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THE MONEY MASTER

By Gilbert Parker

EPOCH THE FOURTH

- XVI. MISFORTUNES COME NOT SINGLY
- XVII. HIS GREATEST ASSET
- XVIII. JEAN JACQUES HAS AN OFFER
- XIX. SEBASTIAN DOLORES DOES NOT SLEEP
- XX. "AU 'VOIR, M'SIEU' JEAN JACQUES"
- XXI. IF SHE HAD KNOWN IN TIME

CHAPTER XVI

MISFORTUNES COME NOT SINGLY

Judge Carcasson was right. For a year after Zoe's flight Jean Jacques wrapped Sebastian Dolores round his neck like a collar, and it choked him like a boaconstrictor. But not Sebastian Dolores alone did that. When things begin to go wrong in the life of a man whose hands have held too many things, the disorder flutters through all the radii of his affairs, and presently they rattle away from the hub of his control.

So it was with Jean Jacques. To take his reprobate father-in-law to his lonely home would have brought him trouble in any case; but as things were, the Spaniard became only the last straw which broke his camel's back. And what a burden his camel carried--flour-mill, saw-mill, ash-factory, farms, a general store, lime-kilns, agency for lightning-rods and insurance, cattle-dealing, the project for the new cheese-factory, and money-lending!

Money-lending? It seemed strange that Jean Jacques should be able to lend money, since he himself had to borrow, and mortgage also, from time to time. When things began to go really wrong with him financially, he mortgaged his farms, his flour-mill, and saw-mill, and then lent money on other mortgages. This he did because he had always lent money, and it was a habit so associated with his prestige, that he tied himself up in borrowing and lending and counter-mortgaging till, as the saying is, "a Philadelphia lawyer" could not have unravelled his affairs without having been born again in the law. That he was able to manipulate his tangled affairs, while keeping the confidence of those from whom he borrowed, and the admiration of those to whom he lent, was evidence of his capacity. "Genius of a kind" was what his biggest creditor called it later.

After a personal visit to St. Saviour's, this biggest creditor and financial potentate--M. Mornay--said that if Jean Jacques had been started right and trained right, he would have been a "general in the

financial field, winning big battles."

M. Mornay chanced to be a friend of Judge Carcasson, and when he visited Vilray he remembered that the Judge had spoken often of his humble but learned friend, the Clerk of the Court, and of his sister. So M. Mornay made his way from the office of the firm of avocats whom he had instructed in his affairs with Jean Jacques, to that of M. Fille. Here he was soon engaged in comment on the master-miller and philosopher.

"He has had much trouble, and no doubt his affairs have suffered," remarked M. Fille cautiously, when the ice had been broken and the Big Financier had referred casually to the difficulties among which Jean Jacques was trying to maintain equilibrium; "but he is a man who can do things too hard for other men."

The Big Financier lighted another cigar and blew away several clouds of smoke before he said in reply, "Yes, I know he has had family trouble again, but that is a year ago, and he has had a chance to get another grip of things."

"He did not sit down and mope," explained M. Fille. "He was at work the next day after his daughter's flight just the same as before. He is a man of great courage. Misfortune does not paralyse him."

M. Mornay's speech was of a kind which came in spurts, with pauses of thought between, and the pause now was longer than usual.

"Paralysis--certainly not," he said at last. "Physical activity is one of the manifestations of mental, moral, and even physical shock and injury. I've seen a man with a bullet in him run a half-mile--anywhere; I've seen a man ripped up by a crosscut-saw hold himself together, and walk--anywhere--till he dropped. Physical and nervous activity is one of the forms which shattered force takes. I expect that your 'M'sieu' Jean Jacques' has been busier this last year than ever before in his life. He'd have to be; for a man who has as many irons in the fire as he has, must keep running from bellows to bellows when misfortune starts to damp him down."

