and you refuse, because, you say, she is not very popular ? "

" I ? " exclaimed Richelieu, a good deal embarrassed by the turn the conversation was taking.

" *Dame!* the report is quite public," said the king, with that feigned off-hand good-nature which was peculiar to him. " I forget now who told it to me—most probably the gazette."

" Well, sire! " said Richelieu, taking advantage of the freedom which the unusual gaiety of the august host afforded his guests. " I must confess that on this occasion rumours and even the gazette have reported something not quite so absurd as usual/'

" What! " exclaimed Louis XV., " then you have really refused a portfolio, my dear duke ? "

Richelieu, it may easily be imagined, was in an awkward position. The king well knew that he had refused nothing; but it was necessary that Taverney should continue to believe what Richelieu had told him. The duke had therefore to frame his reply so as to avoid furnishing matter for amusement to the king, without at the same time incurring the reproach of falsehood, which was already hovering upon the baron's lips and twinkling in his smile.

" Sire," said Richelieu, " pray let us not speak of effects, but of the cause. Whether I have, or have not refused a portfolio, is a state secret which your majesty is not bound to divulge over the bottle ; but the cause for which I should have refused the portfolio had it been offered to me is the important point."

•• Oh ! oh I duke," said the monarch, laughing; " and this cause is not a state secret ? "

" No, sire, and certainly not for your majesty, who

is at this moment, I beg pardon of the divinity, the most amiable earthly Amphytrion in the universe for my friend the Baron de Taverney and myself. I have no secrets, therefore, from my king. I give my whole soul up to him, for I do not wish it to be said that the King of France has not one servant who would tell him the entire truth."

"Let us hear the truth, then, duke," said the king, while Taverney, fearing that Richelieu might go too far, pinched up his lips and composed his countenance scrupulously after the king's.

"Sire, in your dominions there are two powers which a minister must obey: the first is, your will; the second, that of your majesty's most intimate friends. The first power is irresistible; none dare to rebel against it; the second is yet more sacred, for it imposes duties of the heart on whosoever serves you. It is termed your confidence. To obey it, a minister must have the most devoted regard for the favourite of the king."

Louis XV. laughed.

"Duke," said he, "that is a very good maxim, and one I am delighted to hear from your lips; but I dare you to proclaim it aloud by sound of trumpet upon the Pont Neuf."

"Oh, I know, sire," said Richelieu, "that the philosophers would be up in arms; but I do not think that their objurgations would matter much to your majesty or to me. The chief point is that the two preponderating influences in the kingdom be satisfied. Well! the will of a certain person, I will confess it openly to your majesty, even should my disgrace, that is my death, be the consequences—Madame Dubarry's will I could not conform to."

Louis was silent.

" It occurred to me the other day," continued Richelieu, " to look around amongst your majesty's court, and in truth I saw so many noble girls, so many women of dazzling beauty, that had I been King of France I should have found it almost impossible to choose/ "

Louis turned to Taverney, who seeing things take such a favourable turn for him, sat trembling with hope and fear, aiding the marshal's eloquence with eyes and breath, as if he would waft forward the vessel loaded with his fortunes to a safe harbour.

" Come, baron, what is your opinion ? " said the king.

" Sire," replied Taverney with swelling heart, " the duke, as it seems to me, had been discoursing most eloquently, and at the same time with profound discernment, to your majesty for the last few minutes."

" Then you are of his opinion, in what he says of lovely girls ? "

" In fact, sire, I think there are indeed very lovely-young girls at the French court."

" Then you are of his opinion ? "

" Yes, sire."

" And, like him, you advise me to choose among the beauties of the court ? "

" I would venture to confess that I am of the marshal's opinion, if I dared to believe that it was also your majesty's."

There was a short silence, during which the king looked complaisantly at Taverney.

" Gentlemen," said he, " no doubt I would follow your advice, if I were only thirty years of age. I should have a very natural predilection for it, but I find myself at present rather too old to be credulous."

" Credulous! pray, sire, explain the meaning of the word."

" To be credulous, my dear duke, means to believe. Now, nothing will make me believe certain things/'

" What are they ? "

" That at my age it would be possible to inspire love."

" Ah, sire," exclaimed Richelieu, " until this moment I thought your majesty was the most polite gentleman in your dominions, but with deep regret I see that I have been mistaken/'

" How so ? " asked the king, laughing.

" Because, in that case, I must be old as Methuselah, as I was born in '94. Remember, sire, I am sixteen years older than your majesty/'

This was an adroit piece of flattery on the duke's part. Louis XV. had always admired this man's age, who had outlived so many younger men in his service; for, having this example before him, he might hope to reach the same advanced period.

" Granted," said Louis ; " but I hope you no longer have the pretension to be loved for yourself, duke ? "

" If I thought so, sire, I would instantly quarrel with two ladies who told me the contrary only this very morning."

" Well, duke," said Louis, " we shall see; M. de Taverney, we shall see ; youth is certainly catching, that is very true."

" Yes, yes, sire; and we must not forget that a powerful constitution like your majesty's always gains and never loses."

" Yet, I remember," said Louis, " that my predecessor, when he became old, thought not of such toys as woman's love, but became exceedingly devout."

" Come, come, sire ! " said Richelieu ; " your majesty knows my great respect for the deceased king, who twice sent **me to** the Bastille, **but that ought**

not to prevent me from saying that there is a vast difference between the ripe age of Louis XV. and that of Louis XIV. *Diable!* your most Christian majesty, although honouring fully your title of eldest son of the Church, need not carry asceticism so far as to forget your humanity."

" Faith, no ! " said Louis. " I may confess it, since neither my doctor nor confessor is present."

" Well, sire ! the king, your grandfather, frequently astonished Madame de Maintenon, who was even older than he, by his excess of religious zeal and his innumerable penances. I repeat it, sire, can there be any comparison made between your two majesties ? "

The king this evening was in a good humour. Richelieu's words acted upon him like so many drops of water from the fountain of youth.

Richelieu thought the time had come ; he touched Taverney's knee with his.

" Sire," said the latter, " will your majesty deign to accept my thanks for the magnificent present you have made my daughter ? "

" You need not thank me for that, baron," said the king. " Mademoiselle de Taverney pleased me by her modest and ingenuous grace. I wish my daughters had still their households to form ; certainly, Mademoiselle Andree—that is her name, is it not——? "

" Yes, sire," said Taverney, delighted that the king knew his daughter's Christian name.

" A very pretty name—certainly Mademoiselle Andree should have been the first upon the list ; but every post in my house is rilled up. In the meantime, baron, you may reckon upon my protection for your daughter. I think I have heard she has not a rich dowry ? "

" Alas ! no, sire."

" Well, I will make her marriage my especial, care." Taverney bowed to the ground.

"Then your majesty must be good enough," said he, " to select a husband; for I confess that, in our confined circumstances—our almost poverty——"

Yes, yes; rest easy on that point," said Louis; " but she seems very young—there is no haste."

" The less, sire, that I am aware your majesty dislikes marriage."

" Ha! " said Louis, rubbing his hands and looking at Richelieu. " Well! at all events, M. de Taverney, command me whenever you are at all embarrassed."

Then, rising, the king beckoned the duke, who approached.

" Was the little one satisfied ? " asked he.

" With what ? "

" With the casket."

" Your majesty must excuse my speaking low, but the father is listening, and he must not overhear what I have to tell you."

" Bah ! "

" No, I assure you, sire."

" Well, speak ! "

" Sire, the little one has indeed a horror of marriage ; but of one thing I am certain—viz., that she has not a horror of your majesty."

Uttering these words in a tone of familiarity which pleased the king from its very frankness, the marshal, with his little pattering steps, hastened to rejoin Taverney, who, from respect, had moved away to the doorway of the gallery.

Both retired by the gardens. It was a lovely evening. Two servants walked before them, holding torches in one hand, and with the other pulling aside the branches of the flowering shrubs. The windows of Trianon were

blazing with light, and, flitting across them could be discerned a crowd of joyous figures, the honoured guests of the dauphiness.

His majesty's band gave life and animation to the minuet, for dancing had commenced after supper, and was still kept up with undiminished spirit.

Concealed in a dense thicket of lilac and snowball shrubs, Gilbert, kneeling upon the ground, was gazing at the movements of the shadows through the transparent curtains. A thunderbolt cleaving the earth at his feet would scarcely have distracted the attention of the gazer, so much was he entranced by the lovely forms he was following with his eyes through all the mazes of the dance. Nevertheless, when Richelieu and Taverny passed, and brushed against the thicket in which this night-bird was concealed, the sound of their voices, and, above all, a certain word, made Gilbert raise his head; for this word was an all important one for him.

The marshal, leaning upon his friend's arm, and bending down to his ear, was saying,—

" Everything well weighed and considered, baron—it is a hard thing to tell you—but you must at once send your daughter to a convent."

" Why so ? " asked the Baron.

" Because I would wager," replied the marshal, " that the king is madly in love with Mademoiselle de Taverny."

At these words Gilbert started and turned paler than the flaky snow-berries, which, at his abrupt movement, showered down upon his head and shoulders.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PRESENTIMENTS

THE next day, as the clock at Trianon was striking twelve, Nicole's voice was heard calling Andree, who had not yet left her apartment:—

" Mademoiselle, here is M. Philip ! "

The exclamation came from the bottom of the stairs.

Andree, at once surprised and delighted, drew her muslin robe closely over her neck and shoulders, and hastened to meet the young man, who was in fact dismounting in the court-yard of Trianon, and inquiring from the servants at what time he could see his sister.

Andree therefore opened the door in person, and found herself face to face with Philip, whom the officious Nicole had ran to summon from the court-yard, and was accompanying up the stairs.

The young girl threw her arms round her brother's neck, and they entered Andree's apartments together, followed by Nicole.

It was then that Andree for the first time remarked that Philip was more serious than usual—that his smile was not free from sadness—that he wore his elegant uniform with the most scrupulous neatness, and that he held a travelling cloak over his arm.

" What is the matter, Philip ? " asked she, with the instinct of tender affection, of which a look is a sufficient revelation.

" My sister," said Philip, " this morning I received an order to join my regiment "

" And you are going ? "

" I must."

" Oh I " said Andree; and with this plaintive exclamation all her courage, and almost all her strength, seemed to desert her.

And although this departure was a very natural occurrence, and one which she might have foreseen, yet she felt so overpowered by the announcement that she was obliged to lean for support on her brother's arm.

" Good heavens ! " asked Philip, astonished, " does this departure afflict you so much, Andree ? You know, in a soldier's life, it is a most commonplace event."

" Yes, yes ; it is in truth common," murmured the young girl. " And whither do you go, brother ? "

" My garrison is at Rheims. You see, I have not a very long journey to undertake. But it is probable that from thence the regiment will return to Strasbourg."

" Alas ! " said Andree ; " and when do you set out ? "

" The order commands me to start immediately."

" You have come to bid me good-bye, then ? "

" Yes, sister."

" A farewell ! "

" Have you anything particular to say to me, Andree ? " asked Philip, fearing that this extreme dejection might have some other cause than his departure.

Andree understood that these words were meant to call her attention to Nicole, who, astonished at AndreVs extreme grief, was gazing at this scene with much surprise ; for, in fact, the departure of an officer to his garrison was not a catastrophe to cause such a flood of tears.

Andree, therefore, saw at the same instant Philip's

feelings and Nicole's surprise. She took up a mantle, threw it over her shoulders, and, leading her brother to the staircase,—

"Come," said she, "as far as the park-gates, Philip. I will accompany you through the covered alley. I have, in truth, many things to tell you, brother!"

These words were equivalent to a dismissal for Nicole, who returned to her mistress's chamber, while the latter descended the staircase with Philip.

Andr e led the way to the passage which still, even at the present day, opens from the chapel into the garden; but although Philip's look anxiously questioned her, she remained for a long time silent, leaning upon his arm, and supporting her head upon his shoulder.

But at last her heart was too full; her features were overspread with a death-like paleness, a deep sigh escaped her lips, and tears rushed from her eyes.

"My dear sister—my sweet Andree!" exclaimed Philip, "in the name of heaven, what is the matter?"

"My friend—my only friend!" said Andree, "you depart—you leave me alone in this great world, which I entered but yesterday, and yet you ask me why I weep? Ah! remember, Philip, I lost my mother at my birth; it is dreadful to acknowledge it, but I have never had a father. All my little griefs—all my little secrets—I could confide to you alone. Who smiled upon me? vWho caressed me? Who rocked me in my cradle? It was you. Who has protected me since I grew up? You. Who taught me that God's creatures were not cast into the world only to suffer? You, Philip—you alone. For, since the hour of my birth, I have loved no one in the world but you, and no one but you has loved me in return. Oh! Philip, Philip," continued Andrei **sadly,** **you turn**

away your head, and I can read your thoughts. You think I am young—that I am beautiful—and that I am wrong not to trust to the future and to love. And yet you see, alas ! Philip, it is not enough to be young and handsome, for no one thinks of me.

" You will say the dauphiness is kind, and she is so. She is all perfection ; at least, she seems so in my eyes, and I look upon her as a divinity. But it is exactly because she holds this exalted situation that I can feel only respect for her, and not affection. Yet, Philip, affection is necessary for my heart, which if always thrust back on itself must at last break. My father—I tell you nothing new, Philip—my father is not only no protector or friend, but I cannot even look at him without feeling terror. Yes, yes, I fear him, Philip, and still more now, since you are leaving me.

" You will ask, why should I fear him ? I know not. Do not the birds of the air and the flocks of the field feel and dread the approaching storm ? You will say they are endowed with instinct; but why will you deny the instinct of misfortune to our immortal souls ? For some time past everything has prospered with our family; I know it well. You are a captain; I am in the household, and almost in the intimacy of the dauphiness; my father, it is said, supped last night almost *tete-a-tete* with the king. Well! Philip, I repeat it, even should you think me mad, all this alarms me more than our peaceful poverty and obscurity at Taverney."

" And yet, dear sister," said Philip sadly, " you were alone there also; I was not with you there to console you."

" Yes, but at least I was alone—alone with the memories of childhood. It seemed to me as if the house

where my mother lived and breathed hen last owed me, if I may so speak, a protecting care. All there was peaceful, gentle, affectionate. I could see you depart with calmness, and welcome you back with joy. But whether you departed or returned, my heart was not all with you ; it was attached also to that dear house, to my gardens, to my flowers, to the whole scene of which formerly you were but a part. Now you are all to me, Philip, and when you leave me I am indeed alone."

" And yet, An dree, you have now a protector far more powerful than I am."

" True."

" A happy future before you."

" Who can tell ? "

" Why do you doubt it ? "

" I do not know."

" This is ingratitude towards God, my sister."

" Oh, no ! thank heaven, I am not ungrateful to God. Morning and evening I offer up thanks to Him ; but it seems to me as if, instead of receiving my prayers with grace, every time I bend the knee, a voice **from** on high whispers to my heart : Take care, **young** girl, take care ! ' "

" But against what are you to guard ? Answer me. I will admit that a danger theatens you. Have you any presentiment of the nature of this misfortune ? Do you know how to act so as best to confront it, or how to avoid it ? "

^{il} I know nothing, Philip, except that my life seems to hang by a thread, that nothing will look bright to me from the moment of your departure. In a word, it seems as if during my sleep I had been placed on the declivity of a precipice too steep to allow me to arrest my progress when roused to a sense of my danger;

that I see the abyss, and yet am dragged down; and that, you being far away, and your helping hand no longer ready to support me, I shall be dashed down and crushed in the fall."

"Dear sister! my sweet Andr e!" said Philip, agitated in spite of himself by the expression of deep and unaffected terror in her voice and manner. "you exaggerate the extent of an affection for which I feel deeply grateful. Yes, you will lose your friend, but only for a time ; I shall not be so far distant but that you can send for me if necessity should arise. Besides, remember that except chimerical fears, nothing threatens you."

Andr e placed herself in her brother's way.

"Then, Philip," said she, "how does it happen that you, who are a man, and gifted with so much more strength, are at this moment as sad as I am ? Tell me, my brother, how do you explain that ? "

"Easily, dear sister," said Philip, arresting Andree's steps, for she had again moved forwards on ceasing to speak. "We are not only brother and sister by blood, but in heart and affection; therefore we have lived in an intimate communion of thoughts and feelings, which, especially since our arrival in Paris, has become to me a delightful necessity. I break this chain, my sweet love, or rather it is broken by others, and I feel the blow in my inmost heart. I am sad, but only for the moment, Andr e. I can look beyond our separation ; I do not believe in any misfortune, except in that of not seeing you for some months, perhaps for a year. I am resigned, and do not say farewell/ but rather, 'we shall soon meet again.' "

In spite of these consolatory words, Andr e could only reply by sobs and tears.

"Dearest sister," exclaimed Philip, grieved at this

dejection, which seemed so incomprehensible to him, "Dearest sister, you have not told me all—you hide something from me. In heaven's name, speak!"

And he took her in his arms, pressing her to his heart, and gazing earnestly in her eyes.

"I!" said she. "No, no, Philip, I assure you solemnly. You know all the most secret recesses of my heart are open before you."

"Well, then, Andree, for pity's sake, take courage; do not grieve me so."

"You are right," said she, "and I am mad. Listen: I never had a strong mind, as you, Philip, know better than any one; I have always been a timid, dreaming, melancholy creature. But I have no right to make so tenderly beloved a brother a sharer in my fears, above all when he labours to *give* me courage, and proves to me that I am wrong to be alarmed. You are right, Philip; it is true, everything here is conducive to my happiness. Forgive me, Philip! You see, I dry my tears—I weep no longer—I smile, Philip—I do not say 'adieu,' but rather, 'we shall soon meet again.'"

And the young maiden tenderly embraced her brother, hiding her head on his shoulder to conceal from his view a tear which still dimmed her eye, and which dropped like a pearl upon the golden epaulette of the young officer.

Philip gazed upon her with that infinite tenderness which partakes at the same time of a father's and a brother's affection.

"Andree," said he, "I love to see you bear yourself thus bravely. Be of good courage; I must go, but the courier shall bring you a letter every week. **And** every week let me receive one from you in return."

"Yes, Philip," said Andree; "yes, it will be my

only happiness. But you have informed my father, have you not ? "

" Of what ? "

" Of your departure/'

" Dear sister, it was the baron himself who brought me the minister's order this morning. M. de Taverney is not like you, Andree, and it seems will easily part with me. He appeared pleased at the thought of my departure, and in fact he was right. Here I can never get forward, while there, many occasions may present themselves."

" My father is glad to see you go ? " murmured Andree. " Are you not mistaken, Philip ? "

" He has you ' replied Philip, eluding the question , " that is a consolation for him, sister."

" Do you think so, Philip ? He never sees me."

" My sister, he bade me tell you that this very day, after my departure, he would come to Trianon. Believe me, he loves you ; only it is after his own fashion."

" What is the matter now, Philip ? you seem embarrassed."

" Dearest Andree, I heard the clock strike, what hour is it ? "

" A quarter to one."

" Well, dear sister, I seem embarrassed because I ought to have been on the road an hour ago, and here we are at the gate where my horse is waiting. Therefore——"

Andree assumed a calm demeanour, and taking her brother's hand,—

" Therefore," said she, in a voice too firm to be entirely natural, " therefore, brother, adieu ! "

Philip gave her one last embrace.

*' Too meet soon again," said he ; " remember, your promise."

" What promise ? "

" One letter a week, at least/'

" Oh ! do you think it necessary to ask it ? "

She required a violent effort to pronounce these last words. The poor girl's voice was scarcely audible.

Philip waved his hand in token of adieu, and walked quickly towards the gate. Andree followed his retreating form with her eyes, holding in her breath in the endeavour to repress her sighs. Philip bounded lightly on horseback, shouted a last farewell from the other side of the gate, and was gone. Andree remained standing motionless till he was out of sight, then she turned, darted like a wounded fawn amongst the shady trees, perceived a bench, and had only strength sufficient to reach it, and to sink on it powerless and almost lifeless. Then, heaving a deep and heart-rending sigh, she exclaimed,—

" Oh, my God ! do not leave me quite alone upon earth."

She buried her face in her hands, while the big tears she did not seek to restrain made their way through her slender fingers. At this instant a slight rustling was heard amidst the shrubs behind her. Andree thought she heard a sigh. She turned, alarmed; a melancholy form stood before her.

It was Gilbert.

CHAPTER XXIX

GILBERT'S ROMANCE

As pale, as despairing as Andree, Gilbert stood down-cast before her. At the sight of a man, and of a stranger, for such he seemed at first sight through the thick veil of tears which obscured her gaze, Andree hastily

dried her eyes, as if the proud young girl would have blushed to be seen weeping. She made an effort to compose herself, and restored calmness to her marble features, only an instant before agitated with the shudder of despair. Gilbert was much longer in regaining his calmness, and his features still wore an expression of grief when Mademoiselle de Taverney, looking up, at last recognised him.

" Oh ! Monsieur Gilbert again ! " said Andree, with that trifling tone which she affected to assume whenever chance brought her in contact with the young man.

" Gilbert made no reply ; his feelings were still too deeply moved. The grief which had shaken Andree's, frame to the centre had violently agitated his own. It was Andree, therefore, who again broke the silence, wishing to have the last word with this apparition.

" But what is the matter, Monsieur Gilbert ? " inquired she. " Why do you gaze at me in that woebegone manner ? Something must grieve you. May I ask what it is ? "

" Do you wish to know ? " asked Gilbert mournfully, for he felt the irony concealed beneath this appearance of interest.

" Yes."

" Well, what grieves me, mademoiselle, is to see you suffer/" replied Gilbert."

" And who told you that I am suffering ? "

" I see it."

" You mistake, sir ; I am not suffering," said Andree, passing her handkerchief over her face.

Gilbert felt the storm rising, but he resolved to turn it aside by humility.

" I entreat your pardon, mademoiselle," said he, " but the reason I spoke was that I heard your sobs."

" Ah ! you were listening ; better and better ! "

"Mademoiselle, it was by accident," stammered Gilbert, for he felt that he was telling a falsehood

"Accident! I regret exceedingly, Monsieur Gilbert, that chance should have brought you here. But even so, may I ask in what manner these sobs which you heard me utter grieved you? Pray inform me."

"I cannot bear to see a woman weep," said Gilbert, in a tone which highly displeased Andree.

"Am I then a *woman* in M. Gilbert's eyes?" replied the haughty young girl. "I sue for no one's sympathy, but M. Gilbert's still less than any other's."

"Mademoiselle," said Gilbert sadly, "you do wrong to taunt me thus. I saw you sad, and I felt grieved. I heard you say, that now M. Philip was gone, you would be alone in the world. Never, mademoiselle! for I am beside you, and never did a heart beat more devoted to you. I repeat it, Mademoiselle de Taverney cannot be alone in the world while my head can think, my heart beat, or my arm retains its strength."

While he spoke these words, Gilbert was indeed a model of manly elegance and beauty, although he pronounced them with all the humility which the most sincere respect commanded.

But it was fated that everything which the young man did should displease Andree, should offend her, and urge her to offensive retorts—as if his very respect were an insult, and his prayers a provocation. At first she attempted to rise, that she might second her harsh words with as harsh gestures; but a nervous shudder retained her on her seat. Besides, she reflected that if she were standing, she could be seen from a distance, and seen talking to Gilbert. She therefore remained seated; for she was determined, once for all, to crush the importunate insect before her under foot, and replied,—

" I thought I had already informed you, Monsieur Gilbert, that you are highly displeasing *to me*, that your voice annoys me, that your philosophical speeches disgust me. Then why, when you know this, do you still persist in addressing me?"

" Mademoiselle," replied Gilbert, pale, but self-possessed, " an honest-hearted woman is never disgusted by sympathy. An honest man is the equal of every human being; and I, whom you maltreat so cruelly, deserve, more than any other, perhaps, the sympathy which I regret to perceive you do not feel for me."

At this word *sympathy*, thus twice repeated, Andree opened her large eyes to their utmost extent, and fixed them impertinently upon Gilbert.

" Sympathy ! " said she ; " sympathy between you and me, Monsieur Gilbert! In truth, I was deceived in my opinion of you. I took you for insolent, and I find you are even less than that—you are only a mad-man."

" I am neither insolent nor mad," said Gilbert with an apparent calm which it must have caused his proud disposition much to assume. " No, mademoiselle ; nature has made me your equal, and chance has made you my debtor."

" Chance again ! " said Andree sarcastically.

" Perhaps I should have said Providence. I never intended to have spoken to you of this, but your insults refresh my memory."

" / your debtor, sir ? Your *debtor*, I think you said ? Explain yourself."

" I should be ashamed to find you ungrateful, mademoiselle: God, who has made you so beautiful, has given you, to compensate for your beauty, sufficient defects without that,"

This time Andree rose.

" Stay ! pardon me ! " said Gilbert; " at times you irritate me too much also, and then I forget for a moment the interest with which you inspire me."

Andree burst into a fit of laughter so prolonged that it was calculated to rouse Gilbert's anger to the utmost; but to her great surprise Gilbert did not take fire. He folded his arms on his breast, retained the same hostile and determined expression in his fiery glance, and patiently awaited the end of this insulting laugh.

When she had finished,—

" Mademoiselle," said Gilbert coldly, " will you condescend to answer one question ? Do you respect your father ? "

" You take the liberty of catechising me, it seems, Monsieur Gilbert ? " replied the young girl with sovereign hauteur.

" Yes, you respect your father," continued Gilbert; " and it is not on account of his good qualities or his virtues, but simply because he gave you life. A father, unfortunately—and you must know it, mademoiselle—a father is respected only in one relation, but still it gives him a claim. Even more ; for this sole benefit "—and Gilbert, in his turn, felt himself animated by an Amotion of scornful pity—" you are bound to love, your benefactor. Well, mademoiselle, this being established as a principle, why do you insult me ? why do you scorn me ? why do you hate him who did not indeed give you life, but who saved it ? "

" You ! " exclaimed Andree ; " you saved my life ?"

" Ah ! you did not even dream of that," said Gilbert, " or rather you have forgotten it. That is very natural; it occurred nearly a year ago. Well, mademoiselle, I must only therefore inform you of it, or recall it to

your memory. Yes, I saved your life at the risk of my own."

"At least, Monsieur Gilbert/' said Andr e, deadly pale/* you will do me the favour of telling me when and where/'

"The day, mademoiselle, when a hundred thousand persons, crushed one against the other, fleeing from the fiery horses, and the sabres which thinned the crowd, left a long train of dead and dying upon the Place Louis XV."

"Ah! the 31st of May? "

"Yes, mademoiselle."

Andr e seated herself and her features again assumed a pitiless smile.

"And on that day, you say you sacrificed your life to save mine, Monsieur Gilbert? "

"I have already told you so."

"Then you are the Baron Balsamo; I beg your pardon, I was not aware of the fact."

"No, I am not the Baron Balsamo," replied Gilbert, with flashing eye and quivering lip; "I am the poor child of the people—Gilbert, who has the folly, the madness, the misfortune to love you; who, because he loved you like a madman, like a fool, like a sot, followed you into the crowd; who, separated from you for a moment, recognised you by the piercing **shriek** you uttered when you lost your footing; who, **forcing** his way to you, shielded you with his arms until twenty thousand arms, pressing against his, broke their strength; who threw himself upon the stone wall against which you were about to be crushed, to afford you the softer repose of his corpse; and perceiving among the crowd that strange man who seemed to govern his fellow-men, and whose name you have just pronounced, collected all his strength, all

his energy, and raised you in his exhausted' arms that this man might see you, seize hold of you, and save you!—Gilbert, who in yielding you up to a more fortunate protector than himself, retained nothing but a shred of your dress, which he pressed to his lips ! And it was time, for already the blood was rushing to his heart, to his temples, to his brain. The rolling tide of executioners and victims swept over him, and buried him beneath its waves, while you ascended aloft from its abyss to a haven of safety ! "

Gilbert in these hurried words had shown himself as he was—uncultivated, simple, almost sublime, in his resolution as in his love. Notwithstanding her contempt, Andree could not refrain from gazing at him with astonishment. For a moment he believed that his narrative had been as irresistible as truth—as love. But poor Gilbert did not take into his calculations incredulity, that demon prompted by hatred. Andree, who hated Gilbert, did not allow herself to be moved by any of the forcible arguments of her despised lover.

She did not reply immediately, but looked at Gilbert, while something like a struggle took place in her mind. The young man, therefore, ill at ease during this freezing silence, felt himself obliged to add, as a sort of peroration,—

" And now, mademoiselle, do not detest me as you did formerly, for now it would not only be injustice, but ingratitude, to do so. I said so before, and I now repeat it."

At these words Andree raised her haughty brow, and in the most indifferent and cutting tone, she asked :

" How long, Monsieur Gilbert, did you remain under M. Rousseau's tutelage ? "

" Mademoiselle/" said Gilbert ingenuously, " I think about three months, without reckoning the few

days of my illness, which was caused by the accident on the 31st of May."

" You misunderstand me," said she, " I did not ask you whether you have been ill or not, or what accidents you may have received. They add an artistic finish to your story, but otherwise they are of no importance to me. I merely wished to tell you, that having resided only three months with the illustrious author, you have profited well by his lessons, and that the pupil at his first essay composes romances almost worthy of his master."

Gilbert had listened with calmness, believing that Andr e was about to reply seriously to his impassioned narration ; but at this stroke of cutting irony, he fell from the summit of his buoyant hopes to the dust.

" A romance ! " murmured he indignantly ; " you treat what I have told you as a romance! "

" Yes, sir," said Andree, " a romance—I repeat the word ; only you did not force me to read it—for that I have to thank you. I deeply regret that, unfortunately, I am not able to repay its full value ; but I should make the attempt in vain—the romance is invaluable."

" And this is your reply ? " stammered Gilbert, a pang darting through his heart, and his eyes becoming dim from emotion.

" I do not reply at all, sir," said Andree, pushing him aside to allow her room to pass on.

The fact was, that Nicole had at that moment made her appearance at the end of the alley, calling her mistress while still a considerable distance off, in order not to interrupt this interview too suddenly, ignorant as she was as to whom Andr e's companion might be, for she had not recognised Gilbert through the foliage. But as she approached she saw the young man,

recognised him, and stood astounded. She then repented not having made a detour in order to overhear what Gilbert had to say to Mademoiselle de Taverney. The latter addressed her in a softened voice, as if to mark more strongly to Gilbert the haughtiness with which she had spoken to him.

" Well, child/' said she, "what is the matter?"

" The Baron de Taverney and the Duke de Richelieu have come to present their respects to mademoiselle/' replied Nicole.

" Where are they ? "

" In mademoiselle's apartments."

" Come then."

And Andree moved away. Nicole followed, not without throwing, as she passed, a sarcastic glance back at Gilbert, who, livid with agitation, and almost frantic with rage, shook his clenched hand in the direction of his departing enemy, and grinding his teeth, muttered,—

" Oh! creature without heart, without soul! I saved your life, I concentrated all my affection on you, I extinguished every feeling which might offend your purity, for in my madness I looked upon you as some superior being—the inhabitant of a higher sphere ! Now that I have seen you more nearly, I find you are no more than a woman—and I am a man ! But one day or other, Andrei de Taverney, I shall be revenged !"

He rushed from the spot, bounding through the thickest of the shrubs like a young wolf wounded by the hunter, who turns and shows his sharp teeth and his bloodshot eyeballs.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

CHAPTER XXX

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

WHEN she reached the opposite extremity of the alley, Andree saw her father and the marshal walking up and down before the vestibule, waiting for her. The two friends seemed in high spirits, and, as they stood with their arms interlaced, presented the most perfect representation of Orestes and Pylades the court had ever witnessed, As Andree approached the two old men seemed still more joyous, and remarked to each other on her radiant beauty, heightened by her walk, and by the emotion she had previously undergone.

The marshal saluted Andree as he would have done a declared Madame Pompadour. This distinction did not escape Taverney, who was delighted at it, but it surprised Andree, from its mixture of respect and gallantry ; for the cunning courtier could express as many shades of meaning in a bow as Covielle could French phrases by a single Turkish word.

Andr e returned the marshal's salutation, made one equally ceremonious to her father, and then, with fascinating grace, she invited both to follow her to her apartment.

The marshal admired the exquisite neatness which was the only ornament of the furniture and architecture of this retreat. With a few flowers and a little white muslin, Andree had made her rather gloomy chamber, not a palace indeed, but a temple.

The duke seated himself upon an arm-chair covered with green chintz, beneath a Chinese cornucopia from which drooped bunches of perfumed acacia and maple, mingled with iris and Bengal roses.