The Clerk of the Court sighed. He realized the significance of what his visitor was saying. Ever since Zoe had gone, Jean Jacques had been for ever on the move, for ever making hay on which the sun did not shine. Jean Jacques' face these days was lined and changeful. It looked unstable and tired--as though disturbing forces were working up to the surface out of control. The brown eyes, too, were far more restless than they had ever been since the Antoine was wrecked, and their owner returned with Carmen to the Manor Cartier. But the new restlessness of the eyes was different from the old. That was a mobility impelled by an active, inquisitive soul, trying to observe what was going on in the world, and to make sure that its possessor was being seen by the world. This activity was that of a mind essentially concerned to find how many ways it could see for escape from a maze of things; while his vanity was taking new forms. It was always anxious to discover if the world was trying to know how he was taking the blows of fate and fortune. He had

been determined that, whatever came, it should not see him paralysed or broken.

As M. Fille only nodded his head in sorrowful assent, the Big Financier became more explicit. He was determined to lose nothing by Jean Jacques, and he was prepared to take instant action when it was required; but he was also interested in the man who might have done really powerful things in the world, had he gone about them in the right way.

"M. Barbille has had some lawsuits this year, is it not so?" he asked.

"Two of importance, monsieur, and one is not yet decided," answered M. Fille.

"He lost those suits of importance?"

"That is so, monsieur."

"And they cost him six thousand dollars--and over?" The Big Financier seemed to be pressing towards a point.

"Something over that amount, monsieur."

"And he may lose the suit now before the Courts?"

"Who can tell, monsieur!" vaguely commented the little learned official.

M. Mornay was not to be evaded. "Yes, yes, but the case as it stands--to you who are wise in experience of legal affairs, does it seem at all a sure thing for him?"

"I wish I could say it was, monsieur," sadly answered the other.

The Big Financier nodded vigorously. "Exactly. Nothing is so unproductive as the law. It is expensive whether you win or lose, and it is murderously expensive when you do lose. You will observe, I know, that your Jean Jacques is a man who can only be killed once--eh?"

"Monsieur?" M. Fille really did not grasp this remark.

M. Mornay's voice became precise. "I will explain. He has never created; he has only developed what has been created. He inherited much of what he has or has had. His designs were always affected by the fact that he had never built from the very bottom. When he goes to pieces--"

"Monsieur--to pieces!" exclaimed the Clerk of the Court painfully.

"Well, put it another way. If he is broken financially, he will never come up again. Not because of his age--I lost a second fortune at fifty, and have a third ready to lose at sixty--but because the primary initiative won't be in him. He'll say he has lost, and that there's an end to it all. His philosophy will come into play--just at the last. It will help him in one way and harm him in another."

"Ah, then you know about his philosophy, monsieur?" queried M. Fille. Was Jean Jacques' philosophy, after all, to be a real concrete asset of his life sooner or later?

The Big Financier smiled, and turned some coins over in his pocket rather loudly. Presently he said: "The first time I ever saw him he treated me to a page of Descartes. It cost him one per cent. I always charge a man for talking sentiment to me in business hours. I had to listen to him, and he had to pay me for listening. I've no doubt his general yearly expenditure has been increased for the same reason--eh, Maitre Fille? He has done it with others--yes?" M. Fille waved a hand in deprecation, and his voice had a little acidity as he replied: "Ah, monsieur, what can we poor provincials do--any of us--in dealing with men like you, philosophy or no philosophy? You get us between the upper and the nether mill stones. You are cosmopolitan; M. Jean Jacques Barbille is a provincial; and you, because he has soul enough to forget business for a moment and to speak of things that matter more than money and business, you grind him into powder."

M. Mornay shook his head and lighted his cigar again. "There you are wrong, Maitre Fille. It is bad policy to grind to powder, or grind at all, men out of whom you are making money. It is better to keep them from between the upper and nether mill-stones.

"I have done so with your Barbille. I could give him such trouble as would bring things crashing down upon him at once, if I wanted to be merely vicious in getting my own; but that would make it impossible for me to meet at dinner my friend Judge Carcasson. So, as long as I can, I will not press him. But I tell you that the margin of safety on which he is moving now is too narrow--scarce a foot-hold. He has too much under construction in the business of his life, and if one stone slips out, down may come the whole pile. He has stopped building the cheese-factory--that represents sheer loss. The ash-factory is to close next week, the saw-mill is only paying its way, and the flour-mill and the farms, which have to sustain the call of his many interests, can't stand the drain. Also, he has several people heavily indebted to him, and if they go down--well, it depends on the soundness of the security he holds. If they listened to him talk philosophy, encouraged him to do it, and told him they liked it, when the bargain was being made, the chances are the security is inadequate."

The Clerk of the Court bridled up. "Monsieur, you are very hard on a man who for twenty-five years has been a figure and a power in this part of the province. You sneer at one who has been a benefactor to the place where he lives; who has given with the right hand and the left; whose enterprise has been a source of profit to many; and who has got a savage reward for the acts of a blameless and generous life. You know his troubles, monsieur, and we who have seen him bear them with fortitude and Christian philosophy, we resent--"

"You need resent nothing, Maitre Fille," interrupted the Big Financier, not unkindly. "What I have said has been said to his friend and the

friend of my own great friend, Judge Carcasson; and I am only anxious that he should be warned by someone whose opinions count with him; whom he can trust--"

"But, monsieur, alas!" broke in the Clerk of the Court, "that is the trouble; he does not select those he can trust. He is too confiding. He believes those who flatter him, who impose on his good heart. It has always been so."

"I judge it is so still in the case of Monsieur Dolores, his daughter's grandfather?" the Big Financier asked quizzically.

"It is so, monsieur," replied M. Fille. "The loss of his daughter shook him even more than the flight of his wife; and it is as though he could not live without that scoundrel near him--a vicious man, who makes trouble wherever he goes. He was a cause of loss to M. Barbille years ago when he managed the ash-factory; he is very dangerous to women--even now he is a danger to the future of a young widow" (he meant the widow of Palass Poucette); "and he has caused a scandal by perjury as a witness, and by the consequences--but I need not speak of that here. He will do Jean Jacques great harm in the end, of that I am sure. The very day Mademoiselle Zoe left the Manor Cartier to marry the English actor, Jean Jacques took that Spanish bad-lot to his home; and there he stays, and the old friends go--the old friends go; and he does not seem to miss them."

There was something like a sob in M. Fille's voice. He had loved Zoe in a way that in a mother would have meant martyrdom, if necessary, and in a father would have meant sacrifice when needed; and indeed he had sacrificed both time and money to find Zoe. He had even gone as far as Winnipeg on the chance of finding her, making that first big journey in the world, which was as much to him in all ways as a journey to Bagdad would mean to most people of M. Mornay's world. Also he had spent money since in corresponding with lawyers in the West whom he engaged to search for her; but Zoe had never been found. She had never written but one letter to Jean Jacques since her flight. This letter said, in effect, that she would come back when her husband was no longer "a beggar" as her father had called him, and not till then. It was written en route to Winnipeg, at the dictation of Gerard Fynes, who had a romantic view of life and a mistaken pride, but some courage too--the courage of love.

"He thinks his daughter will come back--yes?" asked M. Mornay. "Once he said to me that he was sorry there was no lady to welcome me at the Manor Cartier, but that he hoped his daughter would yet have the honour. His talk is quite spacious and lofty at times, as you know."

"So--that is so, monsieur . . . Mademoiselle Zoe's room is always ready for her. At time of Noel he sent cards to all the families of the parish who had been his friends, as from his daughter and himself; and when people came to visit at the Manor on New Year's Day, he said to each and all that his daughter regretted she could not arrive in time from the West to receive them; but that next year she would certainly have the pleasure."