Taverney occupied a similar chair ; and Andree sank upon a folding stool, her arm resting on a nafsichord also ornamented with flowers, arranged in a large Dresden vase.

" Mademoiselle/" said the marshal, " I come as the bearer, on the part of his majesty, of the compliments which your charming voice and your musical talents drew from every auditor of yesterday's rehearsal. His majesty feared to arouse jealousy by praising you too openly at the time, and he therefore charged me to express to you the pleasure you have caused him."

Andree blushed, and her blush made her so lovely that the marshal proceeded as if speaking on his own account.

" The king has assured me," said he, " that he never saw any one at his court who united to such a high degree the gifts of mind and the charms of personal beauty."

" You forget those of the heart," said Taverney, with a gush of affection ; " Andree is the best of daughters."

The marshal thought for a moment that his old friend was about to weep. Admiring deeply this display of paternal sensibility, he exclaimed,—

" The heart! alas, my dear friend ! You alone can judge of the tenderness of which mademoiselle's heart is capable. Were I only five-and-twenty years of age, I would lay my life and my fortune at her feet! "

Andrte did not know how to receive coolly the full fire of a courtier's homage. She could only murmur some almost inaudible words.

" Mademoiselle," continued he, " the king requests you will accept a slight testimony of his satisfaction.

and he has charged the baron, your father, to transmit it to you. * What reply shall I make to his majesty from you ? "

" Sir," replied Andree, animated by no feeling but that respect which is due to a monarch from all his subjects, " assure his majesty of my deep gratitude ; tell him that he honours me too highly by deigning to think of me, and that I am not worthy the attention of so powerful a monarch."

Richelieu seemed in raptures at this reply, which Andree pronounced with a firm voice, and without hesitation. He took her hand, kissed it respectfully, and devouring her with his eyes, -

" A royal hand," said he, " a fairy foot—mind, purity, resolution !—ah ! baron, what a treasure ! It is not a daughter whom you have—it is a queen ! "

With these words he retired, leaving Taverney alone with Andree, his heart swelling with pride and hope.

Whoever had seen this advocate of antiquated theories, this sceptic, this scoffer, inhaling with delight the air of favouritism in its most disreputable channel, would have said that God had blinded at the same moment both his intellect and heart. Taverney alone might have replied, with reference to this change :

" It is not I who have changed—it is the times."

He remained, then, seated beside Andree, and could not help feeling somewhat embarrassed ; for the young girl, with her air of unconquerable serenity, and her clear, limpid, unfathomable look, seemed as if sije would penetrate his most secret thoughts.

" Did not M. de Richelieu, sir, say that his majesty had entrusted you with a testimony of his satisfaction ? May I ask what it is ? "

" Ah ! " thought Taverney, " she is curious—so

much the better ! I could not have expected it. So much the better ! " . . .

He drew the casket, which the marshal had given him the evening before, slowly from his pocket, just as a kind papa produces a paper of sweetmeats or a toy, which the children have devoured with their eyes before their hands can reach them.

" Here it is," said he.

" Ah ! jewels ! " said Andree.

" Are they to your taste ? "

It was a set of pearls of great value. Twelve immense diamonds connected together the rows of pearls, while a diamond clasp, earrings, and a tiara of the same precious material, made the present worth at least thirty thousand crowns.

" Good Heavens, father ! " exclaimed Andree.

" Well ? "

" It is too handsome. The king has made some mistake. I should be ashamed to wear that. I have no dresses suitable to the splendour of these diamonds."

" Oh I complain of it, I beg ! " said Taverney ironically.

" You do not understand me, sir. I regret that I cannot wear these jewels, because they are too beautiful."

" The king, who gives the casket, mademoiselle, is generous enough to add the dresses."

" But, sir, this is goodness on the king's part—— "

" Do you not think I have deserved it by my services ? "

" Ah ! pardon me, sir; that is true," said Andree, drooping her head, but not quite convinced.

After a moment's reflection, she closed the casket.

" I shall not wear these diamonds," said she.

" And why not ? " said Taverney uneasily.

" Because, my dear father, you and my brother are

in want of necessaries, and this superfluity offends my eyes when I think of your embarrassments."

Taverney smiled and pressed her hand.

" Oh ! " said he, " do not think of that, my daughter. The king has done more for me than for you. We are in favour, my dear child. It would neither be respectful as a subject, nor grateful as a woman, to appear before his majesty without the present he has made you."

" I shall obey, sir."

" Yes, but you must obey as if it gave you pleasure to do so. These ornaments seem not to be to your taste."

" I am no judge of diamonds, sir."

" Learn then that the pearls alone are worth fifty thousand livres."

Andr e clasped her hands.

" Sir," said she, " it is most strange that his majesty should make me such a present, reflect! "

" I do not understand you, mademoiselle," replied Taverney dryly.

" If I wear these jewels, I assure you, sir, every one will be greatly surprised."

" Why ? " asked Taverney in the same tone and with a cold and imperious glance which made Andr e lower her eyes.

" I feel a scruple."

" Mademoiselle, you must confess that it is strange you should entertain scruples, when even I, your father, feel none. Give me your young modest girls for seeing evil and finding it out, however closely hidden it is, and when none other had remarked it! None like maidenly and simple girls for making old grenadiers like myself blush ! "

Andr e hid her blushing face in her lovely white hands.

" Oh, my brother ! " she murmured to herself, " why are you already so far from me ? "

Did Taverney hear these words, or did he guess their purport with that wonderful perspicacity which we know he possessed ? We cannot tell, but he immediately changed his tone, and taking Andree's hand in his,—

" Come, my child," said he, " is not your father your friend ? "

A heavenly smile chased the shadow from AndreVs brow.

" Shall I not be here to love you—to advise you ? Are you not proud to contribute to my happiness and that of your brother ? "

" Oh, yes ! " said Andree.

The baron fixed a caressing look upon his daughter.

" Well ! " said he, " you shall be, as M. de Richelieu said just now, the queen of Taverney. The king has distinguished you, and the dauphiness also/" added he hastily. " In your intimacy with these two august personages, you will found our future fortunes by making them happy. The friend of the dauphiness, and—of the king! What a glorious career! You have superior talents and unrivalled beauty, a pure and healthy mind untainted by avarice and ambition. Oh ! my child, what a part you might play ! Do you remember the maiden who soothed the last moments of Charles VI. ? Her name is cherished in France. Do you remember Agnes Sorel, who restored the honour of the French crown ? All good Frenchmen respect her memory. Andree, you will be the support of the old age of our glorious monarch. He will cherish you as his daughter, and you will reign in France by the divine right of beauty, courage, and fidelity ! "

Andree opened her eyes wide with astonishment.

The baron resumed, without giving her time to reflect.

"With a single look you will drive away these wretched creatures who dishonour the throne ; your presence will purify the court. To your generous influence the nobility of the kingdom will owe the return of pure morals, politeness, and real gallantry. My daughter, you may be, you must be, the regenerating star of your country, and a crown of glory to your name."

"But," said Andree, all bewildered, "what must I do to effect all this ?"

The baron reflected for a moment.

"Andree," said he, "I have often told you that in this world you must force men to be virtuous by making them love virtue. Sullen, melancholy, sermonising virtue makes even those fly who wish most to approach her. Lend to your virtue all the allurements of coquetry—I had almost said of vice. It is an easy task for a talented and high-minded girl such as you are. Make yourself so lovely that the court shall talk only of you ; make yourself so agreeable to the king that he cannot do without you. Be so reserved and discreet towards all, except his majesty, that people will soon attribute to you all that power which you cannot fail ultimately to obtain."

"I do not exactly understand your last advice," said Andree.

"Trust yourself to my guidance—you will fulfil my wishes without understanding them; the best plan for such a wise and generous creature as you are. But, by the bye, to enable you to put in practice my first counsel, I must furnish your purse. Take these hundred louis-d'ors and dress in a manner worthy of the rank to which you belong, since his majesty has distinguished you."

Taverney gave the hundred louis to his daughter, kissed her hand, and left her.

He returned with rapid steps along the alley by which he had come, so much engrossed in his reflections that he did not perceive Nicole in eager conference with a nobleman at the extremity of the Bosquet des Amours.

CHAPTER XXXI

WHAT ALTHOTAS WANTED TO COMPLETE
HIS ELIXIR

THE day subsequent to this conversation, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Balsamo was seated in his cabinet, in the Rue Saint Claude, occupied in reading a letter which Fritz had just brought him. The letter was without signature. He turned it over and over in his hands.

" I know this writing." said he ; " large, irregular, slightly tremulous, and full of faults in orthography."

And he read it once more. It ran as follows :—

" MY LORD COUNT,—

" A person who consulted you some time before the fall of the late ministry, and who had consulted you a long time previously, will wait upon you to-day, in order to have another consultation. Will your numerous occupations permit you to grant this person a quarter of an hour between four and five this evening? "

After reading this for a second or third time, Balsamo fell back into his train of reflection.

" It is not worth while to consult Lorenza for such

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

a trifle," said he ; " besides, can I no longer guess myself ? The writing is large—a sign of aristocracy irregular and trembling—a sign of age; full of faults in orthography—it must be a courtier. Ah ! stupid creature that I am ! it is the Duke de Richelieu ! Most certainly I shall have a half-hour at your service, my lord duke—an hour did I say ?—a day ! Make my time your own. Are you not, without knowing it, one of my mysterious agents, one of my familiar demons ? Do we not both pursue the same task ? Do we not both shake the monarchy at the same time—you by making yourself its presiding genius, I by declaring myself its enemy ? Come then, duke, I am ready."

And Balsamo consulted his watch to see how long he must yet wait for the duke. At that moment a bell sounded in the cornice of the ceiling.

" What can be the matter ? " said Balsamo, starting,* " Lorenza calls me—she wishes to see me. Can anything unpleasant have happened to her ? or is it a return of those fits of passion which I have so often witnessed, and of which I have been at times the victim ? Yesterday she was thoughtful, gentle, resigned; she was as I loved to see her. Poor child ! I must go to her."

He arranged his dress, glanced at the mirror to see if his hair was not too much in disorder, and proceeded towards the stairs, after having replied to Lorenza's request by a ring similar to her own.

But, according to his invariable custom, Balsamo paused in the apartment adjoining that occupied by the young girl, and turning, with his arms crossed, towards the direction where he supposed her to be, he commanded her to sleep, with that powerful will which recognised no obstacles. Then, as if doubting his own power, or as if he thought it necessary to

redouble his precautions, he looked into the, apartment through an almost imperceptible crevice in the wood-work.

Lorenza was sleeping upon a couch, to which she had, no doubt, tottered under the influence of her master's will, and had sought a support for her sinking limbs. A painter could not have suggested a more poetic attitude. Panting and subdued beneath the power of the subtle fluid which Balsamo had poured upon her, Lorenza seemed like one of those beautiful Ariadnes of Vanloo, with heaving breasts and features expressive of fatigue or despair.

Balsamo entered by his usual passage, and stopped for a moment before her to contemplate her sleeping countenance. He then awoke her.

As she opened her eyes, a piercing glance escaped from between the half-closed lids ; then, as if to collect her scattered thoughts, she smoothed back her long hair with her hands, dried her lips, moist with slumber, and seemed to reflect anxiously.

Balsamo looked at her with some anxiety. He had been long accustomed to the sudden transition from winning love to outbursts of anger and hatred; but this appearance, to which he was entirely unused—the calmness with which Lorenza on this occasion received him, instead of giving way to a burst of hatred—announced something more serious, perhaps, than he had yet witnessed.

Lorenza sat up on the couch, and fixing her deep soft eyes upon Balsamo, she said,—

" Pray be good enough to take a seat beside me."

Balsamo started at the sound of her voice, expressing as it did such unusual mildness.

" Beside you ! " said he. " You know, my Lorenza, that I have but one wish—to pass my life at your feet."

" Sir," replied Lorenza, in the same tone, " I pray you to be seated, although, indeed, I have not much to say to you ; but, short as it is, I shall say it better, I think, if you are seated."

" Now, as ever, my beloved Lorenza, I shall do as you wish."

And he took a chair near Lorenza, who was still seated upon the couch.

" Sir," said she, fixing her heavenly eyes upon Balsamo, " I have summoned you to request from you a favour."

" Oh ! my Lorenza," exclaimed Balsamo, more and more delighted, " anything you wish ! speak—you shall have everything ! "

" I wish for only one; but I warn you that I wish for this one most ardently."

" Speak, Lorenza, speak !—should it cost my fortune, or half my life."

" It will cost you nothing, sir, but a moment of your time," replied the young girl.

Balsamo, enchanted with the turn the conversation was taking, was already tasking his fertile imagination to supply a list of those wishes which Lorenza was likely to form, and, above all, those which he could satisfy. " She will, perhaps," thought he, " ask for a servant or a companion. Well! even this immense sacrifice—for it would compromise my secret and my friends—I will make, for the poor child is in truth very unhappy in her solitude."

" Speak quickly, my Lorenza," said he aloud, with a smile full of love.

" Sir," said she, " you are aware that I am pining away with melancholy and weariness."

Balsamo sighed, and bent his head in token of assent.

" My youth," continued Lorenza, " is wasted;

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

my days are one long sigh—my nights a continual terror. I am growing old in solitude and anguish."

"Your life is what you have made it, Lorenza," said Balsamo; "it is not my fault that this life which YOU have made so sad is not one to make a queen envious."

"Be it so. Therefore it is I, you see, who have recourse to you in my distress. "

"Thanks, Lorenza."

"You are a good Christian, you have sometimes told me, although——"

"Although you think me lost to heaven, you would say. I complete your thought, Lorenza."

"Suppose nothing except what I tell you, sir; and pray do not conjecture thus groundlessly."

"Proceed, then."

"Well! instead of leaving me plunged in this despair and wrath, grant me, since I am of no service to you——"

She stopped to glance at Balsamo, but he had regained his command over himself, and she only saw a cold look and contracted brow bent upon her.

She became animated as she met his almost threatening eye.

"Grant me," continued she, "not liberty—for I know that some mysterious secret, or rather your will, which seems all-powerful to me, condemns me to perpetual captivity—but at least to see human faces, to hear other voices than yours—permit me, in short, to go out, to walk, to take exercise."

"I had foreseen this request, Lorenza," said Balsamo taking her hand; "and you know that long since your wish has been also my own."

"Well, then!" exclaimed Lorenza.

"But." resumed Balsamo, "you have yourself

prevented it. Like a madman that I was—and every man who loves is such—I allowed you to penetrate into some of my secrets, both of science and politics. You know that Althotas has discovered the philosopher's stone, and seeks the elixir of life. You know that I and my companions conspire against the monarchies of this world. The first of these secrets would cause me to be burnt as a sorcerer—the other would be sufficient to condemn me to be broken on the wheel for high treason. Besides, you have threatened me, Lorenza—you have told me that you would try every means to regain your liberty; and, this liberty once regained, that the first use you would make of it would be to denounce me to M. de Sartines. Did you not say so ? "

" What can you expect ? At times I lash myself to fury, and then I am half mad."

" Are you calm and sensible now, Lorenza ?—and can we converse quietly together."

" I hope so."

" If I grant you the liberty you desire, shall I find in you a devoted and submissive wife—a faithful and gentle companion ? You know, Lorenza, this is my most ardent wish ? "

The young girl was silent.

" In one word—will you love me ?" asked Balsamo with a sigh.

" I am unwilling to promise what I cannot perform." said Lorenza; " neither love nor hatred depends upon ourselves. I hope that God, in return for your good actions, will permit my hatred towards you to take flight, and love to return."

" Unfortunately, Lorenza, such a promise is not a sufficient guarantee that I may trust you. I require a positive, sacred oath, to break which would be a sacrilege—an oath which binds you in this world as

in the next—which would bring with it your death in this world and your damnation in that which is to come."

Lorenza was silent.

" Will you take this oath ? "

Lorenza hid her face in her hands, and her breast heaved under the influence of contending emotions.

" Take this oath, Lorenza, as I shall dictate it in the solemn terms in which I shall clothe it, and you shall be free."

" What must I swear, sir ? "

" Swear that you will never, under any pretext, betray what has come to your knowledge relative to the secrets of Althotas."

" Yes, I will swear it."

" Swear that you will never divulge what you know of our political meetings."

" I will swear that also."

" With the oath and in the form which I shall dictate ? "

" Yes. Is that all ? "

" No ; swear—and this is the principal one, Lorenza, for the other matters would only endanger my life, whilst upon the one I am about to name depends my entire happiness—swear that you will never, either at the instigation of another's will or in obedience to your own, leave me, Lorenza. Swear this, and you are free."

The young girl started as if cold steel had pierced her heart.

" And in what form must the oath be taken ? "

" We will enter a church together and communicate at the same altar. You will swear on the host never to betray anything relating to Althotas or my companions. You will swear never to leave me. We will

then divide the host in two, and each will take the half, you swearing before God that you will never betray me, and I that I will ever do my utmost to make you happy."

"No!" said Lorenza; "such an oath is a sacrilege."

"An oath, Lorenza, is never a sacrilege," replied Balsamo sadly, "but when you make it with the intention of not keeping it."

"I will not take this oath," said Lorenza; "I should fear to peril my soul."

"It is not—I repeat it—in taking an oath that you peril your soul; it is in breaking it."

"I cannot do it."

"Then learn patience, Lorenza," said Balsamo, without anger, but with the deepest sadness.

Lorenza's brow darkened like an overshadowed plain when a cloud passes between it and the sun.

"Ah! you refuse?" said she.

"Not so, Lorenza; it is you who refuse."

A nervous movement indicated all the impatience the young girl felt at these words.

"Listen, Lorenza!" said Balsamo. "This is what I will do for you, and, believe me, it is much."

"Speak!" said the young girl, with a bitter smile.

"Let me see how far your generosity will extend."

"God, chance, or fate—call it what you will, Lorenza, has united us in an indissoluble bond; do not attempt to break this bond in this life, for death alone can accomplish that."

"Proceed; I know that," said Lorenza impatiently.

"Well, in one week, Lorenza—whatever it may cost me, and however great the sacrifice I make—in eight days you shall have a companion,"

"Where?" asked she.

"Here"

" Here ! " she exclaimed, " behind these bars—behind these inexorable doors, these iron" doors—a fellow-prisoner! Oh, you cannot mean it, sir; that is not what I ask."

" Lorenza, it is all that I can grant."

The young girl made a more vehement gesture of impatience.

" My sweetest girl," resumed Balsamo mildly, " reflect a little ; with a companion you will more easily support the weight of this necessary misfortune."

" You mistake, sir. Until now I have grieved only for myself, not for others. This trial only was wanting, and I see that you wish to make me undergo it. Yes, you will immure beside me a victim like myself; I shall see her grow thinner and paler, and pine away with grief, even as I do. I shall see her dash herself, as I do, against these walls—that hateful door—which I examine twenty times each day to see where it opens to give you egress; and when my companion, your victim, has, like me, wounded her hands against the marble blocks in her endeavours to disjoin them ; when, like me, she has worn out her eyelids with her tears ; when she is dead as I am, in soul and mind, and you have two corpses in place of one, you will say, in your hateful benevolence : ' These two young creatures amuse themselves—they keep each other company—they are happy ! ' Oh ! no, no, no !—a thousand times no ! "

And she passionately stamped her foot upon the ground, while Balsamo endeavoured in vain to calm her.

" Come, Lorenza," said he, " I entreat you to show a little more mildness and calmness. Let us reason on the matter."

" He asks me to be calm, to be gentle, to reason !

The executioner tells the victim whom he is torturing to be gentle, and the innocent martyr to be calm ! "

" Yes, Lorenza; I ask you to be gentle and calm, for your anger cannot change our destiny; it only embitters it. Accept what I offer you, Lorenza; I will give you a companion who will hug her chains, since they have procured for her your friendship. You shall not see a sad and tearful face, such as you fear, but smiles and gaiety which will smooth your brow. Come, dearest Lorenza, accept what I offer; for I swear to you that I cannot offer you more."

" That means that you will place near me a hireling, to whom you will say : ' I give you in charge a poor insane creature, who imagines herself ill and about to die ; soothe her, share her confinement, attend to her comforts, and I will recompense you when she is no more.' "

" Oh, Lorenza ! Lorenza ! "

" No, that is not it; I am mistaken," continued Lorenza, with bitter irony; " I guess badly. But what can you expect ? I am so ignorant, I know so little of the world. You will say to the woman: ' Watch over the madwoman, she is dangerous ; report all her actions, all her thoughts, to me. Watch over her waking and sleeping/ And you will give her as much gold as she requires, for gold costs you nothing—you make it ! "

" Lorenza, you wander; in the name of heaven, Lorenza, read my heart better ! In giving you a companion, my beloved, I compromise such mighty interests that you would tremble for me if you did not hate me. In giving you a companion, I endanger my safety, my liberty, my very life, and, notwithstanding, I risk all to save you a little weariness."

" Weariness ! " exclaimed Lorenza, with a wild and

frantic laugh which made Balsamo shudder. , "He calls it weariness ! "

" Well! suffering. Yes, you are right, Lorenza ; they are poignant sufferings. I repeat, Lorenza, have patience; a day will come when all your sufferings will cease—a day will come when you shall be free and happy."

" Will you permit me to retire to a convent and take the vows ? "

" To a convent ? "

" I will pray—first for you and then for myself. I shall be closely confined indeed, but I shall at least have a garden, air, space. I shall have a cemetery to walk in, and can seek beforehand among the tombs for the place of my repose. I shall have companions, who grieve for their own sorrows, and not for mine. Permit me to retire to a convent, and I will take any vows you wish. A convent, Balsamo! I implore you on my knees to grant this request! "

" Lorenza ! Lorenza ! we cannot part. Mark me well—we are indissolubly connected in this world ! Ask for nothing which exceeds the limits of this house."

Balsamo pronounced these last words in so calm and determined a tone, that Lorenza did not even repeat the request.

" Then you refuse me?" said she dejectedly.

" I cannot grant it."

" Is what you say irrevocable ? "

" It is."

" Well, I have something else then to ask," said she with a smile.

" Oh ! my good Lorenza, ever smile thus—only smile upon me, and you will compel me to do all you wish ! "

" Oh, yes, I shall make you do all that I wish, provided I do everything that pleases you. Well! be it so ; I will be as reasonable as possible/*

" Speak, Lorenza, speak ! "

" Just now you said : ' One day, Lorenza, your sufferings shall cease—one day you shall be free and happy/' "

" Oh, yes, I said so, and I swear before heaven that I await that day as impatiently as yourself."

" Well, this day may arrive immediately, Balsamo," said the young Italian, with a caressing smile, which her husband had hitherto only seen in her sleep. " I am weary, very weary—you can understand my feelings. I am so young, and have already suffered so much ! Well, my friend—for you say you are my friend—listen to me ; grant me this happy day immediately."

" I hear you," said Balsamo, inexpressibly agitated.

" I end my appeal by the request I should have made at the commencement, Acharat."

The young girl shuddered.

" Speak, my beloved ! "

" Well, I have often remarked, when you made experiments on some unfortunate animal, and when you told me that these experiments were necessary to the cause of humanity—I have often remarked that you possessed the secret of inflicting death, sometimes by a drop of poison, sometimes by an opened vein; that this death was calm, rapid as lightning, and that these unfortunate and innocent creatures, condemned as I am to the miseries of captivity, were instantly liberated by death, the first blessing they had received since their birth. Well——"

She stopped and turned pale.

" Well, my Lorenza ? " repeated Balsamo.

" Well, what you sometimes do to these unfortunate

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

animals for the interest of science, do now to, me in the name of humanity. Do it for a friend, who will bless you with her whole heart, who will kiss your hands with the deepest gratitude, if you grant her what she asks. Do it, Balsamo, for me, who kneel here at your feet, who promise you with my last sigh more love and happiness than you caused me during my whole life ! for me, Balsamo, who promise you a frank and beaming smile as I quit this earth. By the soul of your mother ! by the sufferings of our blessed Lord ! by all that is holy and solemn and sacred in the world of the living and of the dead ! I implore you, kill me ! kill me ! "

" Lorenza ! " exclaimed Balsamo, taking her in his arms as she rose after uttering these last words ; " Lorenza, j^ou are delirious. Kill you ! You ! my love ! my life ! "

Lorenza disengaged herself by a violent effort from Balsamo's grasp, and fell on her knees.

" I will never rise," said she, " until you have granted my request. Kill me without a shock, without violence, without pain ; grant me this favour, since you say you love me—send me to sleep as you have often done—only take away the awaking—it is despair! "

" Lorenza, my beloved ! " said Balsamo. " Oh, God I do you not see how you torture my heart ? What ! you are really so unhappy, then ? Come, my Lorenza, rise ; do not give way to despair. Alas ! do you hate me then so very much ? "

" I hate slavery, constraint, solitude ; and as you make me a slave, unhappy and solitary—well, yes ! I hate you ! "

" But I love you too dearly to see you die, Lorenza. You shall not die, therefore ; I will effect the most

difficult cure I have yet undertaken, my Lorenza—I will make you love life."

"No, no, that is impossible; you have made me long for death."

"Lorenza, for pity's sake!—I promise that soon——"

"Life or death!" exclaimed the young woman, becoming more and more excited. "This is the decisive day—will you give me life, that is to say liberty?—will you give me death, that is to say repose?"

"Life, my Lorenza! life!"

"Then that is liberty."

Balsamo was silent.

"If not, death—a gentle death—by a draught, a needle's point—death during sleep! Repose! repose! repose!"

"Life and patience, Lorenza!"

Lorenza burst into a terrible laugh, and making a spring backwards, drew from her bosom a knife, with a blade so fine and sharp that it glittered in her hand like a flash of lightning.

Balsamo uttered a cry, but it was too late. When he rushed forward and reached the hand, the weapon had already fulfilled its task and had fallen on Lorenza's bleeding breast. Balsamo had been dazzled by the flash—he was blinded by the sight of blood.

In his turn he uttered a terrible cry, and seized Lorenza round the waist, meeting in midway her arm raised to deal a second blow, and receiving the weapon in his undefended hand. Lorenza, with a mighty effort, drew the weapon away, and the sharp blade glided through Balsamo's fingers. The blood streamed from his mutilated hand.

Then, instead of continuing the struggle, Balsamo extended his bleeding hand towards the young woman

and said with a voice of irresistible command :. " Sleep, Lorenza, sleep !—I will it. "

But on this occasion the irritation was such that the obedience was not as prompt as usual.

" No, no, " murmured Lorenza, tottering and attempting to strike again. " No, I will not sleep! "

" Sleep, I tell you ! " said Balsamo, a second time, advancing a step towards her ; " sleep, I command it ! "

This time the power of Balsamo's will was so great that all resistance was in vain. Lorenza heaved a sigh, let the knife fall from her hand, and sank back upon the cushions.

Her eyes still remained open, but their threatening glare gradually died away, and finally they closed; her stiffened neck drooped ; her head fell upon her shoulder like that of a wounded bird ; a nervous shudder passed through her frame—Lorenza was asleep.

Balsamo hastily opened her robe, and examined the wound, which seemed slight, although the blood flowed from it in abundance.

He then pressed the lion's eye, the spring started, and the back of the fireplace opened ; then, unfastening the counterpoise which made the trap-door of Althotas's chamber descend, he leaped upon it and mounted to the old man's laboratory.

" Ah ! it is you, Acharat, " said the latter, who was still seated in his arm-chair, " you are aware that in a week I shall be a hundred years old. You are aware that before that time I must have the blood of a child or of an unmarried female. "

But Balsamo heard him not. He hastened to the cupboard in which the magic balsams were kept, seized one of the phials of which he had often proved the efficacy, again mounted upon the trap, stamped his foot, and descended to the lower apartment.

Althptas, rolled his arm-chair to the mouth of the trap with the intention of seizing him by his dress.

" Do you hear, wretch ? " said he ; " do you hear ? If in a week I have not a child or an unmarried woman to complete my elixir, I am a dead man ! "

Balsamo turned; the old man's eyes seemed to glare in the midst of his -unearthly and motionless features, as if they alone were alive.

" Yes, yes." replied Balsamo ; " yes, be calm ; you shall have what you want."

Then, letting go the spring, the trap mounted again, fitting like an ornament in the ceiling of the room.

After which he rushed into Lorenza's apartment, which he had just reached when Fritz's bell rang.

" M. de Richelieu ! " muttered Balsamo ; " oh ! duke and peer as he is, he must wait."

CHAPTER XXXII

M. DE RICHELIEU'S TWO DROPS OF WATER

M, DE RICHELIEU left the house in the Rue Saint Claude at half-past four. What his errand with Balsamo was will explain itself in the sequel.

M. de Taverny had dined with his daughter, as the dauphiness had given her lea/e to absent herself on this day in order that she might receive her father.

They were at dessert, when M. de Richelieu, ever the bearer of good news, made his appearance to announce to his friend that the king would **not** give merely a company to Philip, but a regiment. Taverny was exuberant in his expressions of joy, and Andree warmly thanked **the** marshal.

The conversation took a turn which may be easily imagined after what had passed; Richelieu spoke of nothing but the king, Andree, of nothing but her brother, and Taverney of nothing but Andree. The latter announced in the course of conversation that she was set at liberty from her attendance on the dauphiness; that her royal highness was receiving a visit from two German princes, her relations; and that in order to pass a few hours of liberty with them which might remind her of the court of Vienna, Marie Antoinette had dismissed all her attendants, even her lady of honour; which had so deeply shocked Madame de Noailles that she had gone to lay her grievances at the king's feet.

Taverney was, he said, delighted at this, since he had thus an opportunity of conversing with Andree about many things relating to their fortune and name. This observation made Richelieu propose to retire, in order to leave the father and daughter quite alone; but Mademoiselle de Taverney would not permit it, so he remained.

Richelieu was in a vein of moralising; he painted most eloquently the degradation into which the French nobility had fallen, forced as they were to submit to the ignominious yoke of these favourites of chance, these contraband queens, instead of the favourites of the olden times, who were almost as noble as their august lovers—women who reigned over the sovereign by their beauty and their love, and over his subjects by their birth, their strength of mind, and their royal and pure patriotism.

Andree was surprised at the close analogy between Richelieu's words and those she had heard from the Baron de Taverney a few days previously.

Richelieu then launched into a theory of virtue so

spiritual, so pagan, so French, that Andree was obliged to confess that she was not at all virtuous according to M. de Richelieu's theories, and that true virtue, as the marshal understood it, was the virtue of Madame Chateauroux, Mademoiselle de La Valliere, and Mademoiselle Fosseuse.

From argument to argument, from proof to proof, Richelieu at last became so clear that Andree no longer understood a word of what he said. On this footing the conversation continued until about seven o'clock in the evening, when the marshal rose, being obliged as he said, to pay his court to the king at Versailles.

In passing through the apartment to take his hat, he met Nicole, who had always something to do wherever M. de Richelieu was.

" My girl." said he, tapping her on the shoulder, " you shall see me out. I want you to carry a bouquet which Madame de Noailles cut for me in her garden, and which she commissioned me to present to the Countess d'Egmont."

Nicole curtsayed like the peasant girls in M. Rousseau's comic operas, whereupon the marshal took leave of father and daughter, exchanged a significant glance with Taverney, made a youthful bow to Andree, and retired.

With the reader's permission, we will leave the baron and Andree conversing about the fresh mark of favour conferred on Philip, and follow the marshal. By this means we shall know what was his errand at the Rue Saint Claude, where he arrived at such a fearful moment.

Richelieu descended the stairs resting on Nicole's shoulder, and as soon as they were in the garden he stopped, and looking her in the face said,—

" Ah ! little one, so we have a lover ? "

" I ? my lord marshal I " exclaimed Nicole; blushing crimson, and retreating a step backwards.

" Oh ! perhaps you are not called Nicole Legay ? "

" Yes, my lord marshal."

" Well, Nicole Legay has a lover."

" Oh ! indeed !"

" Yes, faith, a certain well-looking rascal, whom she used to meet in the Rue Coq-Heron, and who has followed her to Versailles."

" My lord duke, I swear——"

" A sort of exempt called—shall I tell you how Mademoiselle Legay's lover is called ? "

Nicole's last hope was that the marshal was ignorant of the name of the happy mortal.

" Oh ! yes, my lord marshal, tell me, since you have made a beginning."

" Who is called M. Beausire," repeated the marshal, " and who in truth does not belie his name."

Nicole clasped her hands with an affectation of prudery which did not in the least impose on Richelieu.