"Like the light in the window for the unreturning sailor," somewhat cynically remarked the Big Financier. "Did many come to the Manor on that New Year's Day?"

"But yes, many, monsieur. Some came from kindness, and some because they were curious--"

"And Monsieur Dolores?"

The lips of the Clerk of the Court curled, "He went about with a manner as soft as that of a young cure. Butter would not melt in his mouth. Some of the women were sorry for him, until they knew he had given one of Jean Jacques' best bear-skin rugs to Madame Palass Poucette for a New Year's gift."

The Big Financier laughed cheerfully. "It's an old way to popularity-- being generous with other people's money. That is why I am here. The people that spend your Jean Jacques' money will be spending mine too, if I don't take care."

M. Fille noted the hard look which now settled in M. Mornay's face, and it disturbed him. He rose and leaned over the table towards his visitor anxiously.

"Tell me, if you please, monsieur, is there any real and immediate danger of the financial collapse of Jean Jacques?"

The other regarded M. Fille with a look of consideration. He liked this Clerk of the Court, but he liked Jean Jacques for the matter of that, and away now from the big financial arena where he usually worked, his natural instincts had play. He had come to St. Saviour's with a bigger thing in his mind than Jean Jacques and his affairs; he had come on the matter of a railway, and had taken Jean Jacques on the way, as it were. The scheme for the railway looked very promising to him, and he was in good humour; so that all he said about Jean Jacques was free from that general irritation of spirit which has sacrificed many a small man on a big man's altar. He saw the agitation he had caused, and he almost repented of what he had already said; yet he had acted with a view to getting M. Fille to warn Jean Jacques.

"I repeat what I said," he now replied. "Monsieur Jean Jacques' affairs are too nicely balanced. A little shove one way or another and over goes the whole caboose. If anyone here has influence over him, it would be a kindness to use it. That case before the Court of Appeal, for instance; he'd be better advised to settle it, if there is still time. One or two of the mortgages he holds ought to be foreclosed, so that he may get out of them all the law will let him. He ought to pouch the money that's owing him; he ought to shave away his insurance, his lightning-rod, and his horsedealing business; and he ought to sell his farms and his store, and concentrate on the flour-mill and the saw-mill. He has had his warnings generally from my lawyers, but what he wants most is the gentle hand to lead him; and I should think that yours, M. Fille, is the hand

the Almighty would choose if He was concerned with what happens at St. Saviour's and wanted an agent."

The Clerk of the Court blushed greatly. This was a very big man indeed in the great commercial world, and flattery from him had unusual significance; but he threw out his hands with a gesture of helplessness, and said: "Monsieur, if I could be of use I would; but he has ceased to listen to me; he--"

He got no further, for there was a sharp knock at the street door of the outer office, and M. Fille hastened to the other room. After a moment he came back, a familiar voice following him.

"It is Monsieur Barbille, monsieur," M. Fille said quietly, but with apprehensive eyes.

"Well--he wants to see me?" asked M. Mornay. "No, no, monsieur. It would be better if he did not see you. He is in some agitation."

"Fille! Maitre Fille--be quick now," called Jean Jacques' voice from the other room.

"What did I say, monsieur?" asked the Big Financier. "The mind that's received a blow must be moving--moving; the man with the many irons must be flying from bellows to bellows!"

"Come, come, there's no time to lose," came Jean Jacques' voice again, and the handle of the door of their room turned.

M. Fille's hand caught the handle. "Excuse me, Monsieur Barbille, --a minute please," he persisted almost querulously. "Be good enough to keep your manners . . . monsieur!" he added to the Financier, "if you do not wish to speak with him, there is a door"--he pointed--"which will let you into the side-street."

"What is his trouble?" asked M. Mornay.

M. Fille hesitated, then said reflectively: "He has lost his case in the Appeal Court, monsieur; also, his cousin, Auguste Charron, who has been working the Latouche farm, has flitted, leaving--"

"Leaving Jean Jacques to pay unexpected debts?"

"So, monsieur."

"Then I can be of no use, I fear," remarked M. Mornay dryly.

"Fille! Fille !" came the voice of Jean Jacques insistently from the room.

"And so I will say au revoir, Monsieur Fille," continued the Big Financier.

A moment later the great man was gone, and M. Fille was alone with the philosopher of the Manor Cartier.

"Well, well, why do you keep me waiting! Who was it in there--anyone that's concerned with my affairs?" asked Jean Jacques.

In these days he was sensitive when there was no cause, and he was credulous where he ought to be suspicious. The fact that the little man had held the door against him made him sure that M. Fille had not wished him to see the departed visitor.

"Come, out with it--who was it making fresh trouble for me?" persisted Jean Jacques.

"No one making trouble for you, my friend," answered the Clerk of the Court, "but someone who was trying to do you a good turn."

"He must have been a stranger then," returned Jean Jacques bitterly. "Who was it?"

M. Fille, after an instant's further hesitation, told him.

"Oh, him--M. Momay !" exclaimed Jean Jacques, with a look of relief, his face lighting. "That's a big man with a most capable and far-reaching mind. He takes a thing in as the ocean mouths a river. If I had had men like that to deal with all my life, what a different ledger I'd be balancing now! Descartes, Kant, Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, Hegel--he has an ear for them all. That is the intellectual side of him; and in business"--he threw up a hand--"there he views the landscape from the mountain-top. He has vision, strategy, executive. He is Napoleon and Anacreon in one. He is of the builders on the one hand, of the Illuminati and the Encyclopedistes on the other."

Even the Clerk of the Court, with his circumscribed range of thought and experience, in that moment saw Jean Jacques as he really was. Here was a man whose house of life was beginning to sway from an earthquake; who had been smitten in several deadly ways, and was about to receive buffetings beyond aught he had yet experienced, philosophizing on the tight-rope--Blondin and Plato in one. Yet sardonically piteous as it was, the incident had shown Jean Jacques with the germ of something big in him. He had recognized in M. Mornay, who could level him to the dust tomorrow financially, a master of the world's affairs, a prospector of life's fields, who would march fearlessly beyond the farthest frontiers into the unknown. Jean Jacques' admiration of the lion who could, and would, slay him was the best tribute to his own character.

M. Fille's eyes moistened as he realized it; and he knew that nothing he could say or do would make this man accommodate his actions to the hard rules of the business of life; he must for ever be applying to them conceptions of a half-developed mind.

"Quite so, quite so, Jean Jacques," M. Fille responded gently, "but"--here came a firmer note to his voice, for he had taken to heart the

lesson M. Mornay had taught him, and he was determined to do his duty now when the opportunity was in his hand--"but you have got to deal with things as they are; not as they might have been. If you cannot have the great men you have to deal with the little men like me. You have to prove yourself bigger than the rest of us by doing things better. A man doesn't fail only because of others, but also because of himself. You were warned that the chances were all against you in the case that's just been decided, yet you would go on; you were warned that your cousin, Auguste Charron, was in debt, and that his wife was mad to get away from the farm and go West, yet you would take no notice. Now he has gone, and you have to pay, and your case has gone against you in the Appellate Court besides. . . . I will tell you the truth, my friend, even if it cuts me to the heart. You have not kept your judgment in hand; you have gone ahead like a bull at a gate; and you pay the price. You listen to those who flatter, and on those who would go through fire and water for you, you turn your back--on those who would help you in your hour of trouble, in your dark day."

Jean Jacques drew himself up with a gesture, impatient, masterful and forbidding. "I have fought my fight alone in the dark day; I have not asked for any one's help," he answered. "I have wept on no man's shoulder. I have been mauled by the claws of injury and shame, and I have not flinched. I have healed my own wounds, and I wear my scars without--"

He stopped, for there came a sharp rat-tat-tat at the door which opened into the street. Somehow the commonplace, trivial interruption produced on both a strange, even startling effect. It suddenly produced in their minds a feeling of apprehension, as though there was whispered in their ears, "Something is going to happen--beware!"