" It seems," said he, " we make appointments with him at Trianon. *Peste !* in a royal chateau ! that is a serious matter. One may be discharged for these freaks, my sweet one, and M. de Sartines sends all young ladies who are discharged from the royal chateau to the Salpetriere."

Nicole began to be uneasy.

" My lord," said she, " I swear *to* you that if M. Beausire boasts of being my lover, he is a fool and a villain, for indeed I am innocent."

" I shall not contradict you," said Richelieu ; " but have you made appointments with him or not ? "

" My lord duke, a rendezvous is no proof of——"

" Have you or have you not ? Answer me."

" My lord——"

" You have. Very well; I do not blame you, my dear child. Besides, I like pretty girls who display their charms, and I have always assisted them in so doing to the utmost of my power. Onfy, as your friend and protector, I warn you."

" But have I been seen, then ? " asked Nicole.

" It seems so, since I am aware of it."

" My lord," said Nicole resolutely, " I have not been seen ; it is impossible ! "

" As to that, I know nothing ; but the report is very prevalent, and must tend to lasten attention on your mistress. Now, you must be aware that being more the friend of the Taverneys than of the Legays, it is my duty to give the baron a hint."

" Oh ! my lord ! " exclaimed Nicole, terrified at the turn the conversation was taking, " you will ruin me. Although innocent, I shall be discharged on the mere suspicion."

" In that case, my poor child, you shall be discharged at all events ; for even now some evil-minded person or other, having taken offence at these rendezvous, innocent though they be, has informed Madame de Noailles of them."

" Madame de Noailles ! good heavens ! "

" Yes ; you see the danger is urgent."

Nicole clasped her hands in despair.

" It is unfortunate, I am aware," said **Richelieu**, " **but** what the deuce can you do r "

" And you, who said just now you were my protector—you who have proved yourself to be such—can you no longer protect me ? " asked Nicole **with** a wheedling cunning worthy of a woman **of thirty**.

" **Yes, *pardieu* i I can protect you.**"

" **Well, my lord ? "**

" **Yes, but I will not.**"-

" Oh ! my lord duke."

" Yes ; you are pretty, I know that, and your beautiful eyes are telling me all sorts of things ; but I have lately become rather blind, my poor Nicole, and I no longer understand the language of lovely eyes. Once I would have offered you an asylum in my pavilion of Hanover, but those days are over."

" Yet you once before received me there," said Nicole angrily.

" Ah ! that is ungrateful in you. Nicole, to reproach me with having taken you there, when I did so to render you a service ; for confess that without M. Rafté's assistance, who made you a charming brunette, you would never have entered Trianon, which, after all, perhaps, would have been better than to be dismissed from it now. But why the devil did you give a rendezvous to M. Beausire, and at the very gate of the stables, too ? "

" So you know that also ? " said Nicole, who saw that she must change her tactics, and place herself at the marshal's discretion.

" *Parbleu !* you see I know it ; and Madame de Noailles too. This very evening you have another appointment."

" That is true, my lord, but on my faith I shall not go."

" Of course, you are warned ; but M. Beausire is not warned, and he will be seized. Then, as he will not like of course to be taken for a thief and be hanged, or for a spy and be whipped, he will prefer to say—especially as there is no disgrace in confessing it—' Unhand me ! I am the lover of the pretty Nicole/ "

" My lord duke, I will send to warn him."

" Impossible, my poor child ! by whom could you send ? By him who betrayed you, perhaps ? "

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" Alas ! that is true," said Nicole, feigning despair.

" What a becoming thing remorse is! " exclaimed Richelieu.

Nicole covered her face with her hands, taking care, however, to leave space enough between her fingers to allow her to observe every look and gesture of Richelieu.

" You are really adorable! " said the duke, whom none of these little tricks could escape ; " why am I not fifty years younger ? No matter. *Parbleu!* Nicole, I will bring you out of the scrape."

" Oh, my lord ! if you do that, my gratitude——"

" I don't want it, Nicole. On the contrary, I shall give you most disinterested assistance."

" Oh ! how good of you, my lord ; I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

" Do not thank me yet; as yet you know nothing. *Diable !* wait till you hear more."

" I will submit to anything, provided Mademoiselle Andrée does not dismiss me."

" Ah ! then you are very fond of Trianon ? "

" Very, my lord."

" **Well**, Nicole, in the very first place, get rid of this feeling."

" **But** why so, if I am not discovered, my lord ? "

" Whether you are discovered or not, you must **leave Trianon.**"

" **Oh, why ?** "

" **I shall tell** you; because if Madame de Noailles **has found you** out, **no** one, not even the king, could save you."

^{<r} Ah ! **if** I could only see the king."

" In the second place, even if you are not found out, **I myself** should be **the means of** dismissing you."

" **You ?** "

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" Immediately."

" In truth, my lord marshal, I do not understand you."

" It is as I have had the honour of telling you."

" And that is your protection, is it ? "

" If you do not wish for it, there is yet time ; you have only to say the word, Nicole."

" Oh, yes ! my lord, on the contrary, I do wish for it."

" And I will grant it."

" Well ? "

" Well, this is what I will do for you. Hark ye ! "

" Speak, my lord."

" Instead of getting you discharged, and perhaps imprisoned, I will make you rich and free."

" Rich and free ? "

" Yes."

" And what must I do in order to be rich and free ? "

" Almost nothing."

" But what—— ? "

" What I am about to tell you."

" Is it difficult ? "

" Mere child's play."

" Then," said Nicole, " there is something to do ? "

" Ah, *dame* ! you know the motto of this world of ours, Nicole—*nothing for nothing* ! "

" And that which I have to do, is it for myself or for you ? "

The duke looked at Nicole.

" *Tudieu!* " said he, " the little masker, how cunning she is ! "

" Well, finish, my lord duke."

" Well ! it is for yourself," replied he boldly.

" Ah ! " said Nicole, who, perceiving that the marshal had need of her services, already feared him no longer,

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

while Jier ingenious brain was busily endeavouring to discover the truth amid the windings, which, from habit, her companion always used ; " what shall I have to do for myself, my lord duke ? "

" This : M. Beausire comes at half-past seven, does he not ? "

" Yes, my lord marshal, that is his hour. "

" It is now ten minutes past seven. "

" That is also true. "

" If I say the word he will be arrested. "

" Yes, but you will not say it. "

" No. You will go to him, and tell him—but in the first place, Nicole, do you love this young man ? "

" Why, I have given him a rendezvous. "

" That is no reason you may wish to marry him. Women take such strange caprices. "

Nicole burst into a loud laugh.

" Marry him ! " said she. " Ha ! ha ! ha ! "

Richelieu was astounded; he had not, even at court, met many women of this stamp.

" Well," said he, " so be it. You do not wish to marry him ; but in that case you love him. So much the better. "

" Agreed! I love M. Beausire. Let us take that for granted, my lord, and proceed! "

" *Peste!* what strides you make ! "

" Of course. You may readily imagine that I am anxious to know what remains for me to do. "

" In the first place, since you love him, you must fly with him. "

" *Dame!* if you wish it particularly, I suppose I must. "

" Oh ! I wish nothing about it—not so fast, little one. "

Nicole saw that she was going too far, and that as

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

yet she had neither the secret nor the money of her cunning opponent. She stooped, therefore, only to rise again afterwards.

" My lord," said she, " I await your orders."

" Well! you must go to M. Beausire and say to him : * We are discovered; but I have a protector who will save you from Saint Lazarus, and me from the Salpetriere. Let us fly ! ' "

Nicole looked at Richelieu.

" Fly ? " repeated she.

Richelieu understood her cunning and expressive look.

" *Parbleu !* " said he, " of course, I shall pay the expenses."

Nicole asked for no further explanation. *It* was plain that she must know all, since she was to be paid.

The marshal saw what an important point Nicole had gained and hastened to say all he had to say, just as a gambler is eager to pay when he has lost, in order to have the disagreeable task of paying over.

" Do you know what you are thinking of, Nicole ? " said he.

" Faith, no," replied the girl; " but I suppose you, my lord marshal, who know so many things, can guess it."

" Nicole," he replied, " you were reflecting that if you fled, your mistiess might require you during the night, and not finding you, might give the alarm, which would expose you to the risk of being overtaken and seized."

" No," said Nicole, " I was not thinking of that, because, after all, my lord, I think I would prefer remaining here."

" But if M. Beausire is taken ? "

" Well, t cannot help it."

" But if he confess ? "

" Let him confess."

" Ah ! " said Richelieu, beginning to be uneasy, " but in that case you are lost."

" No; for Mademoiselle Andree is kindness itself, and as she loves me at heart, she will speak to the king for me ; so, even if M. de Beausire is punished, I shall not share his punishment."

The marshal bit his lip.

" Nicole," said he, " I tell you you are a fool. Mademoiselle Andree is not on such good terms with the king, and I will have you arrested immediately if you do not hsten to me as I wish. Do you hear, you little viper ? "

" Oh ! my lord, my ears do not serve me so ill. I hear you, but I form my own conclusions."

" Good. Then you will go at once and arrange your plan of flight with M. Beausire."

" But how ? Do you imagine, my lord marshal, that I shall expose myself to the risk of flight, when you tell me yourself that mademoiselle might awake, might ask for me, give the alarm, and a great deal more which I know not, but which you, my lord, who are a man of experience, must have foreseen ? "

Richelieu bit his lip again, but this time more deeply than he had done before.

" Well, minion, if I have thought of these consequences, I have also thought of how to avoid them."

" And how will you manage to prevent mademoiselle from calling me ? "

" By preventing her awaking."

" Bah ! she awakes ten times during the night."

" Then she has the same malady that I have ? " said Richelieu calmly.

" The same that you have ? " said Nicole, laughing.

" Yes. I also awake ten times every night, only I have a remedy for this sleeplessness. She must use the same remedy, or if not, you will do it for her."

" What do you mean, my lord ? "

" What does your mistress take in the evening before she goes to bed ? "

" What does she take ? "

" Yes, it is the fashion now to drink something in the evening. Some take orangeade or lemonade, others take eau-de-Melisse, others——"

" Mademoiselle drinks only a glass of pure water in the evening before going to bed ; sometimes sweetened and flavoured with orange-water, if her nerves are weak."

" Ah ! excellent ! " said Richelieu, " just as I do myself. My remedy will suit her admirably."

" How so ? "

" I pour one drop of a certain liquid in my beverage, and I then never wake all night."

Nicole tasked her brain to discover to what end the marshal's diplomacy tended.

" You do not answer ? " said he.

" I was just thinking that mademoiselle has not your cordial."

I will give you some."

" Ah ! " thought Nicole, seeing at last a ray of light through the darkness.

" You must put two drops of it in your mistress' glass—neither more nor less, remember—and she will sleep soundly, so that she will not call you, and consequently you will gain time."

" Oh ! if that is all, it is very simple."

" You will give her the two drops ? "

" Certainly."

" You promise me ? "

" I presume it is for my own interest to do so; besides, I will lock the door so carefully——"

" By no means," said Richelieu hastily. " That is exactly what you must not do; on the contrary, you must leave her room door open."

" Ah! " exclaimed Nicole, with suppressed joy. She now understood all. Richelieu saw it plainly. " Is that all ? " inquired she.

" Absolutely all. Now you may go and tell your exempt to pack up his trunks."

" Unfortunately, sir, it would be useless to tell him to fill his purse."

" You know that is my affair."

" Yes, I remember your lordship was kind enough to say——"

" Come, Nicole, how much do you want ? "

" For what ? "

" For pouring in the two drops of water."

" For that, nothing, my lord, since you assure me I do so for my own interest; it would not be just that you should pay me for attending to my own interest. But for leaving mademoiselle's door open—ah ! for that I warn you I must have a good round sum."

" At one word, how much ? "

" I must have twenty thousand francs, my lord." Richelieu started.

" Nicole," said he with a sigh., " you will make some figure in the world."

" I ought to do so, my lord, for I begin to believe now that I shall attract attention. But with your twenty thousand francs we shall smooth difficulties."

" Go and warn M. Beausire, Nicole ; and when you return I will give you the money."

" My lord, M. Beausire is very incredulous, and he

will not believe what I tell him unless I can_o give him proofs." *•

Richelieu pulled out a handful of bank-notes from his pocket.

" Here is something on account," said he, " in this purse there are a hundred double louis."

" Your lordship will settle the account in full and give me the balance then, when I have spoken to M. Beausire ? "

" No, *pardieu!* I will settle it on the spot. You are a careful girl, Nicole ; it will bring you luck."

And Richelieu handed her the promised sum, partly in bank-notes, and partly in louis-d'ors and half-louis.

" There ! " said he, " is that right ? "

" I think so," said Nicole ; " and now, my lord, I want only the principal thing."

" The cordial ? "

" Yes; of course your lordship has a bottle ? "

" I have my own, which I always carry about with me."

Nicole smiled.

" And then," said she, " Trianon is locked every night, and I have not a key."

" But I have one, as first gentleman of the chamber."

" Ah ! indeed ! "

" Here it is."

" How fortunate all this is ! " said Nicole ; " it is one succession of mkacles ! And now, my lord duke, adieu ! "

" How ! adieu ? "

" Certainly. I shall not see your lordship again, as I shall go as soon as mademoiselle is asleep."

" Quite right. Adieu then, Nicole ! "

And Nicole, laughing in her sleeve, disappeared in the increasing darkness.

"I shall still succeed," said Richelieu. "But in truth it would seem that I am getting old, and fortune is turning against me. I have been outwitted by this little one. But what matters it, if I return the blow?"

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE FLIGHT

NICOLE was a conscientious girl. She had received M. de Richelieu's money, and received it in advance too, and she felt anxious to prove herself worthy of this confidence by earning her pay. She ran, therefore, as quickly as possible to the gate, where she arrived at forty minutes past seven, instead of at half-past. Now M. Beausire, who, being accustomed to military discipline, was a punctual man, had been waiting there for ten minutes. About ten minutes before, too, M. de Taverney had left his daughter, and Andree was consequently alone. Now, being alone, the young girl had closed the blinds.

Gilbert as usual was gazing eagerly at Andree from his attic, but it would have been difficult to say if his eyes sparkled with love or hatred. When the blinds were closed Gilbert could see nothing. Consequently he looked in another direction, and, while looking, he perceived M. Beausire's plume, and recognised the exempt, who was walking up and down, whistling an air to kill time while he was waiting.

In about ten minutes, that is to say, at forty minutes past seven, Nicole made her appearance. She exchanged a few words with M. Beausire, who made a gesture with his head as a sign that he understood her perfectly, and disappeared by the shady alley leading

to the little Trianon. Nicole, light as a bird, returned in the direction she had come.

" Oh, oh ! " thought Gilbert. " Monsieur the exempt and mademoiselle the femme-de-chambre have something to do or to say which they fear to have witnesses ! Very good! "

Gilbert no longer felt any curiosity with respect to Nicole's movements, but actuated by the idea that the young girl was his natural enemy, he merely sought to collect a mass of proofs against her morality, with which proofs he might successfully repulse any attack, should she attempt one against him. And, as he knew the campaign might begin at any moment, like a prudent soldier he collected his munitions of war.

A rendezvous with a man, in the very grounds of Trianon, was one of the weapons which a cunning enemy such as Gilbert could not neglect, especially when it was imprudently placed under his very eyes. Gilbert consequently wished to have the testimony of his ears as well as that of his eyes, and to catch some fatally compromising phrase which would completely floor Nicole at the first onset. He quickly descended from his attic, therefore, hastened along the lobby, and gained the garden by the chapel stairs. Once in the garden, he had nothing to fear, for he knew all its hiding-places, as a fox knows his cover. He glided beneath the linden-trees, then along the espalier, until he reached a small thicket situated about twenty paces from the spot where he calculated upon seeing Nicole.

As he had foreseen, Nicole was there. Scarcely had he installed himself in the thicket when a strange noise reached his ears. It was the chink of gold upon stone—that metallic sound of which nothing except the reality can give a correct idea.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

Like a serpent Gilbert glided along to a raised terrace, out-topped by a hedge of lilacs, which at that season (early in May) diffused their perfume around, and showered down their flowers upon the passers-by who took the shady alle⁷ on their way from the Great to the Little Trianon.

Having reached this retreat, Gilbert, whose eyes were accustomed to pierce the darkness, saw Nicole emptying the purse which M. de Richelieu had given her, upon a stone on the inner side of the gate, and prudently placed out of M. Beausire's reach.

The large louis-d'ors showered from it in bright profusion, while M. Beausire, with sparkling eye and trembling hand, looked at Nicole and her louis-d'ors as if he could not comprehend how the one should possess the other.

Nicole spoke first.

" You have more than once, my dear M. Beausire," said she, " proposed to elope with me."

" And to marry you," exclaimed the enthusiastic exempt.

" Oh ! my dear sir, that is a matter of course ; just now, flight is the most important point. Can we fly in two hours ? "

" In ten minutes, if you like."

" No; I have something to do first, which will occupy me two hours."

" In two hours, as in ten minutes, I shall be at your orders, dearest."

" Very well. Take these fifty louis."

Nicole counted the fifty louis, and handed them through the gate to M. Beausire, who, without counting them, stuffed them into his waistcoat pocket.

" And in an hour and a half," continued she, " be here with a carriage."

" But——" objected Beausire.

" Oh ! if you do not wish, forget what has passed between us, and give me back my fifty louis."

" I do not shrink, dearest Nicole ; but I fear the result."

" For whom ? "

" For you."

" For me ? "

" Yes ; the fifty louis—once vanished, and vanished they will soon be—you will complain—you will regret Trianon—you will——"

" Oh ! how thoughtful you are, M. Beausire ! But learn nothing ; I am not one of those women who are easily made miserable. Have no scruples on that score ; when the fifty louis are gone, we shall see."

And she shook the purse which contained the other fifty. Beausire's eyes were absolutely phosphorescent.

" I would charge through a blazing furnace for your sake ! " exclaimed he.

" Oh ! content you—I shall not require so much from you, sir. Then it is agreed you will be here with the chaise in an hour and a half, and in two hours we shall fly ? "

" Agreed ! " exclaimed Beausire, seizing Nicole's hand, and drawing it through the gate to kiss it.

" Hush ! " said Nicole, " are you mad ? "

" No ; I am in love."

" Hum I " muttered Nicole.

" Do you not believe me, sweetheart ? "

" Yes, yes, I believe you—above all, be sure to have good horses."

" Oh ! yes."

And they separated.

But a moment afterwards Beausire returned, quite alarmed.

" Hist! " whispered he.

" Well, what is ? " asked Nicole, already some distance off, **and** putting her hand to her mouth, so as to convey her voice farther.

" And the gate ? " asked Beausire, " will you creep under it ? "

" How stupid he is," murmured Nicole, who at this moment was not ten paces distant from Gilbert. Then she added in a louder tone,—

*' I have the key."

Beausire uttered a prolonged " oh ! " of admiration, and this time took to his heels for good and all. Nicole hastened back with drooping head and nimble step to her mistress.

Gilbert, now left sole master of the field, put the following four questions to himself,—

" Why does Nicole fly with Beausire, when she does not love him ?

" How does Nicole come to possess such a large sum of money ?

" Why has Nicole the key of the gate ?

" Why does Nicole return to Andree, when she might go at once ? "

Gilbert found an answer to the second question, but to the others he could find none.

Thus checked at the commencement, his natural curiosity and his acquired distrust were so much excited that he determined to remain in the cold, beneath the dew-covered trees, to await the end of this scene, of which he had witnessed the commencement.

Andree had conveyed her father to the barriers of the Great Trianon, and was returning alone and pensive, when Nicole appeared issuing from the alley leading to the famous gate where she had been concerting tier measures with M. Beausire.

Nicole stopped on perceiving her mistress, and upon a sign which Andree made to her, she followed her to her apartment.

It was now about half-past eight in the evening. The night had closed in earlier than usual; for a huge cloud, sweeping from south to north, had overspread the whole sky, and all around, as far as the eye could reach over the lofty forest of Versailles, the gloomy shroud was gradually enveloping in its folds the stars, a short time before sparkling in the azure dome. A light breeze swept along the ground, breathing warmly on the drooping flowers, which bent their heads, as if imploring heaven to send them rain or dew.

The threatening aspect of the sky did not hasten Andree's steps; on the contrary, melancholy and thoughtful, the young girl seemed to ascend each step leading to her room with regret, and she paused at every window as she passed to gaze at the sky, so much in harmony with her saddened mood, and thus to delay her return to her own little retreat.

Nicole, impatient, angry, fearing that some whim might detain her mistress beyond the usual hour grumbled and muttered, as servants never fail to do when their masters are imprudent enough to satisfy their own caprices at the expense of those of their domestics.

At last Andree reached the door of her chamber, and sank rather than seated herself upon a couch, gently ordering Nicole to leave the window, which looked upon the court, half open. Nicole obeyed; then, returning to her mistress with that affectionate air which the flatterer could so easily assume, she said :

" I fear mademoiselle feels ill this evening ; her eyes are red and swollen, yet bright. I think that mademoiselle is in great need of repose."

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

⁴⁴ "Do you think so?" asked Andree, who had scarcely listened.

And she carelessly placed her feet upon a cushion of tapestry work.

Nicole took this as an order to undress her mistress and commenced to unfasten the ribbons and flowers of her headdress—a species of edifice which the most skilful could not unbuild in less than a quarter of an hour. While she was thus employed Andree did not utter a word and Nicole, thus left to follow her own wishes, hastened the business, without disturbing Andree, whose pre-occupation was so great that she permitted Nicole to pull out her hair with impunity.

When the night toilet was finished, Andree gave her orders for the morrow. In the morning some books were to be fetched from Versailles which Philip had left there for his sister, and the tuner was to be ordered to attend to put the harpsichord in proper order.

Nicole replied that if she were not called during the night, she would rise early and would have both these commissions executed before her young lady was awake.

"To-morrow also I will write to Philip," said Andree, speaking to herself; "that will console me a little."

"Come what will," thought Nicole, "I shall not carry the letter."

And at this reflection the girl, who was not quite lost yet, began to think, in saddened mood, that she was about for the first time to leave that excellent mistress under whose care her mind and heart had been awakened. The thought of Andree was linked in her mind with so many other recollections, that to touch *it* was to stir the whole chain which carried her **back** to the first days of infancy.

Whilst these two young creatures, so different in their character and their condition, were thus reflecting

beside each other, without any connection* existing between their thoughts, time was rapidly flying, and Andree's little timepiece, which was always in advance of the great clock of Trianon, struck nine.

Beausire would be at the appointed place, and Nicole had but half an hour to join her lover.

She finished her task as quickly as possible, not without uttering some sighs which Andree did not even notice. She folded a night-shawl around her mistress, and as Andree still sat immovable, with her eyes fixed on the ceiling, she drew Richelieu's phial from her bosom, put two pieces of sugar into a goblet, added the water necessary to melt it, and without hesitation, and by the resolute force of her will, so strong in one so young, she poured two drops of the fluid from the phial into the water, which immediately became turbid, then changed to a slight opal tint, which soon died away.

"Mademoiselle," said Nicole, "your glass of water is prepared, your clothes are folded, the night-lamp is lighted. You know I must rise very early to-morrow morning; may I go to bed now?"

"Yes," replied Andree absently.

Nicole curtseyed, heaved a last sigh, which, like the others, was unnoticed, and closed behind her the glass door leading to the anteroom. But instead of retiring into her little cell adjoining the corridor and lighted from Andree's anteroom, she softly took to flight, leaving the door of the corridor ajar, so that Richelieu's instructions were scrupulously followed.

Then, not to arouse the attention of the neighbours, she descended the stairs on tiptoe, bounded down the outer steps, and ran quickly to join M. Beausire at the gate.

Gilbert had not quitted his post. He had heard

Nicole say that she would return in two hours, and he waited. But as it was now ten minutes past the hour, he began to fear that she would not return.

All at once, he saw her running as if some one were pursuing her.

Nicole approached the gate, passed the key through the bars to Beausire, who opened it, rushed out, and the gate closed with a dull, grating noise. The key was then thrown among the grass in the ditch, near the spot where Gilbert was stationed. He heard it fall with a dead sound, and marked the place where it had dropped.

Nicole and Beausire in the meantime gained ground ; Gilbert heard them move away, and soon he could distinguish, not the noise of a carriage, as Nicole had required, but the pawing of a horse, which, after some moment's delay—occupied doubtless by Nicole in recrimination, who had wished to depart, like a duchess, in her carriage—changed to the clattering of his iron-shod feet on the pavement, and at last died away in the distance.

Gilbert breathed freely; he was free, free from Nicole—that is to say, from his enemy. Andree was henceforth alone.

He took the contrary direction from the one Nicole was pursuing, and hurried towards the offices of Trianon.

CHAPTER XXXIV

DOUBLE SIGHT

WHEN Andree was alone, she gradually recovered from the mental torpor into which she had fallen, and while Nicole was flying *en croupe* behind M. Beausire,

she knelt down and offered up a fervent, prayer for Philip, the only being in the world she loved with a true and deep attachment ; and while she prayed her trust in God assumed new strength and inspired her with fresh courage.

The prayers which Andree offered were not composed of a succession of words strung one to the other ; they were a kind of heavenly ecstasy, during which her soul rose to her God and mingled with His Spirit.

In these impassioned supplications of the mind, freed from earthly concerns, there was no alloy of self. Andree in some degree abandoned all thoughts of herself, like a shipwrecked mariner who has lost hope, and who prays only for his wife and his children, soon to become orphans. This inward grief had sprung up in AndreVs bosom since her brother's departure, but it was not entirely without another cause. Like her prayer, it was composed of two distinct elements, one of which was quite inexplicable to her.

It was, as it were, a presentiment, the perceptible approach of some impending misfortune. It was a sensation resembling that of the shooting of a cicatrised wound. The acute pain is over, but the remembrance survives, and reminds the sufferer of the calamity, as the wound itself had previously done. She did not even attempt to explain her feelings to herself. Devoted heart and soul to Philip, she centred in her beloved brother every thought and every affection of her heart.

Then she rose, took a book from her modestly-furnished library, placed the light within reach of her hand, and stretched herself on a couch. The book she had chosen, or rather upon which she had accidentally placed her hand, was a dictionary of botany, It may readily be imagined that this book was not calculated to absorb her attention, but rather to lull it

to rest. ' Gradually, drowsiness weighed down her eyelids, and a filmy veil obscured her vision. For a moment the young girl struggled against sleep ; twice or thrice she collected her scattered thoughts, which soon escaped again from her control ; then, raising her head to blow out the candle, she perceived the glass of water prepared by Nicole, stretched out her hand and took the glass, stirred the sugar with the spoon, and, already half asleep, she approached the glass to her lips.

All at once, just as her lips were already touching the beverage, a strange emotion made her hand tremble, a moist and burning weight fell on her brow, and Andree recognised with terror, by the current of the fluid which rushed through her nerves, that supernatural attack of mysterious sensations which had several times already triumphed over her strength and overpowered her mind. She had only time to place the glass upon the plate, when instantly, without a murmur, but with a sigh which escaped from her half-open lips, she lost the use of voice, sight, and reason, and, seized with a death-like torpor, fell back as if struck by lightning upon her bed. But this sort of annihilation was but the momentary transition to another state of existence. For an instant she seemed perfectly lifeless, and her eyes closed in the slumber of death ; but all at once she rose, opened her eyes, which stared with a fearful fixity of gaze, and like a marble statue descending from its tomb she once more stood upon the floor. There was no longer room for doubt. Andree was sunk in that marvellous sleep which had several times already suspended her vital functions.

She crossed the chamber, opened the glass door, and entered the corridor, with the fixed and rigid

attitude of breathing marble. She reached the stairs, descended step by step without hesitation and without haste, and emerged upon the portico. Just as Andree placed her foot upon the topmost step to descend, Gilbert reached the lowest on his way to his attic. Seeng this white and solemn figure advancing as if to meet him, he recoiled before her, and, still retreating as she advanced, he concealed himself in a clump of shrubs. It was thus, he recollected, that he had already seen Andree de Taverney at the chateau of Taverney.

Andree passed close by him, even touched him, but saw him not. The young man, thunderstruck, speechless with surprise, sank to the ground on one knee. His limbs refused to support him—he was afraid.

Not knowing to what cause to attribute this strange excursion, he followed her with his eyes; but his reason was confounded, his blood beat impetuously against his temples, and he was in a state more closely bordering on madness than the coolness and circumspection necessary for an observer.

He remained therefore crouching on the grass among the leaves, watching as he had never ceased to do since this fatal attachment had entered his heart. All at once the mystery was explained; Andree was neither mad nor bewildered, as he had for a moment supposed—Andree was, with this sepulchral step, going to a rendezvous. A gleam of lightning now furrowed the sky, and by its blue and livid light Gilbert saw a man concealed beneath the sombre avenue of linden-trees, and, notwithstanding the rapidity of the flash, he had recognised the pale face and disordered garments of the man, relieved against the dark background.

Andr e advanced towards this man, whose arm was extended as if to draw her towards him.

A sensation like the branding of a red-hot iron rushed through Gilbert's heart; he raised himself upon his knees to see more clearly. At that moment another flash of lightning illumined the sky.

Gilbert recognised Balsamo, covered with dust and perspiration; Balsamo, who, by some mysterious means, had succeeded in entering Trianon, and thus drew Andree towards him as invincibly, as fatally, as the serpent fascinates its prey.

When two paces from him, Andree stopped. Balsamo took her hand ; her whole frame shuddered.

" Do you see ? " he asked.

" Yes," replied Andree ; " but in summoning me so suddenly you have nearly killed me."

" Pardon, pardon ! " replied Balsamo ; " but my brain reels—I am beside myself—I am nearly mad—I shall kill myself."

" You are indeed suffering." said Andree, conscious of Balsamo's feelings by the contact of his hand.

" Yes, yes," replied Balsamo, " I suffer, and I come to you for consolation. You alone can save me."

" Question me? "

" Once more, do you see ? "

" Oh ! perfectly."

" Will you follow me to my nouse ? Can you do so ? "

" I can, if you will conduct me there in thought."

" Come ! "

" Ah ! " said Andree, " we are entering Paris—we follow the boulevard, we plunge into a street lighted by a single lamp."

*1 Yes, that is it. Enter ! enter I "

"We are in an antechamber. There is a staircase to the right, but you draw me toward the wall—the wall opens—steps appear——"

"Ascend!" exclaimed Balsamo, "that is our way."

"Ah! we are in a sleeping-chamber; there are lions' skins, arms—Stay, the back of the fireplace opens."

"Pass through; where are you?"

"In a strange sort of room, without any outlet, and the windows of which are barred. Oh! how disordered everything in the room appears?"

"But empty—it is empty, is it not?"

"Yes, empty."

"Can you see the person who inhabited it?"

"Yes, if you give me something which has touched her, which comes from her, or which belongs to her."

"Hold! there is some hair."

Andr e took the hair and placed it on her heart.

"Oh! I recognise her," said she; "I have already seen this woman. She was flying towards Paris."

"Yes, yes; can you tell me what she has been doing during the last two hours, and how she escaped?"

"Wait a moment; yes, she is reclining upon a sofa; her breast is half bared, and she has a wound on one side."

"Look, Andree, look! do not lose sight of her."

"She was asleep—she awakes—she looks around—she takes a handkerchief and climbs upon a chair. She ties the handkerchief to the bars of the window—oh! God!"

"Is she really determined to die?"

"Oh, yes! she is resolute. But this sort of death terrifies her. She leaves the handkerchief tied to the bars—she descends—ah! poor woman."

"What!"

" Oh ! how she weeps, how she suffers, and wrings her hands! She searches for a corner of the wall against which to dash her head! "

" Oh ! my God ! my God ! " murmured Balsamo.

" She rushes towards the chimney-piece! It represents two marble lions ; she will dash out her brains against the lions ! "

" What, then ? look, Andree, look—it is my will! "

" She stops."

Balsamo breathed again.

"She looks——"

" What does she look at ? " asked Balsamo.

" She has perceived some blood upon the lion's eye."

" Oh, heavens! "

" Yes, blood, and yet she did not strike herself against it. Oh ! strange ! the blood is not hers, it is yours."

" Mine ? " asked Balsamo, frantic with excitement.

" Yes, yours. You had cut your finger with a knife, with a poniard—and had touched the lion's eye with your bleeding hand. I see you."

" True, true. But how does she escape ? "

" Stay, I see her examining the blood ; she reflects ; then she places her finger where you had placed yours. Ah ! the lion's eye gives way—a spring acts—the chimney board flies open ! "

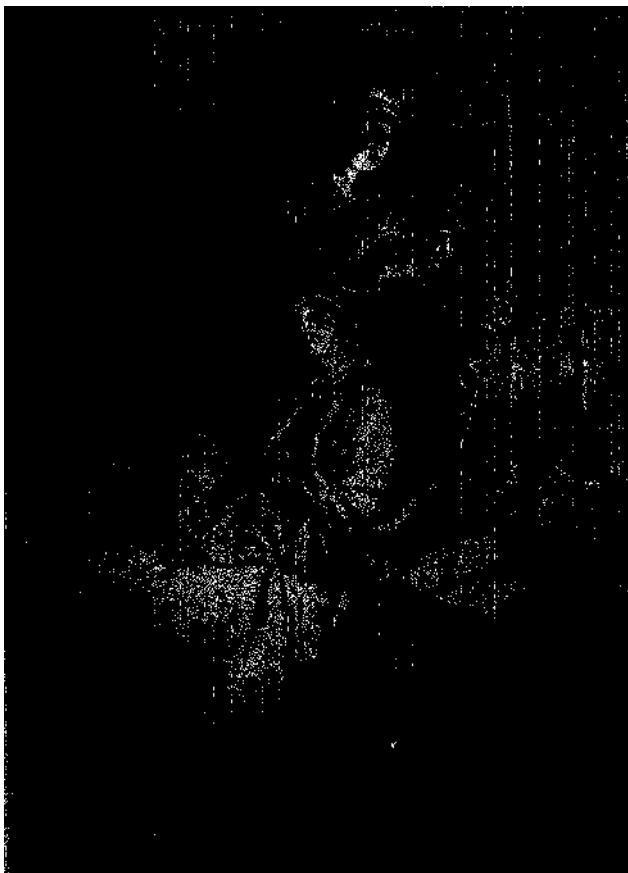
" Oh ! imprudent wretched fool that I am ! I have betrayed myself I "

Andree was silent.

" And she leaves the room ? " asked Balsamo ;
" she escapes ? "

" Oh ! you must forgive the poor woman—she was very miserable."

" Where is she ? whither does she fly ? Follow her, Andree—it is my will."



EX.

She poured two drops of the fluid into the water

M

Page 345

" She stops for a moment in the chamber of furs and armour; a cupboard is open, a casket/ usually locked in this cupboard, is upon the table ; she recognises the box ; she takes it."

" What does the box contain ? "

" Your papers, I think."

" Describe it."

" It is covered with blue velvet, and studded with brass nails; has clasps of silver, and a golden lock."

" Oh ! " exclaimed Balsamo, stamping with anger; " it is she, then, who has taken the casket."

" Yes. She descends the stairs leading into the ante-room, opens the door, draws back the chain of the street door, and goes out."

" Is it late ? "

" It must be late, for it is dark."

" So much the better; she must have fled shortly before my return, and I shall perhaps have time to overtake her. Follow her, Andree ! follow her ! "

" Once outside the house she runs as if she were mad, she reaches the boulevard—she hastens on without pausing."

" In which direction ? "

" Towards the Bastille."

" You see her yet ? "

" Yes ; she looks like a mad-woman ; she jostles against the passers-by; she stops—she endeavours to discover where she *h* : she inquires."

" What does she say ? Listen, Andree, listen; in heaven's name do not lose a syllable ! You said she inquired ? "

" Yes, from a man dressed in black."

" What does she ask ? "

" She wishes to know the address of the lieutenant of police."

" Oxi! then it was not a vain threat. Does the person give it her ? "

" Yes."

" What does she do ? "

" She retraces her steps and turns down a winding street. She crosses a large square."

" The Place Royale—it is the direct way. Can you read her intention ? "

" Follow her quickly !—hasten !—she goes to betray you ! If she arrives before you and sees M. de Sartines, you are lost! "

Balsamo uttered a terrible cry, plunged into the thicket, rushed through a little door, which a shadowy apparition opened and closed after him, and leaped with one bound on his faithful Djerid, who was pawing the ground at the little gate. Urged on at once by voice and spur, he darted like an arrow towards Paris, and soon nothing was heard but the clattering of his hoofs on the paved causeway.

As for Andree, she remained standing there, cold, mute, and pale. Then, as if Balsamo had borne away with him life and strength, she tottered, drooped, and fell. Balsamo, in his eagerness to follow Lorenza, had forgotten to awaken her.

Andree did not sink, as we have said, all at once, but gradually, in the manner we will attempt to describe.

Alone, abandoned, overpowered with that deathlike coldness which succeeds any violent nervous shock, Andree began to tremble and totter like one suffering from the commencement of an epileptic fit.

Gilbert had never moved—rigid, immovable, leaning forward and devouring her with his gaze. But, as it may readily be imagined, Gilbert, entirely ignorant of magnetic phenomena, dreamed neither of sleep nor of suffered violence. He had heard nothing, or almost

nothing of her dialogue with Balsamo. But for the second time, at Trianon as at Taverney, Andree had appeared to obey the summons of this marjor who had acquired such a strange and terrible power over her. To Gilbert, therefore, everything resolved itself to this ; Mademoiselle Andree has, if not a lover, at least a man whom she loves, and to whom she grants a rendezvous at night.

The dialogue which had taken place between Andree and Balsamo, although sustained in a low voice, had all the appearance of a quarrel. Balsamo, excited, flying, frantic, seemed like a lover in despair; Andree, left alone, mute and motionless, like the fair one he had abandoned.

It was at this moment that he saw the young girl totter, wring her hands, and sink slowly to the ground. Then she uttered twice or thrice a groan so deep, that her oppressed heart seemed torn by the effort. She endeavoured, or rather nature endeavoured, to throw back the overpowering mass of fluid which, during the magnetic sleep, had endowed her with that double sight which we have seen, in the preceding pages, produce such strange phenomena.

But nature was overpowered ; Andree could not succeed in throwing off the remains of that mysterious will which Balsamo had forgotten to withdraw. She could not loose the marvellous, inexplicable ties which had bound her hand and foot; and by dint of struggling she fell into those convulsions which in the olden time the Pythoness suffered upon her tripod, before the crowd of religious questioners who swarmed around the peristyle of the temple. Andree lost her equilibrium, and uttering a heart-rending groan, fell to the ground as if she had been struck by the flash which at that moment furrowed the vault of heaven.

But she had not yet touched the earth when Gilbert, strong and agile as a panther, darted towards her, seized her in his arms, and without being conscious that he carried a burden, bore her back into the chamber which she had left to obey Balsamo's summons, and in which the candle was yet burning beside the disarranged couch.

Gilbert found all the doors open as Andree had left them. As he entered, he stumbled against the sofa, and placed on it the cold and inanimate form of the young girl. The most pressing matter was to recall this beautiful statue to life. He looked round for the carafe, in order to sprinkle some drops of water in Andree's face.

But just as his trembling hand was stretched forth to grasp the thin neck of the crystal ewer, it seemed to him that a firm but light step sounded on the stairs leading to Andree's chamber.

It could not be Nicole, for Nicole had fled with M. Beausire; it could not be Balsamo, for Balsamo was spurring with lightning haste to Paris. It could therefore only be a stranger.

Gilbert, if discovered, was lost; Andree was to him like one of those princesses of Spain, whom a subject may not touch, even to save their life.

All these ideas rushed like a whirlwind through Gilbert's mind in less time than we can relate them. He could not calculate the exact distance of the foot-step, which every moment approached still nearer, for the storm which raged without dulled every other sound, but, gifted with extraordinary coolness and foresight, the young man felt that that was no place for him, and that the most important matter was to conceal himself from sight.

He hastily blew out the candle which illumined the

apartment, and entered the closet which served as Nicole's sleeping-chamber. From this hiding-place he could see through the glass-door into Andree's apartment, and also into the antechamber.

In this antechamber a night-lamp was burning upon a little console-table. Gilbert had at first thought of extinguishing it, as he had done the candle, but he had not time; the step echoed upon the corridor, a repressed breathing was heard, the figure of a man appeared upon the threshold, glided timidly into the antechamber, and closed the door.

Gilbert had only time to hasten into Nicole's closet and to draw the glass-door after him.

He held his breath, pressed his face against the stained glass panes, and listened eagerly.

The storm still howled wildly outside, large rain-drops beat against the windows of Andree's apartment and those of the corridor, where a casement, accidentally left open, creaked upon its hinges, and every now and then, dashed back by the wind which rushed into the corridor, struck noisily against its frame.

But the war of the elements, terrible as it was, produced no effect on Gilbert. His whole soul was concentrated in his gaze, which was riveted upon this man. He crossed the antechamber, passed not two paces distant from Gilbert, and unhesitatingly entered the principal apartment.

As he advanced, he jostled with his arm against the candle upon the table. The candle fell and Gilbert heard the crystal socket break in falling on the marble table. Then the man called twice in a subdued voice,—

"Nicole! Nicole!"

"What! Nicole!" thought Gilbert in his hiding-place. "Why does this man call Nicole instead of Andree?"

but as no voice replied to his, the man lifted the candle from the floor, and proceeded on tiptoe to light it at the night-lamp in the antechamber. It was then that Gilbert riveted his whole attention upon this strange nocturnal visitor; he gazed as if his vision could have pierced the wall. All at once he trembled, and, even in his hiding-place, recoiled a step backwards.

By the light of these two flames combined, Gilbert, trembling and half dead with affright, recognised, in this man who held the candle in his hands—the king!

Then all was explained; Nicole's flight, the money she had given Beausire, the door left open, the interviews between Richelieu and Taverney, and the whole of that dark and mysterious intrigue of which the young girl was the centre.

He would have cried out, but fear—that unreflecting, capricious, irresistible feeling—the fear he felt for this man, whose name had still a charm—the King of France—tied Gilbert's tongue. He slipped stealthily from the closet, gained the antechamber, and fled as if the avenger were behind him.

In the meantime Louis entered the room, candle in hand, and perceived Andr e reclining on the couch, wrapped in a long muslin dressing-gown, her head drooping on her shoulder.

He murmured some words in a caressing voice, and putting his light upon the table, he knelt beside the young girl, and kissed her hand. It was icy cold. Alarmed, he started up, hastily put aside her dressing-gown, and placed his trembling hand upon her heart. Her heart was cold and motionless!

Just then, a fearful peal of thunder made every article of furniture in the room shake, even to the

couch before which Louis was standing. A livieing sulphureous flash of lightning threw so dazzling a light over Andree's countenance, that Louis, a'armed at her paleness, her motionless attitude, and ner silence, started back, murmuring,—

" This girl is surely dead ! "

At the same instant, the idea of having a corpse before him sent an icy chill through the king's veins. He seized the candle, held it close to Andree's face, and hastily examined her features by the light of the trembling flame. Beholding her livid lips, her swollen and discoloured eyes, her dishevelled hair, her chest which no breath stirred, he uttered a cry, let the light fall, staggered back, and reeled like a drunken man into the anteroom, against the walls of which he stumbled in his alarm.

Then his hasty step sounded upon the stairs, then on the gravel walks of the garden, and was soon lost in the howling storm which raged through the long alleys and shady groves of Trianon.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE WILL

WE have seen Balsuino depart. Djerid bore him on with the speed of lightning, whilst the rider, pale with terror and impatience, bent forward over the flowing mane, breathing with half-opened lips the air which the crest of the noble steed cleft as the rapid prow of the vessel cuts the waves.

Behind him, houses and trees disappeared like fantastic visions. He scarcely perceived, as he passed,

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

the clumsy wagon groaning on its axle-tree, while its five huge horses started with affright at the approach of this having meteor, which they could not imagine to belong to the same race as themselves.

Balsamo proceeded at this rate for a league, with whirling brain, sparkling eyes and panting breath. Horse and rider had traversed Versailles in a few seconds. The startled inhabitants who happened to be in the streets had seen a long train of sparks flash past them—nothing more. A second league was passed in like manner. Djerid had accomplished the distance in little more than a quarter of an hour, and yet this quarter of an hour had seemed to his rider a century. All at once a thought darted through his brain. He pulled up suddenly, throwing the noble courser back upon his haunches, while his fore-feet ploughed the ground.

Horse and rider breathed for a moment. Drawing a long breath, Balsamo raised his head. Then, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, while his nostrils dilated in the breeze of night, he murmured :—

" Oh ! madman that you are, neither the rapidity of your steed nor the ardour of your desire will ever equal the instantaneous effect of thunder or the rapidity of the electric flash, and yet it is that which you require to avert the danger impending over you ! You require the rapid effect, the instantaneous, the all-powerful shock, which will paralyse the feet whose activity you fear, the tongue whose speech destroys you. You require, at this distance, the victorious sleep which restores to you the possession of the slave who has broken her chain. Oh ! if she should ever again be in my power ! "

And Balsamo ground his teeth with a despairing gesture.

" Oh ! you do well to wish, Balsamo, you do .went to fly! " exclaimed he ; " Lorenza has already drrived, she is about to speak—she has perhaps aire? iy spoken. Oh ! wretched woman ! no punishment *cdA* be terrible enough for you !

" Let me try," continued Balsamo, frowning, his eyes fixed, and his chin resting on his hand, " let me try. Either science is a dream or a fact—it is either impotent or powerful; let me try. ' Lorenza ! Lorenza ! it is my will that you sleep, wheresoever you may be, Lorenza, sleep—sleep, it is my will! I reckon upon your obedience ! ' "

" Oh ! no, no! " murmured he, despairingly; " no, I utter a falsehood ; I do not believe—I dare not reckon upon it—and yet the will is all. Oh ! I will it with my whole soul, with all the strength of my being. Cleave the air, my potent will; traverse all the current of opposing or indifferent wills ; pass through walls in thy course like a bullet from a gun; follow her wherever she is ; go—strike—destroy ! Lorenza ! Lorenza ! it is my will that you sleep!—be dumb at my command."

And for some moments he concentrated his thoughts upon this aim, imprinting it on his brain as if to lend it more speed in its flight towards Paris. Then after this mysterious operation—to which doubtless all the divine atoms animated by God, the master and lord of all things, assisted—Balsamo, once more, setting his teeth hard and clenching his hands, gave the reins to Djerid, but this time without using either the knee or the spurs. It seemed as if Balsamo wished to convince himself.

The noble steed paced gently onwards in obedience to the tacit permission of his master, placing his hoof gently upon the pavement with that light and noiseless

otepeculiar to his race. During this brief interval, which to a superficial observer would have seemed entirely krt, Balsamo was arranging a complete plan of defence. He concluded it just as Djerid entered the streets of Sevres. Arrived opposite the park-gates, he stopped and looked round as if expecting some one. Almost immediately a man emerged from beneath a carriage entrance and advanced towards him.

" Is that you, Fritz ? " asked Balsamo.

" Yes, master."

" Have you made inquiries ? "

" Yes."

" Is Madame Dubarry in Paris or at Luciennes ? "

" She is in Paris."

Balsamo raised his eyes to heaven with a triumphant look.

" How did you come ? "

" On Sultan."

" Where is he ? "

" In the court-yard of this inn."

" Ready saddled ? "

" Quite ready."

" Very well, be prepared to follow me."

Fritz hastened to bring out Sultan. He was a horse of that strong, willing German race, who grumble a little at forced marches, but who, nevertheless, go as long as they have breath in their lungs, or while there is a spur at their master's heel. Fritz returned to Balsamo, who was writing by the light of a street lantern.

" Return to Paris," said he, " and manage by some means to give this note to Madame Dubarry in person. You have half an hour for this purpose. After which you will return to the Rue Saint Claude, where you will wait for Madame Lorenza, who cannot fail to

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

return soon. You will let her pass without any objection and without offering any opposition. Go, and remember, above all, that in half an hour our commission must be executed."

"It is well," said Fritz, "it shall be done."

As he gave this confident reply to Balsamo, he attacked Sultan with whip and spur, and the good steed started off, astonished at this unusual aggression, and neighing piteously.

Balsamo by degrees resumed his composure, and took the road to Paris, which he entered three-quarters of an hour afterwards, his features almost unruffled and his look calm but pensive.

Balsamo was right. However swift Djerid, the neighing son of the desert might be, his speed was powerless, and thought alone could hope to overtake Lorenza in her flight from prison.

From the Rue Saint Claude she had gained the boulevard, and turning to the right, she soon saw the walls of the Bastille rise before her. But Lorenza, constantly a prisoner, was entirely ignorant of Paris. Moreover, her first aim was to escape from that accursed house in which she saw only a dungeon; vengeance was a secondary consideration.

She had just entered the Faubourg Saint Antoine, hastening onward with bewildered steps, when she was accosted by a young man who had been following her for some moments with astonishment.

In fact, Lorenza, an Italian girl from the neighbourhood of Rome, having almost always lived a secluded life, far from all knowledge of the fashions and customs of the age, was dressed more like an Oriental than a European lady; that is, in flowing and sumptuous robes, very unlike the charming dolls of that time, confined, like wasps, in long tight waists, rustling with

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

and muslin, under which it was almost useless to seek a body, their utmost ambition being to appear immaterial.

Lorenza had only adopted, from the French costume of that period, the shoes with heels two inches high—that strange looking invention which stiffened the foot, displayed the beauty of the ankle, and which rendered it impossible for the Arethusas of that rather mythological age to fly from the pursuit of their Alpheuses.

The Alpheus who pursued our Arethusa easily overtook her, therefore. He had seen her lovely ankles peeping from beneath her petticoats of satin and lace, her unpowdered hair, and her dark eyes sparkling with a strange fire from under a mantilla thrown over her head and neck, and he imagined he saw in Lorenza a lady disguised for a masquerade, or for a rendezvous, and proceeding on foot, for want of a coach, to some little house of the faubourg.

He approached her, therefore, and walking beside her, hat in hand,—

" Good heavens ! madame," said he, " you cannot go far in this costume, and with these shoes which retard your progress. Will you accept my arm until we find a coach, and allow me the honour of accompanying you to your destination ? "

Lorenza turned her head abruptly, gazed with her dark expressive eyes at the man who thus made her an offer which to many ladies would have appeared an impertinent one, and, stopping,—

" Yes," said she, " most willingly. "

The young man gallantly offered his arm.

" Whither are we going, madame ? " asked he.

" To the hotel of the lieutenant of police. "

The young man started.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" To M. de Sartines ? " he inquired.

" I do not know if his name be M. de Sarnies or not; I wish to speak to whoever is lieutenant of police."

The young man began to reflect. A young and handsome woman wandering alone in the streets of Paris at eight o'clock in the evening, in a strange costume, holding a box under her arm, and inquiring for the hotel of the lieutenant of police, while she was going in the contrary direction, seemed suspicious.

" Ah ! *diable*," said he, " the hotel of the lieutenant of police is not in this direction at all."

" Where is it, then ? "

" In the Faubourg St. Germain."

" And how must I go to the Faubourg St. Germain ? "

" This way, madame," replied the young man, calm but always polite ; " and if you wish, we can take the first coach we meet——"

" Oh, yes, a coach ; you are right."

The young man conducted Lorenza back to the boulevard, and having met a hackney-coach, he hailed it. The coachman answered his summons.

" Where to, madame ? " asked he.

" To the hotel of M. de Sartines," said the young man.

And, with a last effort of politeness, or rather of astonishment, having opened the coach-door, he bowed to Lorenza, and, after assisting her to get in, gazed at her departing form as we do in a dream or vision.

The coachman, full of respect for the dreadful name, gave his horse the whip and drove rapidly in the direction indicated.

It was while Lorenza was thus crossing the Place Royale that Andr e in her magnetic sleep had seen and heard her, and denounced her to Balsamo. In twenty minutes Lorenza was at the **door** of the hotel.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

4.1st I wait for you, my fair lady ? " asked the coachman.

" Yes," eplied Lorenza mechanically.

And stepp'ug lightly from the coach, she disappeared beneath the portal of the splendid hotel.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE HOTEL OF M. DE SARTINES

THE moment Lorenza entered the court-yard, she found herself surrounded by a crowd of soldiers and officers. She addressed the garde-francaise who stood nearest to her, and begged him to conduct her to the lieutenant of police. The guardsman handed her over to the porter, who, seeing a beautiful stranger, richly dressed, and holding a magnificent coffer under her arm, thought that the visit might prove not to be an unimportant one, and preceded her up the grand staircase to an antechamber, where every comer could, after the sagacious scrutiny of the porter, be admitted to present an explanation, an accusation, or a request, to M. de Sartines, at any hour of the day or night.

It is needless to say that the two first classes of visitors were more favourably received than the latter.

Lorenza, when questioned by the usher, only replied :
" Are you M. de Sartines ? "

The usher was profoundly astonished that any one could mistake his black dress and steel chain for the embroidered coat and flowing wig of the lieutenant of police ; but as no lieutenant is ever angry at being called captain, as he marked the foreign accent of the lady, and as her firm and steady gaze was not that

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

of a lunatic, he felt convinced that the fair / had something important in the coffer which she held so carefully and so securely under her arm.

But as M. de Sartines was a prudent and suspicious man, as traps had been laid for him with baits not less enticing than that of the beautiful Italian, there was good watch kept around him, and Lorenza had to undergo the investigation, the questioning, and the suspicions, of half a dozen secretaries and valets. The result of all these questions and replies was, that M. de Sartines had not yet returned, and that Lorenza must wait.

Then the young woman sunk into a moody silence, and her eyes wandered over the bare walls of the vast antechamber.

At last the ringing of a bell was heard ; a carriage rolled into the court-yard, and a second usher entered and announced to Lorenza that M. de Sartines was waiting for her.

Lorenza rose, and crossed two halls full of people with suspicious-looking faces, and dresses still more strange than her own. At last she was introduced into a large cabinet of an octagon form, lighted by a number of wax candles.

A man of from fifty to fifty-five years of age, enveloped in a dressing-gown, his head surmounted by a wig profusely powdered and curled, was seated at work before a lofty piece of furniture, the upper part of which, somewhat resembling in form a cupboard, was closed with two doors of looking-glass, in which the person seated could, without moving, see any one who entered the room, and could examine their features before they had time to compose them in harmony with his own.

The lower part of this article of furniture formed a

tlire. A number of rosewood drawers composed the tout, each of which closed by the combination of some letters of the alphabet. M. de Sartines kept in them his papers, and the ciphers which no one in his lifetime could read, since the drawers opened for him alone, and which none could have deciphered after his death, unless in some drawer, still more secret than the others, he had found the key to the cipher.

This secretaire, or rather this cupboard, contained behind the glasses of the upper part twelve drawers, also closed by an invisible mechanism. This piece of furniture, constructed expressly by the regent to contain his chemical or political secrets, had been given by that prince to Dubois, and left by Dubois to M. Dombrevail, lieutenant of police. It was from the latter that M. de Sartines had inherited the press and the secret. However, M. de Sartines had not consented to use it until after the death of the donor, and even then he had had all the arrangements of the locks altered.

This piece of furniture had some reputation in the world, and shut too closely, people said, for M. de Sartines only to keep his wigs in it.

The grumblers, and their name was legion at this period, said that if it were possible to read through the panels of this secretaire, there would most certainly have been discovered, in one of its drawers, the famous treaty by virtue of which Louis XV. speculated in grain, through the intervention of his devoted agent, M. de Sartines.

The lieutenant of police therefore saw, reflected in the glass, the pale, serious face of Lorenza, as she advanced towards him with the coffer still beneath her arm. In the centre of the apartment the young

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

girl stopped. Her costume, her figure, and the strangeness of her proceedings, struck the lieutenant-*/"* *

" Who are you ? " asked he, without turning round, but looking at her in the glass. " What do you want with me ? "

" Am I in the presence of M. de Sartines, lieutenant of police ? " replied Lorenza.

" Yes," replied he abruptly.

" Who will assure me of that ? "

M. de Sartines turned round.

" Will it be a proof that I am the man you seek," said he, " if I send you to prison ? "

Lorenza made no reply. She merely looked around the room with that indescribable dignity peculiar to the women of Italy, and seemed to seek the chair which M. de Sartines did not offer her.

He was vanquished by this look, for Monsieur the Count d'Alby de Sartines was a remarkably well-bred man.

" Be seated," said he sharply.

Lorenza drew a chair forward and sat down.

" Speak quickly," said the magistrate. " Come ! let me know what you want."

" Sir," said Lorenza, " I come to place myself under your protection."

M. de Sartines looked at her with the sarcastic look peculiar to him.

" Ah ! ah ! " said he.

" Sir," continued Lorenza. " I have been carried off from my family, and have, by a false marriage, fallen into the power of a man who for the last three years has oppressed me and made my life miserable."

M. de Sartines looked with admiration upon this noble countenance, and felt touched and charmed by

this [voice](#), so soft that it seemed more like a strain of music

" From what country do you come ? " he asked.

" I am a Roman."

" What is your name ? "

" Lorenza."

" Lorenza what ? "

" Lorenza Feliciani."

" I do not know that family. Are you a demoiselle?"

Demoiselle at this period meant a lady of quality.

In our days a lady thinks herself noble enough when she is married, and only wishes thenceforth to be called madame.

" I am a demoiselle," replied Lorenza.

" Well ? What do you demand ? "

" I demand justice against this man who has stolen and incarcerated me."

" That is no affair of mine," said the lieutenant of police ; " are you his wife ? "

" He says so, at least."

" How !—says ! "

" Yes, but I do not remember anything of it, as the marriage was contracted whilst I slept."

" *Peste I* you sleep soundly."

" What do you say ? "

" I say that it is not in my province. Apply to a procureur and commence an action; I do not like to meddle in family matters."

Upon which M. de Sartines waved his hand with a gesture which meant, " Begone ! " Lorenza did not move.

" Well ? " asked M. de Sartines, astonished.

" I have not done yet," said she ; " and if I come to you, you must understand that it is not to complain of a trifling matter, but to revenge myself. I have

told you that the women of my country revenge*themselves, but never complain."

"That is another affair." said M. de Sartines; "but speak quickly, fair lady, for my time is precious."

"I told you that I came to you to ask for your protection; shall I have it?"

"Protection against whom?"

"Against the man upon whom I wish to revenge myself."

"Is he powerful?"

"More powerful than a king."

"Come, explain, my dear madame. Why should I protect you against a man who is, in your opinion, more powerful than a king, an act which is perhaps a crime? If you wish to be revenged on this man, revenge yourself. That is nothing to me; only, if you commit a crime, I shall have to arrest you, after which we shall see—that is the routine."

"No, sir," said Lorenza, "no, you will not have me arrested, for my vengeance is of the greatest utility to you, to the king, and to France. I shall revenge myself by revealing this man's secrets."

"Oh, ho! he has secrets?" said M. de Sartines, beginning to feel interested in spite of himself.

"Mighty secrets, sir."

"Of what kind?"

"Political ones."

"Mention them."

"But in that case, will you protect me?"

"What sort of protection do you require?" said the magistrate, with a cold smile; "gold or affection?"

"I only ask permission, sir, to retire to a convent and to live there concealed and unknown. I ask that this convent may become my tomb, but that this tomb may never be violated by any one in the world."

" Ah ! " said the magistrate, " that is not a very exactir-f demand. You shall have the convent-speak."

" Then I have your word, sir ? "

" I think I said so."

"Then," said Lorenza, "take this coffer; it contains mysteries which will make you tremble for the safety of the king and his dominions."

" Then you know these mysteries ? "

" Only partially—but I know they exist."

" And that they are important ? "

" That they are terrible."

" Political secrets, you say ? "

" Have you never heard that there existed a secret society ? "

" Ah ! the freemasons ? "

" The invisibles."

" Yes, but I do not believe it."

" When you have opened this coffer you will believe."

" Ah ! " said M. de Sartines eagerly, " let me see."

And he took the coffer from Lorenza's hands. But suddenly, after a moment's reflection, he placed it upon the desk.

" No," said he, with an air of suspicion; " open the coffer yourself."

" But I have not the key."

" How !—you have not the key ? You bring me a coffer which contains the safety of \ kingdom, and you forget the key ? "

" Is it so very difficult, then, to open a lock ? "

" No, not when one knows it." Then, after a moment's pause, he added, " We have in this place keys for all kinds of locks ; you shall have a bunch," (and he looked fixedly at Lorenza) " and you shall open it yourself."

" Give it me," said Lorenza, without the slightest hesitation.

M. de Sartines held out a bunch of little keys of all kinds to the young girl. She took them; M. de Sartines touched her hand—it was cold as marble.

" But why," said he, " did you not bring the key of the coffer ? "

" Because the master of the coffer never lets it out of his possession."

" And who is the master of the coffer—this man who is more powerful than a king ? "

" What he is, no one can say. The Almighty alone knows how long he has lived; the deeds he accomplishes none see but God."

" But his name—his name ? "

" I have known him change it ten times."

" Well, that by which you generally address him ? "

" Acharat."

" And he lives——"

" Rue Saint——"

Suddenly Lorenza started, shuddered, and let the coffer, which she held in the one hand, and the keys which she held in the other, fall to the ground. She made an effort to reply, her lips were distorted convulsively; she raised her hand to her throat, as if the word she was about to utter had suffocated her; then, tossing her trembling arms aloft, she fell her whole length upon the carpet of the study, unable to utter a single word.

" Poor girl! " murmured M. de Sartines, " what the deuce is the matter with her ? She is really very pretty. Ah ! there is some jealousy at work in this project of revenge."

He rang the bell hastily, and in the meantime raised the young girl in his arms, who, with staring eyes and

motionless lips, seemed already dead, and disconnected with this lower world. Two valets entered.

"Carry this young lady carefully into the adjoining apartment," said he; "endeavour to revive her, but above all, use no violence. Go."

The valets obeyed, and carried Lorenza out.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE COFFER

WHEN he was alone, M. de Sartines turned the coffer round and round with the air of a man who can appreciate the value of a discovery. Then he stretched out his hands and picked up the bundle of keys which had fallen from Lorenza's hands.

He tried them all; none would fit.

He took several similar bunches from his drawer.

These bunches contained keys of all dimensions; keys of all sorts of articles, coffer included: common keys, and microscopic keys. M. de Sartines might be said to possess a pattern of every key known.

He tried twenty, fifty, a hundred; not one would even turn round. The magistrate concluded, therefore, that the lock was only a feigned one, and that consequently his keys were only counterfeit keys.

He then took a small chisel and a little hammer from the same drawer, and with his white hand, buried in an ample frill of Mechlin lace, he burst open the lock, the faithful guardian of the coffer.

A bundle of papers appeared, instead of the destructive machine he had feared to find there, or instead of poisons which should diffuse a fatal odour around, and deprive France of its most useful magistrate.

The first words which met the magistrate's eye were the following, written in a handwriting which was evidently feigned.

" Master, it is time to abandon the name of Balsamo."

There was no signature, but merely three letters L.P.D.

" Ha ! " said he, twitching the curls of his wig, " if I do not know the writing, I think I know the name. Balsamo—let me see—I must search the ' B's.' "

He opened one of his twenty-four drawers, and took from it a list, arranged in alphabetical order, written in a fine handwriting full of abbreviations, and containing three or four hundred names, preceded, followed, and accompanied by flaming notes.

" Oh ! ho ! " said he, " there is a long article on this Balsamo."

And he read the whole page with unequivocal signs of dissatisfaction. Then he replaced the Ust in his drawer, and continued the examination of the coffer.

He had not proceeded far before his brow assumed a darker hue, and soon he came to a note full of names and ciphers.

This paper seemed important; it was much worn at the edges, and filled with pencil-marks. M. de Sartines rang the bell; a servant appeared.

" The assistance of the chancery clerk," said he, " immediately. Let him come through the reception-rooms from the orifice to save time."

The valet retired. Two minutes afterwards, a clerk with a pen in his hand, his hat under one arm, a large register under the other, and wearing sleeves of black serge over his coat sleeves, appeared on the threshold of the study. M. de Sartines perceived his entrance in the mirror before him, and handed him the paper over his shoulder.

" Decipher *this*," said he.

" Yes, my lord," replied the clerk.

This decipherer of riddles was a little thin man, with pinched lips, eyebrows contracted by study, pale features, and head pointed both at top and bottom, a narrow chin, a receding forehead, projecting cheek-bones, hollow and dull eyes, which often sparkled with intelligence.

M. de Sartines called him La Fouine.

" Sit down," said the magistrate to him, on seeing him rather embarrassed by his note-book, his code of ciphers, his paper and his pen.