Rat-tat-tat! The two men looked at each other. The same thought was in the mind of both. Jean Jacques clutched at his beard nervously, then with an effort he controlled himself. He took off his hat as though he was about to greet some important person, or to receive sentence in a court. Instinctively he felt the little book of philosophy which he always carried now in his breast-pocket, as a pietist would finger his beads in moments of fear or anxiety. The Clerk of the Court passed his thin hand over his hair, as he was wont to do in court when the Judge began his charge to the Jury, and then with an action more impulsive than was usual with him, he held out his hand, and Jean Jacques grasped it. Something was bringing them together just when it seemed that, in the storm of Jean Jacques' indignation, they were about to fall apart. M. Fille's eyes said as plainly as words could do, "Courage, my friend!"

Rat-tat-tat! Rat-tat-tat! The knocking was sharp and imperative now. The Clerk of the Court went quickly forward and threw open the door.

There stepped inside the widow of Palass Poucette. She had a letter in her hand. "M'sieu', pardon, if I intrude," she said to M. Fille; "but I heard that M'sieu' Jean Jacques was here. I have news for him."

"News!" repeated Jean Jacques, and he looked like a man who was waiting

for what he feared to hear. "They told me at the post-office that you were here. I got the letter only a quarter of an hour ago, and I thought I would go at once to the Manor Cartier and tell M'sieu' Jean Jacques what the letter says. I wanted to go to the Manor Cartier for something else as well, but I will speak of that by and by. It is the letter now."

She pulled off first one glove and then the other, still holding the letter, as though she was about to perform some ceremony. "It was a good thing I found out that M'sieu' Jean Jacques was here. It saves a four-mile drive," she remarked.

"The news--ah, nom de Dieu, the slowness of the woman--like a river going uphill!" exclaimed Jean Jacques, who was finding it hard to still the trembling of his limbs.

The widow of Palass Poucette flushed, but she had some sense in her head, and she realized that Jean Jacques was a little unbalanced at the moment. Indeed, Jean Jacques was not so old that she would have found it difficult to take a well-defined and warm interest in him, were circumstances propitious. She held out the letter to him at once. "It is from my sister in the West--at Shilah," she explained. "There is nothing in it you can't read, and most of it concerns you." Jean Jacques took the letter, but he could not bring himself to read it, for Virginie Poucette's manner was not suggestive of happy tidings. After an instant's hesitation he handed the letter to M. Fille, who pressed his lips with an air of determination, and put on his glasses.

Jean Jacques saw the face of the Clerk of the Court flush and then turn pale as he read the letter. "There, be quick!" he said before M. Fille had turned the first page.

Then the widow of Palass Poucette came to him and, in a simple harmless way she had, free from coquetry or guile, stood beside him, took his hand and held it. He seemed almost unconscious of her act, but his fingers convulsively tightened on hers; while she reflected that here was one who needed help sorely; here was a good, warm-hearted man on whom a woman could empty out affection like rain and get a good harvest. She really was as simple as a child, was Virginie Poucette, and even in her acquaintance with Sebastian Dolores, there had only been working in her the natural desire of a primitive woman to have a man saying that which would keep alive in her the things that make her sing as she toils; and certainly Virginie toiled late and early on her farm. She really was concerned for Jean Jacques. Both wife and daughter had taken flight, and he was alone and in trouble. At this moment she felt she would like to be a sister to him--she was young enough to be his daughter almost. Her heart was kind.

"Now!" said Jean Jacques at last, as the Clerk of the Court's eyes reached the end of the last page. "Now, speak! It is--it is my Zoe?"

"It is our Zoe," answered M. Fille.

"Figure de Christ, what do you wait for--she is not dead?" exclaimed

Jean Jacques with a courage which made him set his feet squarely.