La Fouine modestly took his seat upon the corner of a stool, approached his knees together, and began to write upon them, turning over his dictionary and searching his memory, with an impassible countenance. In five minutes, he had written ,—

§

" An order to assemble three thousand brothers in Paris.

§

" An order to form three circles and six lodges.

§

" An order to form a guard for the Grand Copht, and to contrive four dwellings for him, one in a royal household.

§

" A ri order to place five hundred thousand francs at his disposal for a police.

§

" A n order to enrol the flower of literature and philosophy moving in the first Parisian circles.

§

" An order to hire or to gain over the magistracy, and particularly to make sure of the lieutenant of police, by corruption, violence, or cunning."

Here La Fouine stopped for a moment, not that the poor man was reflecting—he took care not to do that, it would have been a crime—but because his page was filled, and the ink yet wet, so he was obliged to wait for its drying before he could proceed.

M. de Sartines, becoming impatient, snatched the paper from his hands and read it.

At the last paragraph, such an expression of fear was painted on his face, that he turned a deeper pale at seeing himself change colour in the mirror of his cupboard.

He did not return the paper to his clerk, but handed him a fresh sheet. The clerk once more commenced to write in proportion as he deciphered, which he did with a facility terrifying for all writers in cipher.

This time M. de Sartines read over his shoulder,—

§

" To drop the name of Balsamo, which is already too well known in Paris, and to take that of the Count de Fe——"

A large blot of ink concealed the rest of the word.

While M. de Sartines was endeavouring to make out the last syllable which would complete the name, a bell was rung outside, and a valet entering announced:

" The Count de Fenix."

M. de Sartines uttered a cry, and at the risk of demolishing the harmonious edifice of his wig, he clasped

his hands above his head, and hastened to dismiss his clerk by a secret door.

Then, resuming his place before the desk, he said to the valet,—

" Introduce him."

A few seconds afterwards M. de Sartines perceived in his glass the marked profile of the count, which he had already seen at court, on the day of Madame Dubarry's presentation.

Balsamo entered without any hesitation whatever.

M. de Sartines rose, bowed coldly to the count, and crossing one leg over the other, he seated himself ceremoniously in his arm-chair.

At the first glance the magistrate had divined the cause and the aim of this visit.

At the first glance also Balsamo had perceived the opened box, half emptied upon M. de Sartine's desk. His look, however hasty, at the coifer, did not escape the lieutenant of police.

" To what chance do I owe the honour of your presence, my lord count ? " asked M. de Sartines.

" Sir," replied Balsamo, with a most affable smile, " I have had the honour of being presented to all the sovereigns, ministers, and ambassadors of Europe, but I have not found any one to present me to you; I have therefore come to introduce myself."

" In truth, sir," replied the lieutenant of police, " you arrive most opportunely, for I feel convinced that had you not come of yourself, I should have had the honour of sending for you."

" Ah ! indeed ! " said Balsamo. " What a coincidence."

M. de Sartines inclined his head with a sarcastic smile.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" Shall I be so fortunate as to be of any use to you ?" asked Balsamo.

And these words were uttered without a shadow of emotion or of uneasiness clouding his smiling features.

" You have travelled much, my lord count ? " asked the lieutenant of police.

" A great deal, sir."

" Ah ! "

" You wish for some geographical information, perhaps ? A man of your capacity does not confine his observations to France alone—he surveys Europe—the world."

" Geographical is not exactly the word, count. Moral would be more correct."

" Have no scruples, I beg; one is as welcome as the other. I am wholly at your service."

" Well, count, picture to yourself that I am in search of a most dangerous man—a man who, on my word, is a complete atheist."

" Oh ! "

" A conspirator."

" Oh ! "

" A forger."

" Oh ! "

A debauchee, a false coiner, a quack, a charlatan, the chief of a society—a man whose history I have in my books, in this box that you see here—everywhere, indeed ? "

" Ah ! yes, I comprehend," said Balsamo ; " you have the history but not the man."

" No."

" *Diable!* The latter seems to me the most important point."

" Of course ; but you shall see we are not far from having him. Certainly Proteus had not more forms,

nor Jupiter more names, than this mysterious traveller. Acharat in Egypt—Balsamo in Italy—Somini in Sardinia—the Marquis Danna in Malta—the Marquis Pellegrini in Corsica—and lastly, the Count de——? "

" Count de——? " added Balsamo.

" The last name I could not decipher perfectly, sir. But I am sure you will be able to assist me, will you not ? For there is no doubt you must have met this man during your travels in each of the countries *I* have just now named."

" Enlighten me a little, I entreat," said Balsamo quietly.

" Ah ! I understand ; you wish for a description of his person, do you not, count ? "

" Yes, sir, if you please."

" Well! " said M. de Sartines, fixing a glance which he intended to be inquisitorial upon Balsamo, "he is a man of your age, of your size, of your figure. He is sometimes a great lord, scattering money on all sides—sometimes a charlatan, searching into the secrets of nature—sometimes a gloomy member of some mysterious brotherhood which meets by night, and swears ' Death to kings and the overthrow of all thrones/ "

" Oh ! " said Balsamo, " that is very vague."

" How, vague ? "

" If you knew how many men I have seen who resemble this description."

" Indeed ! "

" Of course ; and you must be a little more precise if you wish me to assist you. In the first place, do you know in which country he prefers to live ? "

" He dwells in all."

" But at present, for instance ? "

" At present he is in France."

" And what is his errand in France ? "

" He directs an immense conspiracy."

" Ah ! that is indeed some clue ; and if you know what conspiracy he directs, you probably hold the thread by which to catch your man."

" I am just of your opinion."

" Well! if you think so, why in that case do you ask my advice ? It is useless."

" Ah ! but I am not yet decided."

" On what point ? "

" Whether I shall arrest him or not."

" I do not understand the *not*, Mr. Lieutenant of Police, for if he conspires——"

" Yes ; but if he is partially defended by some name or some title ! "

" Ah ! I understand. But what name ?—what title ? You must tell me that before I can assist you in your search, sir."

" Why, sir, I have told you that I know the name under which he conceals himself, but——"

" But do you not know the one which he openly uses—is that it ? "

^{%t} Yes, otherwise——"

" Otherwise you would arrest him."

" Instantly."

" Well, my dear M. de Sartines, it **is** very fortunate, as you said just now, that I arrived at this moment, for **I will do you the service you require.**"

" **You ?** "

" Yes."

" You will **tell me his name ?** "

" Yes."

" His public name ? "

" Yes."

" Then you know **him ?** "

" Perfectly **well.**"

" And what is his name ? " asked M. de Sartines, expecting some falsehood.

" The Count de Fenix."

" What! the name by which you were announced ? "

" The same."

" Your name ? "

" My name."

" Then this Acharat—this Somini—this Marquis Danna—this Marquis Pellegrini—this Joseph Balsamo—is you ? "

" Yes," said Balsamo quietly ; " is myself."

It was a minute before M. de Sartines could recover from the vertigo which this frank avowal caused him.

" You see I had guessed as much," said he. " I knew you. I knew that Joseph Balsamo and the Count de Fenix were the same."

" Ah ! " said Balsamo, " you are a great minister—I confess it."

" And you are most imprudent," said the magistrate, advancing towards the bell.

" Imprudent ?—why ? "

" Because I am going to have you arrested."

" What say you ? " replied Balsamo, stepping between the magistrate and the bell. " You are going to arrest me ? "

" *Pardieu!* what can you do to prevent me, may I ask ? "

" You ask me ? "

" Yes."

" My dear lieutenant of police, I will blow your brains out."

And Balsamo drew from his pocket a charming little pistol, mounted in silver gilt—which, from its appearance, might have been chased by Benvenuto Cellini—

and calmly levelled it at the forehead of M. de-Sartines, who turned pale and sunk into an arm-chair.'

" There," said Balsamo, drawing another chair close to that occupied by the lieutenant of police, and sitting down ; " now that we are comfortably seated, we can chat a little."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CONVERSATION

M. DE SARTINES took a moment or two to recover from his rather severe alarm. He had seen the threatening muzzle of the pistol presented before his very eye; he had even felt the cold metal of the barrel upon his forehead. At last he recovered.

" Sir," said he, " you have an advantage over me. Knowing what sort of a man I had to deal with, I did not take the precautions usually adopted against common malefactors."

" Oh, sir ! " replied Balsamo, " now you are getting angry and use injurious expressions. Do you not see how unjust you are ? I come to do you a service."

M. de Sartines moved uneasily.

" Yes, sir, to serve you," resumed Balsamo, " and therefore you misunderstand my intentions; you speak to me of conspirators at the very time when I come to denounce a conspiracy to you."

But Balsamo talked in vain. M. de Sartines did not at that moment pay any great attention to the words of his dangerous visitor, and the word conspiracy, which on other occasions would have been sufficient to make him bound from his seat, scarcely caused him to prick up his ears.

" Since you know so well who I am, sir, you are aware of my mission in France. Sent by his majesty the great Frederick, I am more or less secretly the ambassador of his Prussian Majesty. Now, by ambassador is Understood an inquirer; in my quality of inquirer I am ignorant of nothing that happens, and a subject upon which I am particularly well informed is the monopoly of grain."

However unpretendingly Balsamo uttered these last words, they nevertheless produced more effect upon the lieutenant of police than all the others, for they made him attentive. He slowly raised his head.

" What is this affair about corn ? " said he, affecting as much assurance as Balsamo himself had displayed at the commencement of the interview. " Be good enough, in your turn, to instruct me, sir."

" Willingly, sir," said Balsamo. " This is the whole matter——"

" I am all attention."

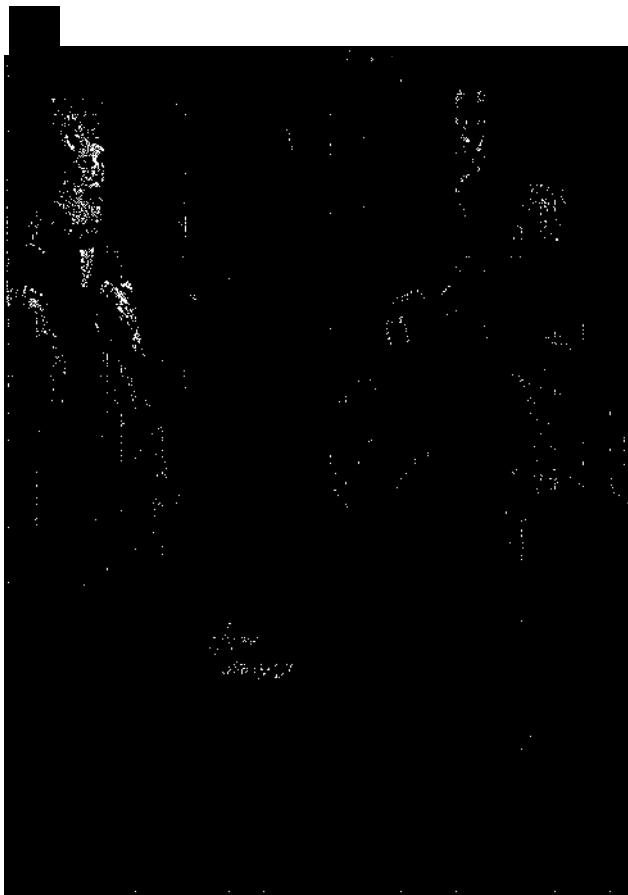
" Oh ! you do not need to tell me that. Some very clever speculators have persuaded his majesty the King of France that he ought to construct granaries for his people in case of scarcity. These granaries therefore have been constructed. Whilst they were doing it, they thought it as well to make them large. Nothing was spared, neither stone nor brick, and they were made very large."

" Well ? "

" Well, they had then to be filled. Empty granaries were useless, therefore they were filled."

" Well, sir," said M. de Sartines, not seeing very clearly as yet what Balsamo was driving at.

" Well! you may readily conceive that to fill these very large granaries a great quantity of grain was required. Is that not evident ? "



K.I* *Page 391*
** You, madame! you !" exclaimed M. de Sartines

" Yes."

" To continue, then. A large quantity of-gram withdrawn from circulation is one way of Starving the people ; for, mark this ; any amount taken from the circulation is equivalent to a failure in the production. A thousand sacks of corn more in the granary are a thousand sacks of corn less in the market-place. If you only multiply these thousand sacks by ten, the corn will rise considerably."

M. de Sartines was seized with an irritating cough. Balsamo paused, and waited quietly till the cough was gone.

" You see, then," continued he, as soon as the lieutenant of police would permit him, " you see that the speculator in these granaries is enriched by the amount of the rise in value. Is that clear to you ? "

" Perfectly clear, sir." said M. de Sartines ; " but, as far as I can understand, it seems that you have the presumption to denounce to me a conspiracy or a crime of which his majesty is the author ? "

" Exactly," said Balsamo ; " you understand me perfectly."

" That is a bold step, sir, and I confess that I am rather curious to see how his majesty will take your accusation ; I fear much the result will be precisely the same that I proposed to myself on looking over the papers in this box before your arrival. Take care, sir ; your destination in either case will be the Bastille."

" Ah ! now you do not understand me at **all**."

" How so ? "

" Good heavens! how incorrect an opinion you form of me, and how deeply you wrong me, sir, in taking me for a fool! What! you imagine I intend to attack the king—I, an ambassador, an inquirer! Why, that

[would.be](#) the work of a simpleton ! Listen to the end, pray."

M. de Sartines bowed.

" The persons who have discovered this conspiracy against the French people—forgive me for taking up your valuable time, sir, but you will see directly that it is not lost—they who have discovered this conspiracy against the French people are economists—laborious and minute men, who by their careful investigation of this underhand game have discovered that the king does not play alone. They know well that his majesty keeps an exact register of the rate of corn in the different markets ; they know that his majesty rubs his hands with glee when the rise has produced him eight or ten thousand crowns; but they know also that beside his majesty there stands a man whose position facilitates the sales, a man who naturally, thanks to certain functions (he is a functionary, you must know), superintends the purchases, the arrivals, the packing,—a man, in short, who manages for the king. Now these economists—these microscopic observers, as I call them—will not attack the king, for of course they are not mad, but they will attack, my dear sir, the man, the functionary, the agent, who thus haggles for his majesty."

M. de Sartines endeavoured in vain to restore the equilibrium of his wig.

" Now," continued Balsamo, "*I* am coming to the point. Just as you who have a police, knew that I was the Count de Fenix, so I know that you are M. de Sartines."

" Well, what then ? " said the embarrassed magistrate. " Yes, I am M. de Sartines. What a discovery !"

" Ah, but cannot you understand that this M. de Sartines is precisely the man of the price list, of the

underhand dealings, of the stowing away—he who, either with or without the king's cognisance; traffics with the food of twenty-seven millions of French people, whom his office requires him to feed on the best possible terms. Now just imagine the effect of such a discovery. You are not much beloved by the people; the king is not a very considerate man: as soon as the cries of the famishing millions demand your head, the king—to avert all suspicion of connivance with you, if there is connivance, or if there is no connivance, to do justice—will cause you to be hung upon a gibbet, like Enguerrand de Marigny. Do you recollect Enguerrand? "

" Imperfectly." said M. de Sartines, turning very pale; " and it is a proof of very bad taste, I think, sir, to talk of gibbets to a man of my rank."

" Oh! if I alluded to it," replied Balsamo, " it was because I think I see poor Enguerrand still before me. I assure you he was a perfect gentleman, from Normandy, of a very ancient family and a noble descent. He was chamberlain of France, captain of the Louvre, comptroller of finance and of buildings; he was Count of LongueviUe, which county is more considerable than yours of Alby! Well, sir, I saw him hung upon the gallows of Montfaucon, which he had himself constructed! Thank God, it was not a crime to have said to him before the catastrophe, ' Enguerrand, my dear Enguerrand! take care—you are dipping into the finances to an extent that Charles of Valois will never pardon.' He would not listen to me, sir, and unfortunately he perished. Alas! If you knew how many prefects of police I have seen, from Pontius Pilate down to M. Bertin de Belille, Count de Bourdeilhes, Lord of Brantome, your predecessor, who first introduced the lantern and prohibited the scales."

M. de Sartines rose, and endeavoured *in vain* to conceal the agitation which preyed upon him.

" Well/* said he, you can accuse me if you like. Of what importance is the testimony of a man such as you, who has no influence or connections ? "

" Take care, sir," said Balsamo; " frequently those who seem to have no connections are connected far and wide ; and when I shall write the history of these corn speculations to my correspondent Frederick, who you know is a philosopher—when Frederick shall hasten to communicate the affair, with his comments upon it, to M. Arouet de Voltaire—when the latter, with his pen, whose reputation at least I hope you know, shall have metamorphosed it into a little comic tale in the style of '*Uhomme aax guar ante Ecus*'—when M. d'Alembert, that excellent geometrician, shall have calculated that the corn withdrawn from the public consumption by you might have fed a hundred millions of men for two or three years—when Helvetius shall have shown that the price of this corn, converted into crowns of six livres and piled up, would touch the moon, or, into bank-notes fastened together, would reach to Saint Petersburg—when this calculation shall have inspired M. de la Harpe to write a bad drama, Diderot a family conversation, and M. Jean Jacques Rousseau, of Geneva, who has a tolerably sharp bite when he chooses, a terrible paraphrase of this conversation with his own commentaries—whe-i M. Caron de Beaumarchais—may heaven preserve you from treading on his toes !—shall have written a memoir, M. Grimm a little letter, M. de Holbach a thundering attack, M. de Marmontel an amiable moral tale in which he will kill you by defending you badly—when you shall be spoken of in the Cafe de la Regence, the Palais Royal, at Audinet's, at the king's dancers' (kept up,

as you know, by M. Nicolet)—ah ! Count d'Alby, you will be in a much worse case than poor Enguerrand de Marigny (whom you would not hear me mention) when he stood under the gallows, for he asserted his innocence, and that with so much earnestness that, on my word of honour, I believed him when he told me so."

At these words, M. de Sartines, no longer paying any heed to decorum, took off his wig and wiped his bald pate, which was bathed in perspiration.

" Well," said he, "so be it ! But all that will not prevent me in the least. Ruin me if you can ; you have your proofs, I have mine. Keep your secret. I shall keep the coffer."

" Oh ! sir," said Balsamo, " that is another error into which I am surprised that a man of your talents should fall ; this coffer——"

" Well ! what of it ? "

" You will not keep."

" Oh ! " exclaimed M. de Sartines, with a sarcastic smile, " true ; I had forgotten that the Count de Fenix is a gentleman of the highway, who rifles travellers with the strong hand. I forgot your pistol, because you have replaced it in your pocket. Excuse me, my lord ambassador."

" But, good heavens ! why speak of pistols, M. de Sartines ? You surely do not believe that I mean to carry off the coffer by main force ; that when on the stairs I may hear your bell ring, and your voice cry, ' Stop, thief ! ' Oh, no ! When I say that you will not keep this coffer, I mean that you will restore it to me willingly and without constraint."

" What ! I ! " exclaimed the magistrate, placing his clenched hand upon the disputed object with so much weight that he nearly broke it.

" Yes, you."

" Oh^r very well, sir, mock away ; but as to taking this coffer, I tell you you shall only have it with my life. And have I not risked my life a thousand times ? Do I not owe it, to the last drop, to the service of his majesty ? Kill me—you can do so ! but the noise will summon my avengers, and I shall have voice enough left to convict you of all your crimes. Ah ! give you back this coffer ! " added he, with a bitter smile, " all hell should not wrest it from me ! "

" And, therefore, I shall not employ the intervention of the subterranean powers. I shall be satisfied with that of the person who is just now knocking at the gate of your court-yard."

And in fact, just at that moment, three blows struck with an air of command were heard outside.

" And whose carriage," continued Balsamo, " is just now entering the court."

" It seems, then, that it is some friend of yours who is coming to honour me with a visit ? "

" As you say—a friend of mine."

" And I shall hand this coffer to him."

" Yes, my dear M. de Sartines, you will give it to him."

The lieutenant of police had not finished his gesture of lofty disdain, when a valet opened the door hastily, and announced that Madame Dubarry wished for an interview.

M. de Sartines started, and looked in stupefied amazement at Balsamo, who required all his self-command to avoid laughing in the face of the honourable magistrate.

Close behind the valet appeared a lady who seemed to have no need of permission to enter. It was the beautiful countess, whose flowing and perfumed

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

skirts gently rustled as they brushed past the door of the cabinet.

" You, madame ! you ! " exclaimed M. de Sartines, who, in the instinct of terror, had seized the open coffer in both hands, and clasped it to his breast.

" Good-day, Sartines," said the countess, with her gayest smile ; then, turning to Balsamo, " good-day, dear count," added she, and she gave her hand to the latter, who familiarly bent over the white fingers, and pressed his lips where the royal lips had so often rested.

In this movement Balsamo managed to whisper a few words aside to the countess, which Sartines could not hear.

" Ah ! precisely," exclaimed the countess, " there is my coffer."

" Your coffer ! " stammered M. de Sartines.

" Of course, my coffer—oh ! you have opened it ; I see—you do not observe much ceremony ! "

" But, madame——"

" Oh ! it is delightful ! The idea occurred to me at once that some one had stolen this coffer, and then I said to myself, ' I must go to Sartines, he will find it for me/ You did not wait till I asked you ; you found it beforehand—a thousand thanks ! "

" And as you see," said Balsamo, " monsieur has even opened it."

" Yes, really !—who could have thought it ! It is odious conduct of you, Sartines I "

" Madame, notwithstanding all the respect I have for you," said the lieutenant of police, " I fear **that** you are imposed upon."

" Imposed, sir ! " said Balsamo ; " do you perchance mean **that word** for **me** ? "

" I know what I know," replied M. de Sartines.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" And I know nothing," whispered Madame Dubarry in a *krv* voice to Balsamo. " Come, tell me what is the matter, my dear count! You have claimed the fulfilment of the promise I made to you, to grant the first favour you should ask. I keep my word like a woman of honour, and here I am. Tell me what must I do for you ? "

" Madame," replied Balsamo aloud, " you confided the care of this coffer and everything it contains to me, a few days ago."

" Of course," answered Madame Dubarry, replying by a look to the count's appealing glance.

" Of course ! " exclaimed M. de Sartines, " you say of course, madame ? "

" Yes, madame pronounced the words loud enough for you to hear them, I should think."

" A box which contains perhaps *ten* conspiracies ! "

" Ah ! M. de Sartines, you are aware that that word is rather an unfortunate one for you ; do not repeat it. Madame asks for her box again ; give it her—that is all."

" Do you ask me for it, madame ? " said M. de Sartines, trembling with anger.

" Yes, my dear magistrate."

" But learn, at least——"

Balsamo looked at the countess.

" You can tell me nothing I do not know," said Madame Dubarry ; " give me tue coffer ; you may believe I did not come for nothing ! "

" But in the name of heaven, madame !—in the name of his majesty's safety !——"

Balsamo made an impatient gesture.

" The coffer, sir I " said the countess abruptly ; " the coffer—yes or no! Reflect well before you refuse!"

" As you please, madame ! " said M. de Sa^rtinos humbly.

And he handed the coffer, in which Balsamo had already replaced all the papers scattered over the desk, to the countess.

Madame Dubarry turned towards the latter with a charming smile.

" Count." said she, " will you carry this coffer to my carriage for me, and give me your hand through all these antechambers, thronged with villainous-looking faces which I do not like to confront alone. Thanks, Sartines."

And Balsamo was already advancing towards the door with his protectress, when he saw M. de Sartines moving towards the bell.

" Countess," said Balsamo, stopping his enemy with a look, " be good enough to tell M. de Sartines, who is quite enraged with me for having claimed this box—be good enough to tell him how much grieved you would be if any misfortune were to happen to me through the agency of the lieutenant of police, and how displeased you would be with him."

The countess smiled on Balsamo.

" You hear what the count says, my dear Sartines ? —well ! it is the simple truth. The count is an excellent friend of mine, and I should be dreadfully angry with you if you displeased him in any way whatsoever. Adieu, Sartines ! " And placing her hand in Balsamo's, who carried the coffer, Madame Dubarry left the study of the lieutenant of police.

M. de Sartines saw them depart without displaying that fury which Balsamo expected him to manifest.

" Go ! " said the conquered magistrate ; " go—you have the box, but I have the woman ! "

And to compensate himself for his disappointment, he rang loud enough to break all the bells in the house.

CHAPTER XXXIX

SARTINES BEGINS TO THINK BALSAMO A SORCERER

AT the violent ringing of M. de Sartines' bell, an usher entered,

" Well! " asked the magistrate ; " this woman ? "

" What woman, my lord ? "

" The woman who fainted here just now, and whom I confided to your care."

" My lord, she is quite well," replied the usher.

" Very good ; bring her to me."

" Where shall I find her, my lord ? "

" What do you mean ? In that room, of course/*

" But she is not there, my lord."

" Not there ! Then where is she ? "

" I do not know."

" She is gone ? "

" Yes."

" Alone ? "

" Yes."

" But she could not stand."

" My lord, it is true that for some moments she remained in a swoon ; but five minutes after the Count de Fenix entered my lord's study, she awoke from this strange fit, which neither essences nor salts affected in the least. Then she opened her eyes, rose, and breathed, seemingly with an air of satisfaction."

" Well, what then ? "

" She proceeded towards the door ; and, as my **lord**

had not ordered that she should be detained, she was allowed to depart."

"Gone!" cried M. de Sartines. "Ah! wretch that you are! I shall send you all to rot at Bicetre! Quick, quick! send me my head-clerk!"

The usher retired hastily to obey the order he had received.

"The wretch is a sorcerer!" muttered the unfortunate magistrate. "I am lieutenant of police to the king, but he is lieutenant of police to the devil!"

The reader has, no doubt, understood what M. de Sartines could not explain to himself. Immediately after the incident of the pistol, and whilst the lieutenant of police was endeavouring to regain his equanimity, Balsamo, profiting by the momentary respite, had turned successively to the four cardinal points, quite sure of finding Lorenza in one of them, and had ordered her to rise, to go out, and to return by the way she had come, to the Rue Saint Claude.

The moment this wish had been formed in Balsamo's mind, a magnetic current was established between him and the young woman, and the latter, obeying the order she had received by intuition, rose and retired, without any one opposing her departure.

M. de Sartines that same evening took to his bed, and caused himself to be bled. The revulsion had been too strong for him to bear with impunity; and the doctor assured him* that a quarter of an hour more would have brought on an attack of apoplexy.

Meanwhile, Balsamo had accompanied the countess to her carriage, and had attempted to take his leave of her; but she was not a woman to let him go thus, without knowing, or at least without endeavouring to discover, the solution of the strange event which had taken place before her. She begged the count to

enter her carriage. The count obeyed, and a groom led Djend behind.

" You see now, count," said she, " whether I am true or not, and whether when I have called a man my friend, I spoke with the lips merely, or my heart. I was just setting out for Luciennes, where the king had said he would pay me a visit to-morrow morning; but your letter arrived, and I left everything for you. Many would have been frightened at the words conspiracies and conspirators which M. de Sartines threw in your teeth ; but I looked at your countenance before I acted, and did as you wished me."

" Madame," replied Balsamo, " you have amply repaid the slight service I was able to render you ; but with me nothing is lost—you will find that I can be grateful. Do not imagine, however, that I am a criminal—a conspirator, as M. de Sartines said. That worthy magistrate had received, from some person who betrayed me, this coffer, containing some chemical and hermetical secrets—which I shall share with you that you may preserve your immortal, your splendid beauty, and your dazzling youth. Now, seeing the ciphers of my receipt, this excellent M. de Sartines called the chancery clerk to assist him, who, in order not to be found wanting, interpreted them after his own fashion. I think I have already told you, madame, that the profession is not yet entirely freed from the dangers which were attendant on it in the middle ages. Only young and intelligent minds like yours favour it. In short, madame, you have saved me from a great embarrassment; I thank you for it, and shall prove my gratitude."

" But what would he have done with you if I had not come to your assistance ? "

" To annoy King Frederick, whom his majesty

hates, he would have imprisoned me in Y^m(^{en}nes or the Bastille. I should have escaped from it/Lknow —thanks to my receipt for melting stone with a breath—but I should have lost my coffer, which contains, as I have had the honour of telling you, many curious and invaluable secrets, wrested by a lucky chance from eternal darkness."

" Ah count! you at once delight and reassure me. Then you promise me a philtre to make me young again ? "

" Yes."

" And when will you give it me ? "

" Oh ! you need be in no hurry. You may ask for it twenty years hence, beautiful countess. In the meantime, I think you do not wish to become quite a child again."

" You are in truth a charming man. One question more and I will let you go, for you seem in haste."

" Speak, countess."

" You said that some one had betrayed you. Is it a man or a woman ? "

" A woman."

" Ah ! ah ! count, love affairs."

" Alas! yes; prompted by an almost frantic jealousy, which has produced the pleasant effect you have seen. It is a woman who, not daring to stab me with a kni[^]e, because she knows I cannot be killed, wanted to imprison and ruin me."

" What! ruin you ? "

" She endeavoured to do so, at least."

" Count, I will stop here," said the countess, laughing. "Is it the liquid silver which courses through your veins that gives you that immortality which makes people betray you instead of killing you ? Shall I

set you down here, or drive you to your own house ? Come, choose ! "

" No, madame, I cannot allow you to inconvenience yourself on my account. I have my horse, Djerid."

" Ah ! that wonderful animal which, it is said, outstrips the wind ? "

" He seems to please you, madame."

" He is, in truth, a magnificent steed."

" Allow me to offer him to you, on the condition that you alone ride him."

" Oh, no, thank you ; I do not ride on horseback ; or, at least, I am a very timid horsewoman. I am as much obliged to you, however, as if I accepted your offer. Adieu ! my dear count ; do not forget my philtre, in ten years."

" I said twenty."

" Count, you know the proverb ; ' a bird in the hand——' and if you could even give it me in five years, there is no knowing what may happen."

" Whenever you please, countess ; are you not aware that I am entirely at your command."

" Only one word more, count."

" I am all attention, madame."

" It proves that I have great confidence in you to speak of it."

Balsamo, who had already alighted from the carriage, suppressed his impatience, and approached the countess.

" It is reported everywhere," continued Madame Dubarry, " that the king is rather taken with this little Tavern ey."

" Ah ! madame," said Balsamo, " is it possible ? "

" A very great partiality, it is said. You must tell me if it is true. Count, do not deceive me ; I beseech you to treat me as a friend. Tell me the truth, count."

" Madame," replied Balsamo, " I will do more ;

I will promise you that Mademoiselle Antree shall never be anything to the king."

"And why not?" cried Madame Dubarry.

"Because I will it so." said Balsamo.

"Oh!" said Madame Dubarry incredulously.

"You doubt."

"Is it not allowed?"

"Never doubt the truths of science, madame. You have believed me when I said yes; believe me when I say no."

"But, in short, have you the means——?"

"Well?"

"Means capable of annihilating the king's will, or conquering his whims?"

Balsamo smiled.

"I create sympathies," said he.

"Yes, I know that."

"You believe it, even."

"I believe it."

"Well, I can create aversions also, and, if needful, impossibilities. Therefore, countess, make your mind easy—I am on the watch."

Balsamo uttered all these fragments of sentences with an absence of mind which Madame Dubarry would not have taken as she did for inspiration, had she known the feverish anxiety which Balsamo felt to be with Lorenza as quickly as possible.

"Well, count," said she, "assuredly you are not only my prophet of happiness, but also my guardian angel. Count, mark my words; defend me and I will defend you. Alliance! union I"

"Agreed, madame." replied Balsamo, kissing the countess's hand.

Then closing the door of the carriage, which the countess had stopped upon the Champs Elysées, he

mounted his horse, who neighed joyously, and was soon lost to view in the shadows of night.

" To Luciennes! " said the countess, consoled.

This time Balsamo whistled softly, and gently pressed his knees against Djerid's side, who started off at a gallop.

Five minutes afterwards he was in the vestibule of the Rue Saint Claude, looking at Fritz.

" Well ? " asked he anxiously.

" Yes, master," replied the domestic, who was accustomed to read his looks.

" She has returned ? "

" She is upstairs."

" In which room ? "

" In the chamber of furs.

" In what state is she ? "

" Oh ! very much exhausted. She ran so quickly that although I saw her coming, for I was watching for her, I had scarcely time to hasten to meet her."

" Indeed ! "

" Oh ! I was quite alarmed. She swept on like a tempest; rushed upstairs without taking breath; and when she entered the room, she fell upon the large black lion's skin. You will find her there."