The Clerk of the Court shook his head and began. "She is alive. Madame Poucette's sister saw her by chance. Zoe was on her way up the Saskatchewan River to the Peace River country with her husband. Her husband's health was bad. He had to leave the stage in the United States where he had gone after Winnipeg. The doctors said he must live the open-air life. He and Zoe were going north, to take a farm somewhere."

"Somewhere! Somewhere!" murmured Jean Jacques. The farther away from Jean Jacques the better--that is what she thinks."

"No, you are wrong, my friend," rejoined M. Fille. "She said to Madame Poucette's sister"--he held up the letter--"that when they had proved they could live without anybody's help they would come back to see you. Zoe thought that, having taken her life in her own hands, she ought to justify herself before she asked your forgiveness and a place at your table. She felt that you could only love her and be glad of her, if her man was independent of you. It is a proud and sensitive soul--but there it is!"

"It is romance, it is quixotism--ah, heart of God, what quixotism!" exclaimed Jean Jacques.

"She gets her romance and quixotism from Jean Jacques Barbille," retorted the Clerk of the Court. "She does more feeling than thinking--like you."

Jean Jacques' heart was bleeding, but he drew himself up proudly, and caught his hand away from the warm palm of Poucette's widow. As his affairs crumbled his pride grew more insistent. M. Fille had challenged his intellect--his intellect!

"My life has been a procession of practical things," he declared oracularly. "I have been a man of business who designs. I am no dreamer. I think. I act. I suffer. I have been the victim of romance, not its interpreter. Mercy of God, what has broken my life, what but romance--romance, first with one and then with another! More feeling than thinking, Maitre Fille--you say that? Why the Barbilles have ever in the past built up life on a basis of thought and action, and I have added philosophy--the science of thought and act. Jean Jacques Barbille has been the man of design and the man of action also. Don Quixote was a fool, a dreamer, but Jean Jacques is no Don Quixote. He is a man who has done things, but also he is a man who has been broken on the wheel of life. He is a man whose heart-strings have been torn--"

He had worked himself up into a fit of eloquence and revolt. He was touched by the rod of desperation, which makes the soul protest that it is right when it knows that it is wrong.

Suddenly, breaking off his speech, he threw up his hands and made for the door.

"I will fight it out alone!" he declared with rough emotion, and at the

door he turned towards them again. He looked at them both as though he would dare them to contradict him. The restless fire of his eyes seemed to dart from one to the other.

"That's the way it is," said the widow of Palass Poucette coming quickly forward to him. "It's always the way. We must fight our battles alone, but we don't have to bear the wounds alone. In the battle you are alone, but the hand to heal the wounds may be another's. You are a philosopher --well, what I speak is true, isn't it?"

Virginie had said the one thing which could have stayed the tide of Jean Jacques' pessimism and broken his cloud of gloom. She appealed to him in the tune of an old song. The years and the curses of years had not dispelled the illusion that he was a philosopher. He stopped with his hand on the door.

"That's so, without doubt that's so," he said. "You have stumbled on a truth of life, madame."

Suddenly there came into his look something of the yearning and hunger which the lonely and forsaken feel when they are not on the full tide of doing. It was as though he must have companionship, in spite of his brave announcement that he must fight his fight alone. He had been wounded in the battle, and here was one who held out the hand of healing to him. Never since his wife had left him the long lonely years ago had a woman meant anything to him except as one of a race; but in this moment here a woman had held his hand, and he could feel still the warm palm which had comforted his own agitated fingers.

Virginie Poucette saw, and she understood what was passing in his mind. Yet she did not see and understand all by any means; and it is hard to tell what further show of fire there might have been, but that the Clerk of the Court was there, saying harshly under his breath, "The huzzy! The crafty huzzy!"

The Clerk of the Court was wrong. Virginie was merely sentimental, not intriguing or deceitful; for Jean Jacques was not a widower--and she was an honest woman and genuinely tender-hearted.