Balsamo hastily ascended and found Lorenza where Fritz had said. She was struggling in vain against the first convulsions of a nervoute crisis. The fluid had weighed upon her too long already; and forced her to violent efforts. She was in pain, and groaned deeply ; it seemed as if a mountain weighed upon her breast, and **that** she endeavoured with both hands to remove it.

Balsamo looked at **her** with an eye sparkling with **anger**, and taking **her in his arms**, he carried her into

her apartment, the mysterious door of which riosed behind him.

CHAPTER XL

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

BALSAMO had just entered Lorenza's apartment, and was preparing to awake her and overwhelm her with all the reproaches which his gloomy anger prompted, fully determined to punish her according to the dictates of that anger, when a triple knock upon the ceiling announced that Althotas had watched for his return and wished to speak to him.

Nevertheless Balsamo waited ; he was hoping either that he had been mistaken or that the signal had been accidental, when the impatient old man repeated his blows. Balsamo, therefore—fearing, no doubt, to see him descend, as he had already done before, or that Lorenza, awakened by an influence opposed to his own, might acquire the knowledge of some other particulars no less dangerous for him than his political secrets—Balsamo therefore, after having, if we may so express it, charged Lorenza with a fresh stratum of the electric fluid, left the room to rejoin Althotas.

It was high time ; the trap-door was already half way from the ceiling. Althotas had left his wheeled arm-chair and was seen squatting down upon the movable part of the ceiling which rose and fell. He saw Balsamo leave Lorenza's room.

Squatting down thus, the old man was at once hideous and terrible to behold.

His white face, in those parts which still seemed as if they belonged to a living being, was purple with tha

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

violence of his rage. His meagre and bony hands, like those of a human skeleton, trembled and shook ; his hollow eyes seemed to vacillate in their deep caverns ; and, in a language unknown even to his disciple, he was loading him with the most violent invectives.

Having left his arm-chair to touch the spring, he seemed to live and move only by the aid of his long arms, lean and angular as those of a spider ; and issuing, as we have said, from his chamber, inaccessible to all but Balsamo, he was about to descend to the lower apartment. To induce this feeble old man, indolent as he was, to leave his arm-chair (that cleverly constructed machine which spared him all fatigue), and consent to perform one of the actions of common life—to induce him to undergo the care and fatigue of such a change in his usual habits, it must have required no ordinary excitement thus to withdraw him from the ideal life in which he existed and plunge him into the every-day world.

Balsamo, taken as it were in the fact, seemed at first astonished, then uneasy.

" Ah ! " exclaimed Althotas, " there you are, you good-for-nothing—you ingrate ! There you are, coward who desert your master ! "

Balsamo called all his patience to his aid, as he invariably did when he spoke to the old man.

" But." replied he quietly, " I think, my friend, you have only just called me."

" Your friend ? " exclaimed Althotas ; " your friend? you vile human creature ! You dare to speak the language of your equals to me ! I have been a friend to you—more than a friend—a father—a father who has educated, instructed, and enriched you. But you my friend ? Oh, no I for you abandon me—you assassinate me ! "

" Come, master, you disturb your bile ; you irritate your blood ; you will make yourself ill."

" Ill ?—absurdity ! Have I ever been ill, except when you made me a sharer, in spite of myself, in some of the miseries of your impure human-kind ? Ill ! have you forgotten that it is I who heal others ? "

" Well, master." replied Balsamo coldly, " I am here. Let us not lose time in vain."

" Yes, I advise you to remind me of that. Time ! time ! which you oblige me to economise—me, for whom this element, circumscribed to all the world, should be endless, unlimited ! Yes, my time flies—yes, my time is lost—my time, like the time of other people, falls minute by minute into the gulf of eternity, when for me it ought to be eternity itself ! "

" Come, master." said Balsamo, with unalterable patience, lowering the trap to the ground as he spoke, placing himself upon it, and causing it to rise again to its place in the room ; " come, what is it you want ? You say I starve you, but are you not in your forty days of regimen ? "

" Yes, yes, doubtless ; the work of regeneration commenced thirty-two days ago."

" Then tell me, of what do you complain ! I see two or three bottles of rain-water, the only kind you drink, still remaining."

" Of course ; but do you imagine I am a silkworm, that I can complete the grand work of renovation of youth and of transformation alone ? Do you imagine that, powerless as I am, I can compose alone the elixir of life ? Or think you that, reclined on my side, and enervated by cooling drinks, my sole nourishment, I could have presence of mind enough, when left to my own resources, and without your assistance, to complete the minute work of my regeneration, in

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

which, as you, ungrateful wretch, well know, I must be aided and supported by a friend ? "

" I am here, master—I am here. Answer me now," said Balsamo, replacing the old man in his chair almost in spite of himself, as he would have done a hideous infant; " answer me—you have not been in want of distilled water, for, as I said before, there are three bottles still remaining. This water, as you know, was all collected in the month of May; there are your biscuits of barley and of sesamum, and I myself administered to you the white drops you prescribed."

" Yes, but the elixir ! The elixir is not made! You do not remember it, for you were not there—it was your father, your father, who was far more faithful than you are—but at the last fiftieth I had the elixir ready a month beforehand. I had my retreat on Mount Ararat. A Jew provided me with a Christian child, still at its mother's breast, for its weight in gold ; I bled it according to the rule ; I took the last three drops of its arterial blood, and in an hour my elixir, which only wanted this ingredient, was composed. Therefore, my first regeneration succeeded wonderfully well. My hair and teeth fell out during the convulsions which succeeded the absorption of that wondrous elixir, but they grew again—the latter badly enough, I know, because I neglected the precaution of letting the elixir flow into my throat through a golden conduit. But my hair and my nails grew again in this second youth, and I began again to live as if I were only fifteen. Now I am old again—I am bordering on the extreme limit—and, if the elixir is not ready, if it is not safely enclosed in this bottle, if I do not bestow all possible care upon this work, the science of a century will be annihilated

with me, and the admirable, the sublime • spCret I possess will be lost for man, who, in me and through me, approaches the divinity? Oh! if I fail—if I am mistaken, if I miss it, Acharat—it will be your fault; and take care, for my anger will be terrible—terrible!"

And as he uttered these last words, a livid glare shot from his dying eyeball, and the old man fell into a brief convulsion, which ended in a violent fit of coughing.

Balsamo instantly lavished the most eager attentions on him, and the old man recovered. His complexion had become death-like instead of pale. This feeble attack had weakened his strength so much that one would have thought he was dying.

"Come, master," said Balsamo, "tell me plainly what you want."

"What I want!" said he, looking fixedly at Balsamo.

"Yes."

"What I want is this——"

"Speak; I hear you, and I will obey; if what you ask is possible."

"Possible! possible!" muttered the old man contemptuously. "You know that everything is possible."

"Yes, with time and science."

"Science I have, and I am on the point of conquering time. My dose has succeeded. My strength has almost entirely left me. The white drops have caused the expulsion of all the remaining portion of my former nature. Youth, like the sap of the trees in May, rises under the old bark, and buds, so to speak, through the old wood. You may remark, Acharat, that the symptoms are excellent; my voice is weak, my sight is three-quarters gone; sometimes I feel my mind wander; I have become insensible to the transition

from heat to cold. I must therefore hasten to finish my elixir in order that, on the appointed term of my second nfty years, I may at once pass from a hundred to twenty. The ingredients for the elixir are all made, the conduit ^s ready ; I want nothing but the three drops of blood I told you of."

Balsamo made a gesture of repugnance.

" Very well," said Althotas, " let us abandon the child, since it is so difficult, and since you prefer to shut yourself up the whole day with your mistress, to seeking it for me."

" You know, master, that Lorenza is not my mistress," replied Balsamo.

" Oh ! oh ! oh ! " exclaimed Althotas ; " you say that ! You think to impose on me as on the mass ; you would make me believe in an immaculate creature, and yet you are a man ! "

" I swear to you, master, that Lorenza is as pure as an angel ; I swear to you, that love, earthly felicity, domestic happiness—I have sacrificed all to my project. For I also have my regenerating work ; only, instead of applying it to myself alone, I shall apply it to all the world."

" Fool ! poor fool ! " cried Althotas ; " I veriJy believe he is going to speak to me of his cataclysm of fleshworms, his revolutions of ant-hills, when I speak to him of life and eternal youth ! "

" Which can only be acquired at the price of a fearful crime—and besides——"

" You doubt, I see you doubt—miserable wretch ! "

" No, master ; but since you give up the child, tell me what do you want ? "

" I must have the first unmarried woman you meet. A woman is the best—I have discovered that, on account of the affinity of the sexes. Find me

that, and quickly, for I have only eight days longer."

"Very well, master, I will see—I will search."

Another lightning flash, more terrible than the first, sparkled in the old man's eyes.

"You will see! you will search!" he cried. "Oh! is that your reply? I expected it, and I don't know why I am surprised. And since when, thou worm of the earth! was the creature entitled to speak thus to its master? Ah! you see me powerless, disabled, supplicating, and you are fool enough to think me at your mercy! Yes or no, Acharat? And answer me without embarrassment or falsehood, for I can see and read your heart; for I can judge you, and shall punish you."

"Master," replied Balsamo, "take care; your anger will do you an injury."

"Answer me—answer!"

"I can only say the truth to my master; I will see if I can procure what you desire, without injuring ourselves. I will endeavour to find a man who will sell you what you want; but I will not take the crime upon myself. That is all I can say."

"You are very fastidious!" said Althotas, with a bitter smile.

"It is so, master," said Balsamo.

Althotas made so violent an effort that with the help of his two arms resting on the arms of the chair he raised himself to his feet.

"Yes, or no?" said he.

"Master, yes, if I find it; no, if I do not."

"Then you will expose me to death, wretch! you will economise three drops of the blood of an insignificant, worthless creature such as I require, and let a perfect creature such as I am fall into the eternal

giilf / Listen, Acharat! " said the old man, with a smile fearful to behold, "I no longer ask you for anything. I ask absolutely nothing. I shall wait, but if you do not obey, I must serve myself; if you desert me, I must help myself! You have heard me—have you not? Now go!"

Balsamo, without replying to this threat, prepared everything the old man might want. He placed the drinks and the food within his reach, and performed all the services a watchful servant would perform for his master, a devoted son for his father; then, absorbed by a thought very different from that which tormented Althotas, he lowered the trap to descend, without remarking that the old man followed him with a sardonic and ominous grin.

Althotas was still grinning like an evil genius when Balsamo stood before the still sleeping Lorenza.

CHAPTER XLI

THE STRUGGLE

BALSAMO stood before her, his heart swelling with mournful thoughts, for the violent ones had vanished.

The scene which had just taken place between himself and Althotas had led him to reflect on the nothingness of all human affairs, and had chased anger from his heart. He remembered the practice of the Greek philosopher who repeated the entire alphabet before listening to the voice of that black divinity, the counsellor of Achilles.

After a moment of mute and cold contemplation before the couch on which Lorenza was lying,—

"I am sad," said he to himself, "but resolved, and

I can look my situation fair in the face. Lorenza hates me ; Lorenza has threatened to betray me, and has betrayed me. My secret is no longer my own; I have given it into this woman's power, and she casts it to the winds. I am like the fox Who has withdrawn from the steel-trap only the bone of his leg, but who has left behind his flesh and his skin, so that the huntsman can say on the morrow, ' The fox has been taken here; I shall know him again, living or dead/

" And this dreadful misfortune which Althotas cannot comprehend, and which therefore I have not even mentioned to him—this misfortune which destroys all my hopes in this country—and consequently in this world, of which France is the soul, I owe to the creature sleeping before me—to this beautiful statue with her entrancing smile. To this tempting angel I owe dishonour and ruin, and shall owe to her captivity, exile, and death.

" Therefore," continued he, becoming more animated, " the sum of evil has exceeded that of good, and Lorenza is dangerous. Oh ! serpent, with thy graceful folds which nevertheless strangle, with thy golden throat which is nevertheless full of venom—sleep on, for when thou awakes I shall be obliged to kill thee ! "

And with a gloomy smile Balsamo slowly approached the young woman, whose languid eyes were turned towards him as Le approached, as the sunflower and volubilis open to the first rays of the rising sun.

" Oh ! " said Balsamo, " and yet I must for ever close those eyes which now beam so tenderly on me, those beautiful eyes which are filled with lightning when they no longer sparkle with love."

Lorenza smiled sweetly, and, smiling, she displayed the double row of her pearly teeth.

" Bat if I kill her who hates me," said Balsamo, wringing his hands, " I shall also kill her who loves me."

And his heart was filled with the deepest grief, strangely mingled with a vague desire.

" No, no," murmured he ; "I have sworn in vain ; I have threatened in vain ; no, I shall never have the courage to kill her. She shall live, but she shall live without being awakened. She shall live this factitious life, which is happiness for her, while the other is despair. Would that I could make her happy ! What matters to me the rest ?—she shall only have one existence, the one I create, the one during which she loves me, that which she lives at this moment."

And he returned Lorenza's tender look by a look as tender as her own, placing his hand as he did so gently on her head. Lorenza, who seemed to read Balsamo's thoughts as if they were an open book, gave a long sigh, rose gradually with the graceful languor of sleep, and placed her two white arms upon Balsamo's shoulders, who felt her perfumed breath upon his cheek.

" Oh ! no, no ! " exclaimed Balsamo, passing his **hand** over his burning forehead and his dazzled eyes ; " **no**, this intoxicating life will make me mad; and **with this** siren, glory, power, immortality, will all **vanish from** my thoughts. No, no ; she must awake, **I must do it**.

" **Oh !** " continued he, " if I awake her, the struggle **will begin** again. If I awake her, she will kill herself, **or she will** kill me, or force me to destroy her. Oh, **what an** abyss I

" Yes, this woman's destiny is written ; it stands **before** me in letters of fire—love ! death !—Lorenza, **Lorenza ! thou** art doomed to love and to die ! Lorenza, **Lorenza I I hold thy life and thy love in my hands I**"

Instead of a reply, the enchantress rose, advanced towards Balsamo, fell at his feet, and gazed into his eyes with a tender smile. Then she took one of his hands and placed it on her heart.

" Death ! " said she in a low voice which whispered from her lips, brilliant as coral when *it* issues from the caverns of the deep ; " death, but love."

" Oh ! " said Balsamo, " it is too much ; I have struggled as long as a human being could struggle. Demon or angel of futurity, whichever thou art! thou must be content. I have long enough sacrificed all the generous passions in my heart to egotism and pride. Oh ! no, no—I have no right thus to rebel against the only human feeling which still remains lurking in my heart. I love this woman, I love her, and this passionate love injures her more than the most terrible hatred could do. This love kills her! Oh, coward! oh, ferocious fool that I am ! I cannot even compromise with my desires. What! when I breathe my last sigh ; when I prepare to appear before God—I, the deceiver, the false prophet—when I throw off my mantle of hypocrisy and artifice before the Sovereign Judge—shall I have not one generous action to confess, not the recollection of a single happiness to console me in the midst of my eternal sufferings ?

" Oh ! no, no, Lorenza ; I know that in loving thee I lose the future ; I know that my revealing angel will wing its flight to heaven if I thus change your entire existence and overturn the natural laws of **your** being. But, Lorenza, you wish it, do you not ? "

" My beloved ! " she sighed.

" Then you accept the factitious instead of the real life ? "

" I ask for it on my knees—I pray for it—I implore it. This life is love and happiness."

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

" And will it suffice for you when you are my wife, for I love you passionately ? "

" Oh ! I know it, I can read your heart."

" You will never regret your wings, poor dove ; for know that you will never again roam through radiant space for me to seek the ray of light Jehovah once deigned to bestow upon his prophets. When I would know the future, when I would command men, alas ! alas ! thy voice will not reply. I have had in thee the beloved woman and the helping spirit, I shall only have one of the two now ; and yet——"

" Ah ! you doubt, you doubt," cried Lorenza ; " I see doubt like a dark stain upon your heart."

" You will always love me, Lorenza ? "

" Always ! always ! "

Balsamo passed his hand over his forehead.

" Well ! it shall be so," said he.

And raising Lorenza, he folded her in his arms and pressed a kiss upon her forehead—the seal of his promise to love and cherish her till death.

CHAPTER XLII

LOVE

FOR Balsamo another life had commenced, a life hitherto unknown in his active, troubled, multiplied existence. For three days there had been for him no more anger, no more apprehension, no more jealousy ; for three days he had not heard the subject of politics, conspirators, or conspiracies, as much as whispered. By Lorenza's side, and he had not left her for an instant, he had forgotten the whole world. This strange

inexplicable love, which, as it were, soared above humanity, this intoxicating and mysterious attachment, this love of a shadow, for he could not conceal from himself that with a word he could change his gentle bride into an implacable enemy—this love snatched from hatred, thanks to an inexplicable caprice of nature or of science, plunged Balsamo into happiness which bordered on madness.

More than once, during these three days, rousing himself from the opiate torpor of love, Balsamo looked at his ever smiling, ever ecstatic companion—for from thenceforth, in the existence he had created for her, she reposed from her factitious life in a sort of ecstasy equally factitious—and when he saw her calm, gentle, happy, when she called him by the most affectionate names, and dreamed aloud her mysterious love, he more than once asked himself if some ruthless demon had not inspired Lorenza with the idea of deceiving him with a falsehood in order to lull his vigilance, and when it was lulled, to escape and only appear again as the Avenging Eumenides.

In such moments Balsamo doubted of the truth of a science received by tradition from antiquity, but of which he had no evidence but examples. But soon the ever-springing fountain of her affection reassured him.

" If Lorenza was feigning." argued he with himself, " if she intended to my from me, she would seek opportunities for sending me away, she would invent excuses for occasional solitude ; but, far from that, her gentle voice ever whispers, ' Stay ! ' "

Then Balsamo's confidence in himself and in science returned. Why, indeed, should the magic secret to which alone he owed his power have become all at once, **and** without any transition, a chimera, **fit only**

to throw to the winds as a vanished Recollection, as the smoke of an extinguished fire? Never with relation to him had Lorenza been more lucid, more clear-sighted. All the thoughts which sprang up in his mind, all the feelings which made his heart bound, were instantly reproduced in hers. It remained to be seen if this lucidity were not sympathy; if, beyond himself and the young girl, beyond the circle which their love had traced, and which their love illuminated with its light—the eyes of her soul, so clear-sighted before this new era of continued sleep, could yet pierce the surrounding darkness.

Balsamo dared not make the decisive trial; he hoped still, and this hope was the resplendent crown of his happiness.

Sometimes Lorenza said to him, with gentle melancholy,—

"Acharat, you think of another than me, of a northern woman, with fair hair and blue eyes. Acharat! Acharat! this woman always moves beside me in your thoughts."

Balsamo looked tenderly at Lorenza.

"You see that in me?" said he.

"Oh, yes; as clearly as I read the surface of a mirror."

"Then you know it is not love which makes me think of that woman," replied Balsamo. "Read in my heart, dearest Lorenza!"

"No," replied she, bending her head; "no, I know it well. But yet your thoughts are divided between us two, as in the days when Lorenza Feliciani tormented you—the naughty Lorenza, who sleeps, and whom you will not again awake."

"No, my love, no," exclaimed Balsamo; "I think only of thee, at least with the heart. Have I not

forgotten all, neglected everything—study, politics, work—since our happiness ? "

" And you are wrong," said Lorenza, "for I could help you in your work."

" How ? "

" Yes ; did you not once spend whole hours in your laboratory ? "

" Certainly. But I renounce all these vain endeavours. They would be so many hours taken from my life—for during that time I should not see you."

" And why should I not follow you in your labours as in your love ? Why should I not make you powerful as I make you happy ? "

" Because my Lorenza, it is true, is beautiful, but she has not studied. God gives beauty and love, but study alone gives science."

" The soul knows everything."

" Then you can really see with the eyes of your soul?"

" Yes."

" And you can guide me in the grand search after the philosopher's stone ? "

" I think so."

" Come, then."

And Balsamo, encircling her waist with his arm, led her into his laboratory. The gigantic furnace, which no one had replenished for four days, was extinguished, and the crucibles had grown cold upon their chafing-dishes.

Lorenza looked around on all these strange instruments—the last combinations of expiring alchemy—without surprise. She seemed to know the purpose which each was intended to fulfil.

" You are attempting to make gold ? " said she smiling.

" Yes.":

" All these crucibles contain preparations in different stages of progress ? "

" All stopped—all lost; but I do not regret it. "

" You are right, for your gold would never be anything but coloured mercury; you can render it solid, perhaps, but you cannot transform it. "

" But gold can be made ? "

" No. "

" And yet Daniel of Transylvania sold the receipt for the transmutation of metals to Cosmo the First for twenty thousand ducats. "

" Daniel of Transylvania deceived Cosmo the First. "

" And yet the Saxon Payken, who was condemned to death by Charles the Second, ransomed his life by changing a leaden ingot into a golden one, from which forty ducats were coined, besides taking as much from the ingot as made a medal, which was struck in honour of the clever alchemist. "

" The clever alchemist was nothing but a clever juggler. He merely substituted the golden ingot for the leaden one; nothing more. Your surest way of making gold, Acharat, is to melt into ingots, as you do already, the riches which your slaves bring you from the four quarters of the world. "

Balsamo remained pensive.

" Then the transmutation of metals is impossible ? " said he.

" Impossible. "

" And the diamond—is it too impossible to create ? "

" Oh ! the diamond is another matter, " said Lorenza.

" The diamond can be made, then ? "

" Yes; for, to make the diamond, you have not to transmute one body into another; to make the diamond is merely to attempt the simple modification of a known element. "

" Then you know the element of which the diamond is formed ? "

" To be sure; the diamond is pure carbon crystallised."

Balsamo was almost stunned; a dazzling, unexpected, unheard of light flashed before his eyes; he covered them with both hands, as if the flame had blinded him.

" Oh, bountiful Creator! " said he, " you give me too much—some danger threatens me ! What precious ring must I throw into the sea to appease the jealousy of my fate ? Enough, Lorenza, for to-day ! "

" Am I not yours ? Order, command me ! "

" Yes, you are mine. Come, come ! "

And he drew her out of the laboratorj?, crossed the chamber of furs, and, without paying any attention to a light creaking noise he heard overhead, he once more entered the barred room with Lorenza.

" So you are pleased with your Lorenza, my beloved Balsamo ? "

" Oh ! " exclaimed he.

" What did you fear then ? Speak—tell me all."

Balsamo clasped his hands, and looked at Lorenza with an expression of such terror that a spectator, ignorant of what was passing in his heart, would have been totally at a loss to account for it.

" Oh ! " murmured he, " and I was near killing this angel—I was near expiring of despair before resolving the problem of being at once powerful and happy ! I forgot that the limits of the possible always exceed the horizon traced by the present state of science, and that the majority of truths which have become facts have always in their infancy been looked upon as dreams! I thought I knew everything, and I knew nothing I "

The young Italian smiled divinely.

"Lorenza, Lorenza!" continued Balsamo, "the mysterious design of the Creator is, then, accomplished which makes woman to be born of the substance of the man, and which commands them to have only one heart in common! Eve is revived for me—an Eve who will not have a thought that is not mine, and whose life hangs by the thread which I hold. It is too much, my God, for a creature to possess! I sink under the weight of Thy gift!"

And he fell upon his knees, gazing with adoration upon the gentle beauty, who smiled on him as no earthly creature can smile.

"Oh, no!" he continued; "no, you shall never leave me more! I shall live in all safety under your look, which can pierce into the future. You will assist me in those laborious researches which you alone, as you have said, can complete, and which one word from you will render easy and successful. You will point me out, since I cannot make gold, gold being a homogeneous substance, a primitive element—you will point me out in what corner of the world the Creator has concealed it; you will tell me where the rich treasures lie which have been swallowed up in the vast depths of the ocean. With your eyes I shall see the pearl grow in the veined shell, and man's thoughts spring up under their gross earthly covering. With your ears I shall hear the dull round of the worm beneath the ground, and the footsteps of mine enemy as he approaches!"

And Lorenza still smiled upon him, and as she smiled she replied to his words by affectionate caresses.

"And yet," whispered she, as if she could see each thought which whirled through his restless brain, "and yet you doubt still, Acharat, as you have said,

if I can cross the circle of our love—you doubt if I can see into the distance ; but you console yourself by thinking that if I cannot see, she can."

" She ! Who ? "

" The fair-haired beauty. Shall I tell you her name?"

" Yes."

" Stay—Andree ! "

ⁱⁱ Ah, yes ; you can read my thoughts ! Yet a last expiring fear still troubles me. Can you still see through space, though material obstacles intervene ? "

" Try me."

" Give me your hand, Lorenza."

The young girl passionately seized Balsamo's hand.

" Can you follow me ? "

" Anywhere ? "

" Come ! "

And Balsamo, leaving in thought the Rue Saint Claude, drew Lorenza's thoughts along with him.

" Where are we ? " asked he.

" We are upon a hill," replied the young Italian.

" Yes, you are right," said Balsamo, trembling with delight. " But what do you see ? "

" Before me, to the right, or to the left ? "

" Before you."

" I see a long valley, with a wood on one side, a town on the other, and a river which separates them and loses itself in the horizon, after flowing under the walls of a large chateau."

¹¹ That is right, Lorenza. The forest is that of Visnet; the town St. Germain ; the chateau is the Chateau de Maisons. Let us enter the pavilion behind us. What do you see there ? "

" Ah ! *in* the first place, in the antechamber, a little negro, fantastically dressed, and employed in eating sugar-plums."

" Yes, Zamore. Proceed, proceed ! "

" An empty saloon, splendidly furnished ; the spaces above the doors painted with goddesses and Cupids."

" The saloon is empty, you say ? "

" Yes."

" Let us go still farther."

" Ah ! we are in a splendid boudoir, lined with blue satin embroidered with flowers of natural colours."

" Is that empty also ? "

" No; a lady is reclining upon a sofa."

" What lady ? Do you not remember to have seen her before ? "

" Yes ; it is the Countess Dubarry."

" Right, Lorenza ! I shall go frantic with delight! What does the lady do ? "

" She is thinking of you, Balsamo."

" Of me ? 'I

" Yes."

" Then you can read her thoughts ? "

" Yes, for I repeat she is thinking of you ? "

" For what purpose ? "

*I You have made her a promise."

" Yes."

" You promised her that water of beauty which Venus, to revenge herself on Sappho, gave to Phaon."

" Yes, yes, you are right again ! And what does she do while thinking ? "

" She comes to a decision."

" What decision ? "

" She reaches out her hand towards the bell; she rings ; another young lady enters."

" Dark or light haired ? "

" Dark."

" Tall or short ? "

" Little."

" Her sister. Listen to what she says to her."/

" She orders the horses to be put to her carriage."

" Where does she wish to go ? "

" To come here."

" Are you sure ? "

" She is giving the order. Stay—she is obeyed. I see the horses and the carriage. In two hours she will be here."

Balsamo fell upon his knees.

" Oh ! " exclaimed he, " If in two hours she should really be here, I shall have nothing left to ask for on earth ! "

" My poor Balsamo ! then you still feared ? "

" Yes, yes ! "

" And why did you fear ? Love, which completes the material existence, increases also our mental powers. Love like every generous emotion brings us nearer to God and all wisdom comes from God."

" Lorenza, Lorenza, you will drive me mad with joy ! "

Balsamo now only waited for another proof to be completely happy. This proof was the arrival of Madame Dubarry.

The two hours of suspense were short. All measure of time had completely ceased for Balsamo.

Suddenly the young girl started and took Balsamo's hand.

" You are doub+ing yet," said she, " or you wish to know where she is at this moment."

" Yes," said Balsamo, " you are right."

" Well," replied Lorenza, " she is thundering along the Boulevards at the full speed of her horses ; she approaches ; she turns into the Rue Saint Claude ; she stops before the door and knocks."

The apartment in which they were was so retired

and so quiet that the noise of the iron knocker could not penetrate its recesses; but Balsamo, raised upon one knee, was anxiously listening.

At this moment two knocks struck by Fritz made him bound to his feet, for the reader will remember that two knocks were the signal of an important visit.

" Oh ! " said he, " then it is true ! "

" Go and convince yourself, Balsamo ; but return quickly."

Balsamo advanced towards the fireplace.

" Let me accompany you," said Lorenzo, " as far as the door of the staircase."

" Come ! "

And they both passed together into the chamber of furs.

" You will not leave this room ? "

" No ; I will await you here. Oh, do not fear ; you know the Lorenza who loves you is not the Lorenza whom you fear. Besides——"

She stopped and smiled.

" What ? " asked Balsamo.

" Can you not read in my soul as I read yours ? "

" Alas ! no."

" Besides, you can command me to sleep until you return. Command me to remain immovable upon this sofa, and I shall sleep and be motionless."

" Well, my Lorenza, it shall be so. Sleep, and await my return here ! "

Lorenza, already struggling with sleep, fell back upon the sofa, murmuring,—

" You will return soon, my Balsamo, will you not ? "

Balsamo waved his hand ; Lorenza was already asleep ; but so beautiful, so pure, with her long flowing hair, the feverish glow upon her cheeks, her half-closed and swimming eyes, so little like a mortal,

that Balsamo turned again, took her hand and kissed it, but dared not kiss her lips.

Two knocks were heard a second time. The lady was becoming impatient, or Fritz feared that his master had not heard him. Balsamo hastened to the door, but as he closed it behind him, he fancied he heard a second creaking noise like the former one. He opened the door again, looked round, and saw nothing but Lorenza sleeping, and her breast heaving beneath the magnetic sleep.

Balsamo closed the door and hastened towards the salon, without uneasiness, without fear, without foreboding—all heaven in his heart! But he was mistaken; it was not sleep alone which oppressed Lorenza's bosom and made her breathe so heavily. It was a kind of dream which seemed to belong to the lethargy in which she was plunged—a lethargy which so nearly resembled death.

Lorenza dreamed, and in the hideous mirror of her gloomy dreams she fancied she saw, through the darkness which commenced to close around her, the oaken ceiling open, and something like a large circular platform descend slowly with a regular, slow, measured movement, accompanied by a disagreeable hissing noise. It seemed to her as if she breathed with difficulty, as if she were almost suffocated by the pressure of this moving circle.

It seemed to her as if upon this moving trap something moved—some mis-shapen being like Caliban in *The Tempest*—a monster with a human face—an old man whose eyes and arms alone were living, and who looked at her with his frightful eyes, and stretched his fleshless arms towards her.

And she—she, poor child!—she writhed in vain, without power to escape, without dreaming of the

danger which threatened her. She felt nothing but the grasp of two living flesh-hooks seizing upon her white dress, lifting her from her sofa and placing her upon the trap, which reascended slowly towards the ceiling, with the grating noise of iron scraping against iron, and amidst a hideous mocking laugh from the monster with the human face who was raising her aloft without shock and without pain.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE PHILTRE

As Lorenza had foretold, it was Madame Dubarry who had just knocked at the gate.

The beautiful countess had been ushered into the salon. Whilst awaiting Balsamo's arrival, she was looking over that curious Book of Death engraved at Mayence, the plates of which, designed with marvellous skill, show death presiding over all the acts of man's life, waiting for him at the door of the ball-room after he has pressed the hand of the woman he loves, dragging him to the bottom of the water in which he is bathing, or hiding in the barrel of the gun he carries to the chase. Madame Dubarry was at the **plate** which represents a beautiful woman daubing her face with rouge and looking at herself in the glass, **when** Balsamo opened the door and bowed to her, with **the** smile of happiness still beaming upon his face.

"Excuse me, madame, for having made you wait; **but** I had not well calculated the distance, **or** was **ignorant of** the **speed** of your horses. I thought you still at the Place Louis XV.

" What do you mean ? " asked the countess. •" You knew I was coming, then ? "

" Yes, madame ; it is about two hours ago since I saw you in your boudoir lined with blue satin, giving orders for your horses to be put to the carriage."

" And you say I was in my blue satin boudoir ? "

" Embroidered with flowers coloured after nature. Yes, countess, you were reclining upon a sofa; a pleasing thought passed through your mind ; you said to yourself, ' I will go and visit the Count de Fenix,' then you rang the bell."

" And who entered ? "

" Your sister, countess—am I right ? You requested her to transmit your orders, which were instantly executed."

" Truly, count, you *are* a sorcerer. You really alarm me."

" Oh ! have no fear, countess ; my sorcery is very harmless."

" And you saw that I was thinking of you ? "

" Yes ; and even that you thought of me with benevolent intentions. "

" Ah ! you are right, my dear count; I have the best possible intentions towards you, but confess that you deserve more than intentions—you, who are so kind, and so useful, and who seem destined to play in my life the part of tutor, which is the most difficult part I know."

" In truth, madame, you make me very happy. Then I have been of use to you ? "

" What! you are a sorcerer, and cannot guess ? "

" Allow me, at least, the merit of being modest."

" As you please, my dear count; then I will first speak of what I have done for you."

" I cannot permit it, madame ; on the contrary, speak of yourself, I beseech you."

" Well, my dear count, in the first place, give me that talisman which renders one invisible ; for on my journey here, rapid as it was, I fancied I recognised one of M. de Richelieu's grays."

" And this gray ? "

" Followed my carriage, carrying on his back a courier."

" What do you think of this circumstance, and for what purpose could the duke have caused you to be followed ? "

" With the intention of playing me some scurvy trick. Modest as you are, my dear Count de Fenix, you must be aware that Nature has gifted you with personal advantages enough to make a king jealous of my visits to you, or of yours to me."

" M. de Richelieu cannot be dangerous to you in any way, madame," replied Balsamo.

" But he was so, my dear count ; he was dangerous before this last event."

Balsamo comprehended that there was a secret concealed beneath these words which Lorenza had not yet revealed to him. He did not therefore venture on the unknown ground, and replied merely by a smile.

" He was indeed," repeated the countess ; " and I was nearly falling a victim to a most skilfully constructed plot—a plot in which you also had some share, count."

" I! engaged in a plot against you ? ' Never, madame! "

" Was it not you who gave the Duke de Richelieu the philtre ? "

" What philtre ? "

" A draught which causes the most ardent love."

" No, madame ; M. de Richelieu composes those draughts himself, for he has long known the receipt; I merely gave him a simple narcotic."

" Ah ! indeed ? "

" Upon my honour ! "

" And on what day did M. de Richelieu ask for this narcotic ? Remember the date, count; it is of importance."

" Madame, it was last Saturday—the day previous to that on which I had the honour of sending you, through Fritz, the note requesting you to meet me at M. de Sartines."

" The eve of that day ! " exclaimed the countess. " The eve of the day on which the king was seen going to the Little Trianon ? Oh ! now everything is explained."

" Then, if all is explained, you see I only gave the narcotic."

" Yes, the narcotic saved us all."

This time Balsamo waited; he was profoundly ignorant of the subject.

" I am delighted, madame," replied he, " to have been useful to you, even unintentionally."

" Oh ! you are always kindness itself. But you can do more for me than you have ever yet done. Oh, doctor ! I have been very ill, practically speaking, and even now I can yet scarcely believe in my recovery."

" Madame," said Balsamo, " the doctor, since there is a doctor in the case, always requires the details of the illness he is to cure. Will you give me the exact particulars of what you have experienced ?—and if possible, do not forget a single symptom."

" Nothing can be more simple, my dear doctor, or dear sorcerer—whichever you prefer. The eve of

the day on which this narcotic was used, his majesty refused to accompany me to Luciennes. He remained, like a deceiver as he is, at Trianon, pretending fatigue, and yet, as I have since learned, he supped at Trianon with the Duke de Richelieu and the Baron do Tavernev"

"Haf"

" Now you understand. At supper the love-draught was given to the king."

" Well, what happened ? "

" Oh ! that is difficult to discover. The king was seen going in the direction of the offices of Trianon ; and all I can tell you is, that his majesty returned *to* Trianon through a fearful storm, pale, trembling, and feverish—almost on the verge of delirium."

" And you think," said Balsamo, smiling, " that it was not the storm alone which alarmed his majesty?"

" No, for the valet heard him cry several times, ' Dead, dead, dead ! ' "

" Oh ! " said Balsamo.

" It was the narcotic," continued Madame Dubarry. " Nothing alarms the king so much as death, and next to death its semblance. He had found Mademoiselle de Tavernev sleeping a strange sleep and must have thought her dead."

" Yes, yes; dead indeed," said Balsamo, who remembered having fled without awakening Andree; " dead, or at least presenting all the appearance of death. Yes, yes—it must be so. Well, madame, and what then ? "

" No one knows what happened during the night. The king on his return was attacked by a violent fever and a nervous trembling, which did not leave him until the morning, when it occurred to the dauphiness to open the shutters and show his majesty a

lovely morning, with the sun shining upon merry, faces. Then all these unknown visions disappeared With **the** night which had produced them. At noon the king was better, took some broth, and ate a partridge's wing ; and in the evening——"

" And in the evening——? " repeated Balsamo.

" In the evening." continued Madame Dubarry. " his majesty, who no doubt would not stay at Trianon after his fright, came to see me at Luciennes."

The triumphant countenance and graceful but roguish look of the countess reassured Balsamo as to the power the favourite yet exercised over the king.

" Then you are satisfied with me, madame ? " inquired he.

" Delighted, count! and when you spoke of impossibilities you could create, you told the exact truth."

And in token of thanks she gave him her soft, white, perfumed hand, which was not fresh as Lorenza's, but almost as beautiful.

" And now, count, let us speak of yourself."

Balsamo bowed like a man ready to listen.

" If you have preserved me from a great danger." continued Madame Dubarry, " I think I have also saved you from no inconsiderable peril."

" Me ! " said Balsamo, concealing his emotion. " I do not require that to feel grateful to you ; but yet, be good enough to inform me what——"

" Yes. The coffer in question——"

" Well, madame ? "

" Contained a multitude of secret ciphers, which M. de Sartines caused all his clerks to translate. **All** signed their several translations, executed apart, and all gave the same result. In consequence of **this**,

M. de Sartines arrived at Versailles this morning while I was there, bringing with him all these translations and the dictionary of diplomatic ciphers."

" Ha !—and what did the king say ? "

" The king seemed surprised at first, then alarmed. His majesty easily listens to those who speak to him of danger. Since the stab of Damien's penknife, there is one word which is ever eagerly hearkened to by Louis XV. ; it is—*Take care!* "

" Then M. de Sartines accused me of plotting ? "

" At first M. de Sartines endeavoured to make me leave the room ; but I refused, declaring that as no one was more attached to his majesty than myself, no one had a right to make me leave him when danger was in question. M. de Sartines insisted, but I resisted, and the king, looking at me in a manner I know well, said :—

" ' Let her remain, Sartines : I can refuse her nothing to-day. '

" Then you understand, count, that as I was present, M. de Sartines, remembering our adieu, so clearly expressed, feared to displease me by attacking you. He therefore spoke of the evil designs of the King of Prussia towards France ; of the disposition prevalent to facilitate the march of rebellion by supernatural means. In a word, he accused a great many people, proving always by the papers he held that these persons were guilty."

" Guilty of what ? "

" Of what! Count, dare I disclose secrets of state ! "

" Which are our secrets, madame. Oh ! you risk nothing. I think it is my interest not to speak."

" Yes, count, I know that M. de Sartines wished to prove that a numerous and powerful sect, composed of

bold, skilful, resolute agents, were silently undermining the respect due to the king, by spreading certain reports concerning his majesty."

"What rumours?"

"Saying, for instance, that his majesty was accused of starving his people."

"To which the king replied——?"

"As the king always replies, by a joke."

Balsamo breathed again.

"And what was the joke?" he asked.

"'Since I am accused of starving the people,' said he, 'there is only one reply to make to the accusation—let us feed them.'"

"'How so, sire?' said M. de Sartines.

"'I will take the charge of feeding all those who spread this report, and, moreover, will give them safe lodging in my chateau of the Bastille/'"

A slight shudder passed through Balsamo's limbs, but he retained his smiling countenance.

"What followed?" asked he.

"Then the king seemed to consult me by a smile. 'Sire,' said I, 'I can never believe that those little black characters which M. de Sartines has brought to you mean that you are a bad king.'"

"Then *the* lieutenant of police exclaimed loudly.

"'Any more,' I added, 'than they prove that our clerks can read.'"

"And what did the king say, countess?" asked Balsamo.

"That I might be right, but that M. de Sartines was not wrong."

"Well, and then?"

"Then a great many *lettres-de-cachet* were made out, and I saw that M. de Sartines tried to slip amongst

them one for you ; but I stood firm, and arrested him by a single word.

" ' Sir/ I said aloud, and before the king, ' arrest all Paris, if you like—that *is* your business; but you had better reflect a little before you lay a finger on one of my friends—if not——'

" * Oh, ho! ' said the king, ' she is getting angry; take care, Sartines.'

" ' But, sire, the interest of the kingdom——'

" ' Oh ! you are not a Sully,' said I, crimson with rage,' and I am not a Gabrielle.'

" ' Madame, they intend to assassinate the king, as Henri IV. was assassinated.'

" For the first time, the king turned pale, trembled, and put his hand to his head.

" I feared I was vanquished.

" ' Sire,' said I, ' you must let M. de Sartines have his own way; for his clerks have, no doubt, read in these ciphers that I also am conspiring against you.'

" And I left the room.

" But *dame!* my dear count, the king preferred my company to that of M. de Sartines, and ran after me.

" ' Ah ! for pity's sake, my dear countess,' said he, ' pray do not get angry.'

" ' Then send away that horrid man, sire ; he smells of dungeons.'

" ' Go, Sartines—be off with yo ! ! ' said the king, shrugging his shoulders.

" ' And for the future, I forbid you not only to visit me but even to bow to me,' added I.

" At this blow our magistrate became alarmed; he approached me, and humbly kissed my hand.

" ' Well,' said he, ' so be it ; let us speak no more of it, fair lady. But you will ruin the state. Since you

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

absolutely insist upon it, your protege shajl be respected by my agents/ "

Balsamo seemed plunged in a deep reverie.

" Well," said the countess, " so you do not even thank me for having saved you from the pleasure of lodging in the Bastille, which perhaps might have been unjust, but assuredly no less disagreeable on that account ? "

Balsamo made no reply. He drew a small phial, filled with a fluid red as blood, from his pocket.

" Hold, madame ! " said he, " for the liberty you have procured for me I *give* you twenty years' additional youth ! "

The countess slipped the phial into her bosom, and took her leave joyous and triumphant.

Balsamo still remained thinking.

" They might perhaps have been saved," said he, " but for the coquetry of a woman. This courtesan's little foot dashes them down into the depths of the abyss. Decidedly, God is with us ! "

CHAPTER XLIV

BLOOD

THE door had no sooner closed upon Madame Dubarry than Balsamo ascended the secret staircase and entered the chamber of furs. This conversation with the countess had been long, and his impatience had two causes.

The first was the desire to see Lorenza ; the second, the fear that she might be fatigued, for in the new life he had given her there was no room for weariness of

mind. She might be fatigued, inasmuch, as she might pass, as she sometimes did, from the magnetic sleep *to* ecstasy ; and to this ecstatic state always succeeded those nervous crises which prostrated Lorenza's strength if the intervention of the restoring fluid did not restore the necessary equilibrium between the various functions of her being.

Balsamo, therefore, having entered and closed the door, immediately glanced at the couch where he had left Lorenza.

She was no longer there !

Only the fine shawl of cashmere embroidered with golden flowers, which had enveloped her like a scarf, was still lying upon the cushions, as an evidence that she had been in the room and had been reclining on them.

Balsamo stood motionless, gazing at the empty sofa. Perhaps Lorenza had felt herself incommoded by a strange odour which seemed to have filled the room since he left it ; perhaps by a mechanical movement she had usurped some of the functions of actual life, and instinctively changed her place.

Balsamo's first idea was that Lorenza had returned to the laboratory, whither she had accompanied him a short time previously.

He entered the laboratory. At the first glance it seemed empty ; but in the shadow of the gigantic furnace or behind the Oriental tapestry, a woman could easily conceal herself.

He raised the tapestry, therefore—he made the circuit of the furnace ; nowhere could he discover even a trace of Lorenza.

There remained- only the young girl's chamber to which she had, no doubt, returned ; for this chamber was a prison to her only in her waking state.

He hastened to the chamber, and found the secret door closed. This was no proof that Lorenza had not entered. Nothing was more probable, in fact, than that Lorenza, in her lucid sleep, had remembered the mechanism, and, remembering it, had obeyed the hallucination of a dream barely effaced from her mind. Balsamo pressed the spring.

The chamber was empty, like the laboratory; it did not appear as if Lorenza had even entered it.

Then a heart-rending thought—a thought which, it will be remembered, had already stung his heart—chased away all the suppositions, all the hopes of the happy lover.

Lorenza had been playing a part; she must have feigned to sleep in order to banish all distrust, all uneasiness, all watchfulness from her husband's mind, and at the first opportunity had fled again, this time with surer precautions, warned as she had been by a first, or rather by two former experiences.

At this idea Balsamo started up and rang for Fritz.

Then, as Fritz, to his impatient mind, seemed to delay, he hastened to meet him, and found him on the secret staircase.

"The signora?" said he.

"Well, master?" said Fritz, seeing by Balsamo's agitation that something extraordinary had taken place.

"Have you seen her?"

"No, master."

"She has not gone?"

"From where?"

"From this house, to be sure!"

"No one has left the house but the countess, behind whom I have just closed the gate."

Balsamo rushed up the stairs again, like a madman. Then he fancied that the giddy young creature, so

different in her sleep from what she was when waking, had concealed herself in a moment of childish playfulness ; that from the corner where she was hid she was now reading his heart, and amusing herself by terrifying him, in order to reassure him afterwards. Then he recommenced a minute search.

Not a nook was omitted, not a cupboard forgotten, not a screen left in its proper place. There was something in this search of Balsamo's like the frantic efforts of a man blinded by passion, alternating with the feeble and tottering gait of a drunkard. He could then only stretch out his arms and cry, " Lorenza, Lorenza! " hoping that the adored creature would rush forth suddenly, and throw herself into his arms with an exclamation of joy.

But silence alone, a gloomy and uninterrupted silence, replied to his extravagant thoughts and mad appeals.

In running wildly about, dashing aside the furniture, shouting to the naked walls, calling Lorenza, staring without seeing any object or forming a single coherent thought, Balsamo passed three minutes—that is to say, three centuries—of agony.

He recovered by degrees from this half insane hallucination, dipped his hand in a vase of iced water, moistened his temples, and pressing one hand in the other, as if to force himself to be cool, he chased back by his iron will the blood which was beating wildly against his brain, with that fatal, incessant, monotonous movement which indicates life when there is merely motion and silence, but which is a sign of death or madness when it becomes tumultuous and perceptible.

" Come ! " said he, " let me reason. Lorenza is not here—no more false pretences with myself. Lorenza is **not** here ; she must be gone—yes, gone, quite gone ! "

And he looked around once more, and once more shouted her name.

"Gone I" continued he. "In vain Fritz asserts that he has not seen her. She is gone—gone !

"Two cases present themselves.

"Either he has not seen Lorenza—and, after all, that is possible, for man is liable to error—or he has seen her, and has been bribed by her.

"Fritz bribed !

"Why not ? In vain does his past fidelity plead against this supposition. If Lorenza, if love, if science, could so deeply deceive and lie, why should the frail nature of a fallible human being not deceive also ?

"Oh, I will know all—I will know all ! Is there not Mademoiselle de Taverney left ? Yes, through Andree I shall know if Fritz has betrayed me, if Lorenza is false ! And this time—oh ! this time, as love has proved false, as science has proved an error, as fidelity has become a snare—oh ! this time Balsamo will punish without pity, without sparing, like a strong man who revenges himself, who chases pity from his heart, and keeps only pride.

"Let me see ; the first step is to leave this as quickly as possible, not to let Fritz suspect anything, and to fly to Trianon."

And Balsamo, seizing his hat, which had rolled on the ground, rushed towards the door.

But all at once he stopped.

"Oh !" said he, "before anything else—my God ! poor old man, I had forgotten him—I must see Althotas. During my delirium, during this spasm of forced and unnatural love, I have neglected the unfortunate old man, I have been ungrateful and inhuman !"

And, with the feverishness which now animated all his movements, Balsamo approached the spring

which put in motion the trap in the ceiling, and the movable scaffold quickly descended.

Balsamo placed himself upon it, and, aided by the counterpoise, mounted again, still overwhelmed by the anguish of his mind and heart, and without thinking of anything but Lorenza. Scarcely had he attained the level of the floor, when the voice of Althotas struck upon his ear, and roused him from his gloomy reverie.

But, to Balsamo's great astonishment, the old man's first words were not reproaches, as he had expected; he was received with an outburst of simple and natural gaiety.

The pupil looked with an astonished gaze upon his master.

The old man was reclining upon his spring-chair. He breathed noisily and with delight, as if at each inspiration he added a day to his life; his eyes, full of a gloomy fire, but the expression of which was enlivened by the smile upon his lips, were fixed eagerly upon his visitor.

Balsamo summoned up all his strength and collected his ideas, in order to conceal his grief from his master, who had so little indulgence for human weaknesses.

During this moment of reflection, Balsamo felt a strange oppression weigh upon his breast. No doubt the air was vitiated by being too constantly breathed, for a heavy, dull, close, nauseous odour, like the one he had already felt below, but thee in a slighter degree, floated in the air, and, like the vapours which rise from lakes and marshes in autumn at sunrise and sunset, had taken a shape and rested on the windows.

In this dense and acrid atmosphere Balsamo's heart throbbed, his head felt confused, a vertigo seized upon him, and he felt that respiration and strength were fast failing him.

" Master," said he, seeking some object on which to support himself, and endeavouring to dilate his lungs ; " master, you cannot live here; there is no air."

" You think so ? "

" Oh ! "

" Nevertheless, I breathe very well in it," replied Althotas gaily. " and I live, as you see ! "

" Master, master " replied Balsamo, growing more and more giddy, " let me open a window ! See ! it rises from the floor like an exhalation of blood ! "

" Of blood ! Ah ! you think so ? Of blood ? " cried Althotas, bursting into a laugh.

" Oh, yes, yes ; I feel the miasma which is exhaled from a newly-killed body. I could weigh it, so heavily does it press upon my brain and heart."

" That is it," said Althotas, with his sardonic laugh ; " that is it; I also perceived it. You have a tender heart and a weak brain, Acharat."

" Master," said Balsamo, pointing with his ringer at the old man, " master, you have blood upon your hands ; master, there is blood upon this table ; there is blood everywhere, even in your eyes, which shine like two torches ; master, the smell which I breathe, and which makes me giddy, which is suffocating me, is the smell of blood !"

" Well, what then ? " said Althotas quickly ; " is this the first time in your life that you have smelt it ? "

" No."

" Have you never seen me make experiments ? Have you never made any yourself ! "

" But human blood ! " said Balsamo, pressing his hand upon his burning forehead.

" Ah ! you have a subtle sense of smell," said Althotas. " Well, I did not think human blood could be distinguished from that of any other animal."

"^c human blood!" muttered Balsamo.

And as he reeled backwards and felt for some projecting point to support him, he perceived with horror a vast copper basin, the shining sides of which reflected the purple colour of the freshly-spilled blood.

The enormous vase was half-filled.

Balsamo started back, terrified.

"Oh, this blood!" exclaimed he: "from whence comes this blood?"

Althotas made no reply, but his watchful glance lost none of the feverish fluctuations and wild terror of Balsamo. Suddenly the latter uttered a fearful groan.

Then, stooping like some wild beast darting upon its prey, he rushed to a corner of the room and picked up from the floor a silken ribbon embroidered with silver to which was hanging a long tress of black hair.

After this wild, mournful, terrible cry, a deathlike silence reigned for a moment in the old man's apartment. Balsamo slowly raised the ribbon, shuddered as he examined the tresses which a golden pin fastened to the silk at one end, while, cut off sharply at the other they seemed like a fringe the extremity of which had been dipped in a wave of blood, the red and sparkling drops of which were still apparent on the margin.

In proportion as Balsamo raised his hand, it trembled still more.

As he looked more intently at the ribbon, his cheeks grew a deeper livid.

"From whence does this come?" murmured he in a hollow voice, loud enough, however, for another to hear and to reply to his question.

"That?" asked Althotas.

"Yes, that."

"Well! it is a silken ribbon tying some hair."

" But the hair—in what is it steeped ? "

" You can see—in blood ! "

" In what blood ? "

" *Par bleu!* in the blood I wanted for my elixir—in the blood which you refused me, and which, therefore, I was forced to procure for myself."

" But this hair, these tresses, this ribbon—from whom did you take them ? This is not a child's hair."

" And who told you it was a child I had killed ? " asked Althotas quietly.

" Did you not want the blood of a child for your elixir ? " said Balsamo. " Did you not tell me so ? "

" Or of an unmarried female, Acharat—or of an unmarried female."

And Althotas stretched his long bony hand from the chair, and took a phial, the contents of which he tasted with delight.

Then, in his most natural tone and with his most affectionate smile,—

" I have to thank you, Acharat," said he : " you were wise and far-sighted in placing that woman beneath my trap, almost within reach of my hand. Humanity has no cause for complaint. The law has nothing to lay hold upon. He ! he !—it was not you who gave me the young creature without whom I should have perished. No ! I took her. He ! he !—thanks, my dear pupil ! Thanks, my dear Acharat ! "

And he once more put the phial to his lips.

Balsamo let fall the tress of hair which he held ; a dreadful light flashed across his mind.

Opposite to him was the old man's table—a large marble slab always heaped with plants, books, and phials. This table was covered with a long cloth of white damask with dark flowers, on which the lamp of Althotas shed a reddish light, and which displayed

an ominous outline which Balsamo had not before remarked.

He seized a corner of the cloth and hastily pulled it away.

But instantly his hair stood on end—his gaping mouth could not utter the horrible cry which almost suffocated him.

Under this shroud he had perceived Lorenza's corpse stretched upon this table, her face livid and yet smiling, and her head hanging backwards as if dragged down by the weight of her long hair.

A large wound gaped underneath the collar-bone, from which not a single drop of blood escaped. Her hands were rigid, and her eyes closed beneath their purple eyelids.

" Yes, blood !—the last three drops of an unmarried woman's blood ; that is what I wanted." said the old man, putting the phial to his lips for the third time.

" Wretch ! " thundered Balsamo, whose cry of despair at last burst from each pore, " die, then ! for she was my WIFE—my wedded wife ! You have murdered her in vain ! Die in your sin ! "

The eyes of Althotas quivered at these words as if an electric shock had made them dance in their orbits ; his pupils were fearfully dilated, his toothless gums chattered, the phial fell from his hand upon the floor and broke into a thousand pieces, whilst he—stupefied, annihilated, struck at once in heart and brain—fell back heavily upon his chair.

Balsamo bent with a sob over Lorenza's body, and pressing his lips to her blood-stained hair, sank senseless on the ground.

CHAPTER XLV

DESPAIR

THE Hours, those mysterious sisters, wflb cleave the air hand-in-hand with a flight so slow for the wretched, so-rapid for the happy, paused in their onward motion, folding their heavy wings over this chamber loaded with sighs and groans.

Death on one side, agony on the other, and between them despair—grievous as agony, deep as death.

Balsamo had not uttered a word since the terrible cry which had been wrung from his breast.

vSince the temble revelation which had cast down the ferocious joy of Althotas, Balsamo had not moved.

As for the hideous old man, thus violently thrown back into life such as God grants to man, he seemed as much bewildered in this new element as the bird struck by a leaden bullet and fallen from the skies into a lake, on whose surface it flutters, unable to employ its wings.

The horror expressed in his pale and agonised features revealed the immeasurable extent of his disappointment.

In fact, Althotas no longer even took the trouble to think, since he had seen the goal at which his spirit aimed, and which it thought firm as a rock, vanish like empty vapour.

His deep and silent despair seemed almost like insensibility. To a mind unaccustomed to measure his it might have seemed an indication of reflection, to Balsamo's, who, however, did not even look upon him, it marked the death-agony of power, of reason, and of life.

Althotas never took his eyes from the broken phial, Uie image of the nothingness of his hopes. One would have said he counted the thousand scattered fragments, which, in falling, had diminished his life by so many days. One would have said he wished to drink in with his look the precious fluid which was spilled upon the floor, and, which for a moment, he had believed to be immortality.

At times, also, as if the grief of this disenchantment was too poignant, the old man raised his dull eyes to Balsamo, then from Balsamo his glance wandered to Lorenza's corpse.

He resembled, at these moments, one oi those savage animals which the huntsman finds in the morning caught in the trap by the leg, and which he stirs for a long time with his foot without making them turn their heads, but who, when he pricks them with his hunting-knife, or with the bayonet of his fowling-piece, obliquely raise their bloodshot eyes, throwing on him a look of hatred, vengeance, reproach, and surprise.

"Is it possible." said this look, so expressive even in its agony, " is it credible that so many misfortunes, so many shocks, should overwhelm me, caused by such an insignificant being as the man I see kneeling there a few yards from me, at the feet of such a vulgar object as that dead woman ? Is it not a reversion of nature, an overturning of science, a cataclysm of reason, that the gross student should have deceived the skilful master ? Is it not monstrous that the grain of sand should have arrested the wheel of the superb chariot, So rapid in its almost unlimited power, in its immortal flight ? "

As for Balsamo—stunned, heart-broken, without voice or motion, almost without life—no human

thought had yet dawned amid the dark vapours of his brain.

Lorenza ! his Lorenza ! His wife, his idol, doubly precious to him as his revealing angel and his love—Lorenza, his delight and his glory, the present and the future, his strength and faith—Lorenza, all he loved, all he wished for, all he desired in this world—Lorenza was lost to him for ever !

He did not weep, he did not groan, he did not even sigh.

He was scarcely surprised at the dreadful misfortune which had befallen him. He was like one of those poor wretches whom an inundation surprises in their bed, in the midst of darkness. They dream that the water gains upon them, they awake, they open their eyes and see a roaring billow breaking over their head, while they have not even time to utter a cry in their passage from life to death.

During three hours Balsamo felt himself buried in the deepest abyss of the tomb. In his overwhelming grief he looked upon what had happened to him as one of the dark dreams which tonnent the dead in the eternal silent night of the sepulchre.

For him there no longer existed Althotas, and with him all hatred and revenge had vanished. For him there no longer existed Lorenza, and with her all life, all love had fled. All was sleep, night, nothingness ! Thus the hours glided past, gloomily, silently, heavily, in this chamber where the blood congealed and the lifeless form grew rigid.

Suddenly amidst the deathlike silence a bell sounded thrice.

Fritz, doubtless, was aware that his master was with Althotas, for the bell sounded in the room itself.

But although it sounded three times with an

insolently strange noise, the sound died away in space

Balsamo did not raise his head.

In a few moments, the same tinkling, only louder this time, sounded again ; but like the first it could not rouse Balsamo from his torpor.

Then, at a measured interval, but not so far from the second as *it* had been from the first, the angry bell a third time made the room resound with multiplied echoes of its wailing and impatient sounds.

Balsamo did not start, but slowly raised his head and interrogated the empty space before him with the cold solemnity of a corpse rising from the tomb.

The bell never ceased ringing.

At last his increasing energy awoke him to partial consciousness. The unfortunate husband took his hand from the hand of the corpse. All the heat had left his body without passing into his lifeless bride's.

" Some important news or some great danger," muttered Balsamo to himself. " May it prove a great danger! "

And he rose to his feet.

" But why should I reply to this summons ? " continued he, aloud, without heeding the gloomy sound of his words echoing beneath the sombre vault of this funereal chamber; " can anything in this world henceforth interest or alarm me? "

Then, as if in reply the bell struck its iron tongue so rudely against its brazen siaes, that the clapper broke and fell upon a glass retort, which flew in pieces with a metallic sound, and scattered the fragments upon the floor.

Balsamo resisted no longer ; besides, it was important that none, not even Fritz, should come to seek him where he was.

He walked therefore with steady step to the spring, pressed it, and placed himself upon the trap, which descended slowly and deposited him in the chamber of furs.

As he passed the sofa, he brushed against the scarf which had fallen from Lorenza's shoulders when the pitiless old man, impassible as death itself, had carried her off in his arms.

This contact, more living seemingly than Lorenza herself, sent an icy shudder through Balsamo's veins. He took the scarf and kissed it, using it to stifle the cries which burst from his heaving breast.

Then he proceeded to open the door of the staircase.

On the topmost steps stood Fritz, all pale and breathless, holding a torch in one hand, and in the other the cord of the bell, which in his terror and impatience, he continued to pull convulsively. On seeing his master, he uttered a cry of satisfaction, followed by one of surprise and fear. But Balsamo, ignorant of the cause of this double cry, replied only by a mute interrogation.

Fritz did not speak, but he ventured—he, usually so respectful—to take his master's hand, and led him to the large Venetian mirror that ornamented the mantelpiece at the back of which was the passage into Lorenza's apartment.

"Oh! look, your excellency," said he, showing him his own image in the glass.

Balsamo shuddered. Then a smile—one of those deadly smiles which spring from infinite and incurable grief—flitted over his lips. He had understood the cause of Fritz's alarm.

Balsamo had grown twenty years older in an hour. There was no more brightness in his eyes, no more colour in his cheek: an expression of dullness and

Stupefaction overspread his features ; a bloody foam fringed his lips ; a large spot of blood stained the whiteness of his cambric shirt.

Balsamo looked at himself in the glass for a moment without being able to recognise himself, then he determinedly fixed his eyes upon the strange person reflected in the mirror.

" Yes, Fritz," said he, " you are right."

Then, remarking the anxious look of his faithful servant,—

" But why did you call me?" inquired he.

" Oh ! master, for *them*."

" For them ? "

" Yes."

" Whom do you mean by *them* ? "

" Excellency," whispered Fritz, putting his mouth close to his master's ear, " the FIVE MASTERS I "

Balsamo shuddered.

" All ? " asked he.

" Yes, all."

" And they are here ? "

" Here."

" Alone ? "

" No ; each has an armed servant waiting in the court-yard."

" They came together ? "

" Yes, master, together, and they were getting impatient ; that is why I rang so many times and so violently."

Balsamo, without even concealing the spot of blood beneath the folds of his frill, without attempting to repair the disorder of his dress, began to descend the stairs, after having asked Fritz if his guests had installed themselves in the salon or in the large study.

" In the salon, excellency." replied Fritz, following his master.

Then at the foot of the stairs, venturing to stop Balsamo, he asked,—

" Has your excellency no orders to give me ? "

" None, Fritz."

" Excellency——" stammered Fritz.

" Well ? " asked Balsamo, with infinite gentleness.

" Will your excellency go unarmed ? "

" Unarmed ? yes ! "

" Even without your sword ? "

" And why should I take my sword, Fritz ? "

" I do not know," said the faithful servant, casting down his eyes, " but I thought—I believed—I feared——"

" It is well, Fritz—you may go."

Fritz moved away a few steps in obedience to the order he had received, but returned.

" Did you not hear ? " asked Balsamo.

" Excellency, I merely wished to tell you that your double-barrelled pistols are in the ebony case upon the gilt stand."

" Go, I tell you ! " replied Balsamo.

And he entered the salon.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE JUDGMENT

FRITZ was quite right; Balsamo's guests had not entered the Rue Saint Claude with a pacific display nor with a benevolent exterior.

Five horsemen escorted the travelling **carriage** in

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

which the masters had come ; five men with a haughty and sombre mien, armed to the teeth, had closed the outer gate and were guarding it whilst appearing to await their masters' return.

A coachman and two footmen on the carriage seat concealed under their overcoats each a small hanger and a musket. It had much more the air of a warlike expedition than a peaceful visit, these people's appearance in the Rue Saint Claude.

It was for this reason that the nocturnal invasion of these terrible men, the forcible taking possession of the hotel, had inspired the German with an unspeakable terror. He had at first attempted to refuse entrance to the whole party, when he had seen the escort through the wicket, and had suspected them to be armed ; but the all-powerful signals they had used—that irresistible testimony of the right of the newcomers—had left him no option. Scarcely were they masters of the place, than the strangers, like skilful generals, posted themselves at each outlet of the house, taking no pains to dissemble their hostile intentions.

The pretended valets in the court-yard and in the passages, the pretended masters in the salon, seemed to Fritz to bode no good ; therefore he had broken the bell.

Balsamo, without displaying any astonishment, without making any preparation, entered the room, which Fritz had lighted up in honour of these, as it was his duty to do towards all guests who visited the house.

His five visitors were seated upon chairs around the room, but not one rose when he appeared.

He, as master of the house, having looked at them, bowed politely ; then only did they rise and gravely return his salute.

Balsamo took a chair in front of them, without

noticing or seeming to notice the strange order of their position. In fact, the five arm-chairs formed a semicircle like to those of the ancient tribunals, with a president, supported by two assessors, and with Balsamo's chair placed in front of that of the president, and occupying the place accorded to the accused in a council or prsetorium.

Balsamo did not speak first, as in other circumstances he would have done ; he looked around without seeing any object clearly—still affected by a kind of painful drowsiness, which had remained after the shock.

" It seems, brother, that you have understood our errand." said the president, or rather he who occupied the centre seat; " yet you delayed to come, and we were already deliberating if we should send to seek you."

" I do not understand your errand," said Balsamo calmly.

" I should not have imagined so, from seeing 3011 take the position and attitude of an accused before us."

" An accused ? " stammered Balsamo vacantly, shrugging his shoulders. " I do not understand you."

" We will soon make you understand us. Not a difficult task, if I may believe your pale cheeks, your vacant eyes, and trembling voice. One would think you did not hear."

" Oh, yes, I hear," replied Balsamo, shaking his head, as if to banish the thoughts which oppressed it.

" Do you remember, brother," continued the president, " that in its last communication the superior committee warned you against a treasonable attempt meditated by one of the great ones of the order ? "

" Perhaps so—yes—I do not deny it."

" You reply as a disordered and troubled conscience might be expected to do; but rouse yourself—be not cast down—reply with that clearness and precision which your terrible position requires. Reply to my questions with the certainty that we are open to conviction, for we have neither prejudice nor hatred in this matter. We are the law ; it does not pronounce a verdict until the evidence is heard."

Balsamo made no reply.

" I repeat it, Balsamo, and my warning once given, let it be to you like the warning which combatants give to each other before commencing their struggle. I will attack you with just but powerful weapons ; defend yourself."

The assistants, seeing Balsamo's indifference, and imperturbable demeanour, looked at each other with astonishment, and then again turned their eyes upon the president.

" You have heard me, Balsamo, have you not ? " repeated the latter.

Balsamo made a sign of the head in the affirmative.

" Like a well-meaning and loyal brother, I have warned you and given you a hint of the aim of my questionings. You are warned, guard yourself; I am about to commence again.

" After this announcement," continued the president, " the association appointed five of its members to watch in Paris the proceedings of the man who was pointed out to us as a traitor. Now, our revelations are not subject to error. We gather them, as you yourself know, either from devoted agents, from the aspect of events, or from infallible symptoms and signs among the mysterious combinations which nature has as yet revealed to us alone. Now one of us had a vision respecting you; we know that he has never been

deceived, we were upon our guard, and watched you."

Balsamo listened without giving the least sign of impatience or even of intelligence. The president continued,—

" It was not an easy task to watch a man such as you. You enter everywhere ; your mission is to have a footing wherever our enemies have a residence or any power whatever. You have at your disposal all your natural resources—which are immense—and which the association entrusts to you to make its cause triumphant. For a long time we hovered in a sea of doubt when we saw enemies visit you, such as a Richelieu, a Dubarry, a Rohan. Moreover, at the last assembly in the Rue Platriere, you made a long speech full of clever paradoxes, which led us to imagine that you were playing a part in flattering and associating with this incorrigible race, which it is our duty to exterminate from the face of the earth. For a long time we respected the mystery of your behaviour, hoping for a happy result; but at last the illusion was dispelled."

Balsamo never stirred, and his features were fixed and motionless, insomuch that the president became impatient.

" Three days ago," said he, " five *lettres-de-cachet* were issued. They had been demanded from the king by M. de Sartines ; they were filled as soon as signed; and the same day were presented to five of our principal agents, our most faithful and devoted brothers, residing in Paris. All five were arrested ; two were taken to the Bastille, where they are kept in the most profound secrecy ; two are at Vincennes, in the *oubliette* ; one in the most noisome cell in Bicetre. Did you know this circumstance ? "

" No." said Balsamo.

" That is strange, after what we know of your relations with the lofty ones of the kingdom ; but there is something stranger still."

Balsamo listened.

" To enable M. de Sartines to arrest these five faithful friends, he must have had the only paper which contains the names of the victims in his possession. This paper was sent to you by the supreme council in 1769; and to you it was assigned to receive the new members, and immediately invest them with the rank which the supreme council assigned them."

Balsamo expressed by a gesture that he did not recollect the circumstance.

" I shall assist your memory. The five persons in question were represented by five Arabic characters ; and these characters, in the paper you received, corresponded with the names and initials of the new brothers."

" Be it so," said Balsamo.

" You acknowledge it ? "

" I acknowledge whatever you please."

The president looked at his assessors, as if to order them to take a note of this confession.

" Well," continued he, " on this paper—the only one, remember, which could have compromised the brothers—there was a sixth name. Do you remember it ? "

Balsamo made no reply.

" The name was—the *Count de kenix*"

" Agreed," said Balsamo.

" Then why—if the names of the five brothers figured in five *lettres-de-cachet*—why was yours respected, caressed, and favourably received at court and in the antechambers of ministers ? If our brothers merited prison, you merited it also. What have you to reply ? "

" Nothing."

" Ah ! I can guess your objection. You may say that the police had by private means discovered the names of the obscurer brethren, but that it was obliged to respect yours as an ambassador and a powerful man. You may even say that they- did not suspect this name."

. " I shall say nothing."

" Your pride outlives your honour. These names the police could only have discovered by reading the confidential note which the supreme council had sent you ; and this is the way it was seen. You kept it in a coffer. Is that true ? "

⁴ " It is."

" One day a woman left your house carrying the coffer under her arm. She was seen by our agents, and followed to the hotel of the lieutenant of police, in the Faubourg St. Germain. We might have arrested the evil at its source ; for if we had stopped the woman and taken the coffer from her, everything would have been safe and sure. But we obeyed the rules of our constitution, which command us to respect the secret means by which some members serve the cause, even when these means have the appearance of treason or imprudence."

Balsamo seemed to approve of this assertion, but with a gesture so little marked, that, had it not been for his previous immobility, it would have been unnoticed.

" This woman reached the lieutenant of police," said the president; " she gave him the coffer, and all was discovered. Is this true ? "

" Perfectly true."

The president rose.

" Who was this woman ? " he exclaimed—"beautiful,

in'passioned, devotedly attached to you body and soul; tenderly loved by you—as spiritual as subtle—as-cunning as one of the angels of darkness who assist man to commit evil! Lorenza Feliciani is the woman, Balsamo! "

Balsamo uttered a groan of despair.

" You are convicted," said the president.

" Have it so," replied Balsamo.

" I have not yet finished. A quarter of an hour after she had entered the hotel of the lieutenant of police, you arrived. She had sown the treason—you came to reap the reward. The obedient servant had taken upon herself the perpetration of the crime—you came to add the finishing stroke to the infamous work. Lorenza departed alone. You renounced her, doubtless, and would not compromise yourself by accompanying her; you left triumphantly along with Madame Dubarry, summoned there to receive from your own lips the information you sold her. You entered her carriage, as the boatman entered the boat with the sinner, Mary the Egyptian. You left behind the papers which ruined us with M. de Sartines, but you brought away the coffer which might have ruined you with us. Fortunately we saw you—God's light is with us when we need it most."

Balsamo bowed without speaking.

" I now conclude," added the president. " Two criminals have been pointed out to the order; a woman, your accomplice, who may be innocent, perhaps, but who, in point of fact, has injured our cause by revealing one of our secrets; and you, the master, the Great Copht, the enlightened mind, who have had the cowardice to shelter yourself behind this woman, that your treason may be less clearly seen."

Balsamo raised his head, and fixed a look upon the

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

commissioners, burning with all the rage which had smouldered in his breast since the commencement of the interrogation.

" Why do you accuse this woman ? " asked he.

" Ah ! we know that you will endeavour to defend her ; we know that you love her almost to idolatry—that you prefer her to everything in the world. We know that she is your treasure of science, of happiness, and of fortune ; we know that she is more precious to you than all the world beside."

" You know all this ? " said Balsamo.

" Yes, we know it ; and we shall punish you through her more than through yourself."

" Finish ! "

The president rose.

" This is the sentence,—

" Joseph Balsamo is a traitor—he has broken his oath ; but his knowledge is immense, and he is useful to the order. Balsamo must live for the cause he has betrayed. He belongs to his brothers, though he has cast them off ."

" Ha ! " said Balsamo gloomily, almost savagely.

" A perpetual prison will protect the association against any renewal of his treachery, at the same time that it will permit the brothers to gather the knowledge from him which it has a right to expect from all its members."

" As to Lorenza Feliciani, a terrible punishment——"

" Hold ! " said Balsamo, with perfect calmness in his voice, " you forget that I did not defend myself — the accused must be heard in his own justification. A word, a single proof, will suffice; wait one moment and I will bring you the proof I have promised."

The commissaries seemed to deliberate **for** a moment.

" Ah ! you fear lest I should kill myself." said Balsamo with a bitter smile. " If that had been my wish, it would have been already done. There is that in this ring which would kill you all live times over had I opened it. You fear I should escape; let me be guarded if you wish it."

" Go ! " said the president.

Balsamo disappeared for about a moment. Then he was heard heavily descending the staircase. He entered, bearing the cold, rigid, and discoloured body of Lorenza upon his shoulder, her white hand hanging to the ground.

" Here is the woman I adored, who was my treasure, my only happiness, my life !—the woman who, as you say, has betrayed you—here, take her ! God did not wait for you to punish, gentlemen ! "

And with a movement quick as lightning, he let the corpse glide from his arms, and sent it rolling on the carpet to the feet of the judges, whom her cold hair and the dead and motionless hands touched to their great horror, while by the light of the lamps they saw the wide gash gaping in her neck, white as a swan's.

" Now pronounce the sentence," added Balsamo.

The horrified judges littered a cry, and, seized with maddening terror, fled in indescribable confusion. Soon their horses were heard neighing and trampling in the court-yard ; the outer gate grated on its hinges; and then silence, the solemn shence of the tomb, returned to seat itself beside despair and death.

CHAPTER XLVII

DOOM

WHILE the terrible scene which we have just described was taking place between Balsamo and the Five Masters, nothing apparently had changed in the rest of the house. The old man had seen Balsamo enter his apartment and bear away Lorenza's corpse, and this new demonstration had recalled him to what was passing around him.

But when he saw Balsamo take up the dead body and descend with it into the lower rooms, he fancied it was the last and eternal adieu of this man whose heart he had broken, and fear descended on his soul with an overwhelming force, which, for him who had done all to avoid death, doubled the horror of the grave.

Not knowing for what purpose Balsamo had left him, nor whither he was going, he began to call out,—
" Acharat! Acharat! "

It was the name his pupil had borne in childhood, and he hoped it would have retained its influence over the man.

But Balsamo continued to descend. Having touched the ground, he even forgot to make the trap reascend, and disappeared in the corridor.

" Ah ! " cried Althotas, " see what man is—a blind ungrateful animal! Return, Acharat, return ! Ah ! you prefer the ridiculous object called a woman to the perfection of humanity which I represent! You prefer a fragment of life to immortality !

" But no ! " he exclaimed after a moment's pause ;
" the wretch has deceived his master—he has betrayed my confidence like a vile robber; he feared that I

show!— live because I surpass him so much in science ; he atten to inherit the laborious work I had nearly concluded ; he laid a trap for me, his master and benefactor ? Oh, Acharat ! "

And gradually the old man's anger was aroused, his cheeks were dyed with a hectic tinge, his half-closed eyes seemed to glow with the gloomy brightness of those phosphorescent lights which sacrilegious children place in the cavities of a human skull. Then he cried,—

" Return, Acharat, return ! Look to yourself ? You know that I have conjurations which evoke fire and raise up supernatural spirits ! I have evoked Satan—him whom the magi called Phegor, in the mountains of Gad—and Satan was forced to leave his bottomless pit and appear before me ! I have conferred with the seven angels who ministered to God's anger, upon the same mountain where Moses received the ten commandments ! But my will alone I have kindled the great tripod with its seven flames which Trajan stole from the Jews ! Take care, Acharat, take care ! "

But there was no reply.

Then his brain became more and more clouded.

" Do you not see, wretch." said he, in a choking voice, * that death is about to seize me as it would the meanest mortal ? Listen, Acharat! you may return. I will do you no harm. Return : I renounce the fire ; you need not fear the evil spirit, nor die seven avenging angels. I renounce vengeance, and yet I could strike you with such terror that you would become an idiot and cold as marble, for I can stop the circulation of the blood. Come back, then, Acharat; I will do you no harm, but, on the contrary, I can do you much good. Acharat, instead of abandoning me, watch over my life, and you shall have all my treasures and all my

secrets. Let me live, Acharat, that I may teach ^m to you. See, see ! "

And with gleaming eyes and trembling fingers he pointed to the numerous objects, papers, and rolls scattered through the vast apartment. Then he waited, collecting all his fast-failing faculties to listen.

" Ah, you come not! " he cried. " You think I shall die thus, and by this murder—for you are murdering me—everything will belong to you ! Madman ! were you even capable of reading the manuscripts which I alone am able to decipher—were the spirit even to grant you my wisdom for a lifetime of one, two, or three centuries, to make use of the materials I have gathered—you shall not inherit them ! No, no, a thousand times no ! Return, Acharat, return for a moment, were it only to behold the ruin of this whole house—were it only to contemplate the beautiful spectacle I am preparing for you ! Acharat! Acharat f Acharat! "

There was no answer, for Balsamo was during this time replying to the accusation of the Five Masters by showing them the mutilated body of Lorenza. The cries of the deserted old man grew louder and louder; despair redoubled his strength, and his hoarse yellings, reverberating in the long corridors, spread terror afar, like the roaring of a tiger who has broken his chain or forced the bars of his cage.

" Ah, you do not come ! " shrieked Althotas ; "you despise me ! you calculate upon my weakness ! Well, you shall see ! Fire ! fire ! fire ! "

He articulated these cries with such vehemence that Balsamo, now freed from his terrified visitors, was roused by them from the depth of his despair. He took Lorenza's corpse in his arms, reascended the staircase, laid the dead body upon the sofa where two

hou previously it had reposed in sleep, and, mounting upon the, trap, he suddenly appeared before Althotas.

' Ah ! at last ! " cried the old man, with savage joy. " You were afraid ! you saw I could revenge myself, and you came ! You did well to come, for in another moment I should have set this chamber on fire ! "

Balsamo looked at him, shrugged his shoulders slightly, but did not deign to reply.

" I am athirst ! " cried Althotas, " I am athirst ! Give me drink, Acharat ! "

Balsamo made no reply ; he did not move ; he looked at the dying man as if he would not lose an atom of his agony.

" Do you hear me ? " howled Althotas ; " do you hear me ? "

The same silence, the same immobility on the part of the gloomy spectator.

" Do you hear me, Acharat ? " vociferated the old man, almost tearing his throat in his efforts to give emphasis to this last burst of rage ; " water ! give me water ! "

Althotas's features were rapidly decomposing

There was no longer fire in his looks, but only an unearthly glare ; the blood no longer coursed beneath his sunken and cadaverous cheek ; motion and life were almost dead within him. His long sinewy arms, in which he had carried Lorenza like a child, were raised, but inert and powerless as the membranes of a polypus. His fury had worn out the feeble spark which despair had for a moment revived in him.

" Ah ! " said he, " ah ! you think I do not die quickly enough ! You mean to make me die of thirst ! You gloat over my treasures and my manuscripts with longing eyes ! Ah ! you think you have them already I Wait, wait ? "

And, with an expiring effort, Althotas took a small bottle from beneath the cushions of the air and uncorked it. At the contact with the air a bright flame burst from the glass vessel, and Althotas, like some potent magician, shook this flame around him.

Instantly the manuscripts piled round the old man's arm-chair, the books scattered over the room, the rolls of paper disinterred with so much trouble from the pyramids of Cheops, and the subterranean depths of Herculaneum, took fire with the rapidity of gunpowder. A sheet of flame overspread the marble slab, and seemed to Balsamo's eyes like one of those flaming circles of hell of which Dante sings.

Althotas no doubt expected that Balsamo would rush amidst the flames to save this valuable inheritance which the old man was annihilating along with himself, but he was mistaken. Balsamo did not stir, but stood calm and isolated upon the trap-door, so that the fire could not reach him.

The flames wrapped Althotas in their embrace, but, instead of terrifying him, it seemed as if the old man found himself once more in his proper element, and that, like the salamanders sculptured on our ancient castles, the fire caressed instead of consuming him.

Balsamo still stood gazing at him. The fire had reached the woodwork, and completely surrounded the old man ; it roared around the feet of the massive oaken chair on which he was seated, and what was most strange, though it was already consuming the lower part of his body, he did not seem to feel it.

On the contrary, at the contact with the seemingly purifying element, the dying man's muscles seemed gradually to distend, and an indescribable serenity overspread his features like a mask. Isolated from his body at this last hour, the old prophet on his car of

fire seemed ready to wing his way aloft. The mind, also powerful in its last moments, forgot its attendant matter, and, sure of having nothing more to expect below, it stretched ardently upwards to those higher spheres to which the fire seemed to bear it.

At this instant Althotas' eyes, which at the first reflection of the flames seemed to have been re-endowed with life, gazed vaguely and abstractedly at some point in space which was neither heaven nor earth. They looked as if they would pierce the horizon, calm and resigned, analysing all sensation, listening to all pain, while with his last breath on earth, the old magician muttered, in a hollow voice, his adieus to power, to life, and hope.

" Ah ! " said he, " I die without regret. I have possessed everything on earth, and have known all; I have had all power which is granted to a human creature ; I had almost reached immortality ! "

Balsamo uttered a sardonic laugh, whose gloomy echo arrested the old man's attention. Through the flames which surrounded him as with a veil, he cast a **look** of savage majesty upon his pupil.

" You are right," said he ; " one thing I had not foreseen—God ! "

Then, as if this mighty word had uprooted his whole soul, Althotas fell back upon his chair. He had given up to God the last breath, which he had hoped to wrest from Him.

Balsamo heaved a sigh, and, without endeavouring to save anything from the precious pile upon which this second Zoroaster had stretched himself to die, he again descended to Lorenza, and touched the spring of the trap, which readjusted itself in the ceiling, veiling from his sight the immense furnace, which **roared like** the crater of a volcano.

During the whole night the fire roared above Balsamo's head like a whirlwind, without his making an effort either to extinguish it or to fly. Stretched beside Lorenza's body, he was insensible to all danger; but, contrary to his expectations, when the fire had devoured all, and laid bare the vaulted walls of stone, annihilating all the valuable contents, it extinguished itself, and Balsamo heard its last howlings, which, like those of Althotas, gradually died away in plaints and sighs.

After the scenes here described, in which several of the important characters of the tale move from the stage, it has been thought best to hurry over the somewhat detailed and perhaps irrelevant events which follow and bring the tale to an end. Here is a brief resume* of the thread of the story :—

It will be remembered that Balsamo, in his hurry and anxiety, left Andree in a state of death-like lethargy. After some little time she recovered consciousness, but was so greatly indisposed mentally and physically that she was unable to perform her duties at the court. At her own request, the dauphiness procured for her admission amongst the Carmelite sisters of St. Denis, the Convent which was in charge of the good Madame Louise of France.

It will readily be imagined that this action of his daughter completely shattered the hopes of the Baron de Taverney and the aspirations of his son Philip. The Baron fell from favour with the king, became an object of scorn for the courtiers, and after disowning his son in a stormy interview, he returned in despair to his country home.

Heart-broken by the sufferings of his sister and the malicious gossip of evil-minded courtiers, Philip set

sail %: America, a land which promised liberty and prosperity. Gilbert also was attracted towards the same country since his ambitions and romantic dreams were now beyond the bounds of possibility. The two sailed in the same vessel from Have.

There is little further mention of Balsamo in the story, and we are not told of his fate. Impaired in health and in his influence over the secret society which he one time controlled, he existed rather than lived in his house in the Rue St. Claude. He reappeared, it is presumed, amid the stormy scenes of the French Revolution.

This now brings us to the concluding events of the book.

EPILOGUE

THE NINTH OF MAY

ON the ninth of May, 1774, at eight o'clock in the evening, Versailles presented a most curious and interesting spectacle.

From the first day of the month the king, Louis XV., attacked with a malady the serious nature of which his physicians at first dared not confess to him, kept his couch, and now began anxiously to consult the countenances of those who surrounded him, to discover in them some reflection of the truth or some ray of hope.

The physician Bordeu had pronounced the king suffering from an attack of small-pox of the most malignant nature, and the physician La Martiniere, who had agreed with his colleague as to the nature of the king's complaint, gave it as his opinion that his majesty

should be informed of the real state of the case, ' in order that, both spiritually and temporally, as a king and as a Christian, he should take measures for his own safety and that of his kingdom."

" His most Christian majesty," said he " should have extreme unction administered to him."

La Martiniere represented the party of the dauphin—the opposition. Bordeu asserted that the bare mention of the serious nature of the disease would kill the king, and said that for his part he would not be a party to such regicide.

Bordeu represented Madame Dubarry's party.

In fact, to call in the aid of the Church to the king was to expel the favourite. When religion enters at one door, it is full time for Satan to make his exit by the other.

In the meantime, during all these intestine divisions of the faculty, of the royal family, and of the different parties of the court, the disease took quiet possession of the aged, corrupt, and worn-out frame of the king, and set up such a strong position, that neither remedies nor prescriptions could dislodge it.

From the first symptoms of the attack, Louis beheld his couch surrounded by his two daughters, the favourite, and the courtiers whom he especially delighted to honour. They still laughed and stood firm by each other.

All at once the austere and ominous countenance of Madame Louise of France appeared at Versailles. She had quitted her cell to give to her father, in her turn, the cares and consolations he so much required.

She entered pale and stern as a statue of Fate. She was no longer a daughter to a father, a sister to her fellow-sisters; she rather resembled those ancient prophetesses **who in the evil day of** adveisity

poured in the startled ears of kings the boding cry "Woe! Woe! Woe!"

She fell upon Versailles like a thunder-shock at the very hour when it was Madame Dubarry's custom to visit the king, who kissed her white hands, and pressed them like some healing medicament to his aching brow and burning cheeks.

At her sight all fled. The sisters, trembling, sought refuge in a neighbouring apartment. Madame Dubarry bent the knee and hastened to those which she occupied, the privileged courtiers retreated in disorder to the antechambers; the two physicians alone remained standing by the fireside.

"My daughter!" murmured the king, opening his eyes, heavy with pain and fever.

"Yes, sire," said the princess, "your daughter."

"And you come——"

"To remind you of God I "

The king raised himself in an upright posture and attempted to smile.

"For you have forgotten God," resumed Madame Louise.

"I! "

"And I wish to recall him to your thoughts."

"My daughter! I am not so near death, I trust, that your exhortations need be so very urgent. My illness is very slight—a slow fever, attended with some inflammation."

"Your malady, sire," interrupted the princess, "is that which, according to etiquette, should summon around your majesty's couch all the great prelates of the kingdom. When a member of the royal family is attacked with small-pox, the rites of the Church should be administered without loss of time."

"Madame ! " exclaimed the king, greatly agitated,

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

and becoming deadly pale, " what is that you say ? "

" Madame ! " broke in the terrified physicians.

" I repeat," continued the princess, " that your majesty is attacked with the small-pox.*"

The king uttered a cry.

" The physicians did not tell me so," replied he.

" They had not the courage. But I look forward to another kingdom for your majesty than the kingdom of France. Draw near to God, sire, and solemnly review your past life."

"The small-pox!" muttered Louis; " a fatal disease !—Bordeu !—La Martiniere !—can it be true ? "

The two practitioners hung their heads.

" Then I am lost! " said the king, more and more terrified.

" All diseases can be cured, sire," said Bordeu, taking the initiative, " especially when the patient preserves his composure of mind."

" God gives peace to the mind and health to the body," replied the princess.

" Madame! " said Bordeu boldly, although in a low voice, " you are killing the king ! "

The princess deigned no reply. She approached the sick monarch, and taking his hand, which she covered with kisses,—

" Break with the past, sire," said she, " and give an example to your people. No one warned you ; you ran the risk of perishing eternally. Promise solemnly to live a Christian life if you are spared—die like a Christian, if God calls you hence ! "

As she concluded, she imprinted a second kiss on the royal hand, and, with slow step took her way through the antechambers. There she let her long black veil fall over her face, descended the staircase

with a grave and majestic air, and entered her carriage, leaving, behind her a stupefaction and terror which cannot be described.

The king could not rouse his spirits except by dint of questioning his physicians, who replied in terms of courtly flattery.

" I do not wish," said he, " that the scene of Metz with the Duchesse de Chateauroux should be re-enacted here. Send for Madame d'Aiguillon, and request her to take Madame Dubarry with her to Rueil!"

This order was equivalent to an expulsion. Bordeu attempted to remonstrate, but the king ordered him to be silent. Bordeu, moreover, saw his colleague ready to report all that passed to the dauphin, and, well aware what would be the issue of the king's malady, he did not persist, but, quitting the royal chamber, he proceeded to acquaint Madame Dubarry with the blow which had just fallen on her fortunes.

The countess, terrified at the ominous and insulting expression which she saw already pictured on every face around her, hastened to withdraw. In an hour she was without the walls of Versailles, seated beside the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, who, like a trustworthy and grateful friend, was taking the disgraced favourite to her chateau of Rueil, which had descended to her from the great Richelieu.

Bordeu, on his side, shut the door of the king's chamber against all the royal family, under pretext of contagion. Louis's apartment was thenceforward walled up : no one might enter but Religion and Death.

The king had the last rites of the Church administered to him that same day, and this news soon spread through Paris, where the disgrace of the favourite was already known, and circulated from mouth to mouth.

All the court hastened to pay their respects to the dauphin, who closed his doors and refused to see any one.

But the following day the king was better, and sent the Duke d'Aiguillon to carry his compliments to Madame Dubarry. This day was the 9th of May, 1774. The court deserted the pavilion occupied by the dauphin, and flocked in such crowds to Rueil, where the favourite was residing, that since the banishment of M. de Choiscul to Chanteloup such a string of carriages had never been witnessed.

Things were in this position, therefore ; would the king live, and Madame Dubarry still remain queen ? —or would the king die, and Madame Dubarry sink to the condition of an infamous and execrable courtesan ?

This was why Versailles, on the evening of the 9th May, in the year 1774, presented such a curious and interesting spectacle.

On the Place d'Amies, before the palace, several groups had formed in front of the railing, who, with sympathetic air, seemed most anxious to hear the news.

They were citizens of Versailles or Paris, and every now and then, with all the politeness imaginable, they questioned the gardes-du-corps, who were pacing slowly up and down the Court of Honour with their hands behind their backs, respecting the king's health.

Gradually these groups dispersed. The inhabitants of Paris took their seats in the *pataches* or stage-coaches to return peaceably to their own homes; whilst those of Versailles, sure of having the earliest news from **the** fountain-head, also retired to their several dwellings.

No one was to be seen in the streets but the patrols of the watch, who performed their duty a little more quietly than usual, and that gigantic world called the

Palace of Versailles became by degrees shrouded in darkness and silence, like that greater world which contained it.

At the angle of the street bordered with trees which extends in front of the palace, a man advanced in years was seated on a stone bench overshadowed by the already leafy boughs of the horse-chestnuts, with his expressive and poetic features turned towards the chateau, leaning with both hands on his cane, and supporting his chin on his hands.

He was nevertheless an old man, bent by age and ill-health, but his eye still sparkled with something of *its* youthful fire, and his thoughts glowed even more brightly than his eyes.

He was absorbed in melancholy contemplation, and did not perceive a second personage who, after peeping curiously through the iron railing and questioning the *gardes-du-corps*, crossed the esplanade in a diagonal direction, and advanced straight towards the bench, with the intention of seating himself upon it.

This personage was a young man with projecting check-bones, low forehead, aquiline nose slightly bent to one side, and a sardonic smile. Whilst advancing towards the stone bench he chuckled sneeringly although alone, seeming to reply by this manifestation to some secret thought.

When within three paces of the bench, he perceived the old man and paused, scanning him with his oblique and stealthy glance, although evidently fearing to let his purpose be seen.

" You are enjoying the fresh air, I presume, sir ? " said he, approaching him with an abrupt movement.

The old man raised his head.

" Ha ! " exclaimed the new-comer, " it is my illustrious rrister! "

" And you are my young practitioner ? " aid the old man.

" Will you permit me to take a seat beside you, sir ? "

" Most willingly." And the old man made room on the bench beside him.

" It appears that the king is doing better ? " said the young man. " The people rejoice." And he burst a second time into his sneering laugh.

The old man made no reply.

" The whole day long the carriages have been rolling from Paris to Rueil, and from Rueil to Versailles. The Countess Dubarry will marry the king as soon as his health is re-established ! " And he burst into a louder laugh than before.

Again the old man made no reply.

" Pardon me if I laugh at fate." continued the young man, with a gesture of nervous impatience, " but every good Frenchman, look you, loves his king, and my king is better to-day."

" Do not jest thus on such a subject, sir," said the old man gently. " The death of a man is always a misfortune for some one, and the death of a king is frequently a great misfortune for all."

" Even the death of Louis XV. ? " interrupted the young man, in a tone of irony. " Oh, my dear master, a distinguished philosopher like you to sustain such a proposition ! I know all the energy and skill of your paradoxes, but I cannot compliment you on this one."

The old man shook his head.

" And, besides," added the new-comer, " why think of the king's death ? Who speaks of such an event ? The king has the small-pox ; well, we all know that complaint. The king has beside him Bordeu and La Martiniere, who are skilful men. Qh, I will wager a trifle, my dear master, that Louis the Well-Beloved

will escape this turn ! Only this time the French people do not sottocate themselves in churches putting up vows ior him, as on the occasion of his former illness. Mark me, everything grows antiquated and is abandoned ! "

" Silence ! " saiu the old man, shuddering ; " silence ! for I tell you you are speaking of a man over whom at this moment the destroying angel of God hovers."

His young companion, surprised at this strange language, looked at the speaker, whose eyes had never quitted the facade of the chateau.

"Then you have more positive intelligence?" inquired he.

" Look ! " said the old man, pointing with his finger to one of the windows of the palace; " what do you behold yonder ? "

" A window lighted up—is that what you mean ? "

" Yes ; but lighted in what manner ? "

" By a wax candle placed in a little lantern."

" Precisely."

" Well ? "

" Well, young man, do you know what the flame of that wax-light represents ? "

" No, sir."

" It represents the life of the king."

The young man looked more fixedly at his aged companion, as if to be certain that he was in his perfect senses.

" A friend of mine, M. de Jussieu," continued the old man, " has placed that wax-light there, which will burn as long as the king is alive."

" It is a signal, then ? "

"A signal which Louis XV's successor devours with his eyes from behind some neighbouring curtain. This signal, which shall warn the ambitious of the dawn

of a new reign, informs a poor philosopher like myself of the instant when the breath of the Almighty sweeps away, at the same moment, an age and a human existence."

The young man shuddered in his turn, and moved closer to his companion.

" Oh," said the aged philosopher, " mark well this night, young man ! Behold what clouds and tempests it bears in its murky bosom ! The morning which will succeed it I shall witness no doubt, for I am not yet old enough to abandon hope of seeing the morrow; but a reign will commence on that morrow which you will see to its close, and which contains mysteries which I cannot hope to be a spectator of. It is not, therefore, without interest that I watch yonder trembling flame, whose signification I have just explained to you."

" True, my master," murmured the young man, " most true."

" Louis XIV. reigned seventy-three years," continued the old man. " How many will Louis XVI. reign ? "

" Ah ! " exclaimed the younger of the two, pointing to the window, which had just become shrouded in darkness.

" The king is dead ! " said the old man, rising with a sort of terror.

And both kept silence for some minutes.

Suddenly a chariot, drawn by eight fiery horses, started at full gallop from the courtyard of the palace. Two outriders preceded it, each holding a torch in his hand.

In the chariot were the dauphin, Marie Antoinette, and Madame Elizabeth, the sister of the king. The flame of the torches threw a gloomy light on their

pale features. The carriage passed close to the two rats, within ten paces of the bench from which they had risen.

" Long live King Louis XVI. ! Long live the queen!" shouted the young man in a loud, harsh voice, as if he meant to insult this new-born majesty instead of saluting it.

The dauphin bowed ; the queen showed her face at the window, sad and severe. The carriage dashed on and disappeared.

" My dear M. Rousseau," said the younger of the two spectators, " then is our friend Mademoiselle Dubarry a widow."

" To-morrow she will be exiled." said his aged companion. " Adieu. M. Marat! "