"I'm coming to the Manor Cartier to-morrow," Virginie continued. "I have a rug of yours. By mistake it was left at my house by M'sieu' Dolores."

"You needn't do that. I will call at your place tomorrow for it," replied Jean Jacques almost eagerly. "I told M'sieu' Dolores to-day never to enter my house again. I didn't know it was your rug. It was giving away your property, not his own," she hurriedly explained, and her face flushed.

"That is the Spanish of it," said Jean Jacques bitterly. His eyes were being opened in many directions to-day.

M. Fille was in distress. Jean Jacques had had a warning about Sebastian Dolores, but here was another pit into which he might fall, the pit

digged by a widow, who, no doubt, would not hesitate to marry a divorced Catholic philosopher, if he could get a divorce by hook or by crook. Jean Jacques had said that he was going to Virginie Poucette's place the next day. That was as bad as it could be; yet there was this to the good, that it was to-morrow and not to-day; and who could tell what might happen between to-day and to-morrow!

A moment later the three were standing outside the office in the street. As Jean Jacques climbed into his red wagon, Virginie Poucette's eyes were attracted to the northern sky where a reddish glow appeared, and she gave an exclamation of surprise.

"That must be a fire," she said, pointing.

"A bit of pine-land probably," said M. Fille--with anxiety, however, for the red glow lay in the direction of St. Saviour's where were the Manor Cartier and Jean Jacques' mills. Maitre Fille was possessed of a superstition that all the things which threaten a man's life to wreck it, operate awhile in their many fields before they converge like an army in one field to deliver the last attack on their victim. It would not have seemed strange to him, if out of the night a voice of the unseen had said that the glow in the sky came from the Manor Cartier. This very day three things had smitten Jean Jacques, and, if three, why not four or five, or fifty!

With a strange fascination Jean Jacques' eyes were fastened on the glow. He clucked to his horses, and they started jerkily away. M. Fille and the widow Poucette said good-bye to him, but he did not hear, or if he heard, he did not heed. His look was set upon the red reflection which widened in the sky and seemed to grow nearer and nearer. The horses quickened their pace. He touched them with the whip, and they went faster. The glow increased as he left Vilray behind. He gave the horses the whip again sharply, and they broke into a gallop. Yet his eyes scarcely left the sky. The crimson glow drew him, held him, till his brain was afire also. Jean Jacques had a premonition and a conviction which was even deeper than the imagination of M. Fille.

In Vilray, behind him, the telegraph clerk was in the street shouting to someone to summon the local fire-brigade to go to St. Saviour's.

"What is it--what is it?" asked M. Fille of the telegraph clerk in marked agitation.

"It's M'sieu' Jean Jacques' flour-mill," was the reply.

Wagons and buggies and carts began to take the road to the Manor Cartier; and Maitre Fille went also with the widow of Palass Poucette.

HIS GREATEST ASSET

Jean Jacques did not go to the house of the widow of Palass Poucette "next day" as he had proposed: and she did not expect him. She had seen his flour-mill burned to the ground on the evening when they met in the office of the Clerk of the evening Court, when Jean Jacques had learned that his Zoe had gone into farther and farther places away from him. Perhaps Virginie Poucette never had shed as many tears in any whole year of her life as she did that night, not excepting the year Palass Poucette died, and left her his farm and seven horses, more or less sound, and a threshing-machine in good condition. The woman had a rare heart and there was that about Jean Jacques which made her want to help him. She had no clear idea as to how that could be done, but she had held his hand at any rate, and he had seemed the better for it. Virginie had only an objective view of things; and if she was not material, still she could best express herself through the medium of the senses.

There were others besides her who shed tears also--those who saw Jean Jacques' chief asset suddenly disappear in flame and smoke and all his other assets become thereby liabilities of a kind; and there were many who would be the poorer in the end because of it. If Jean Jacques went down, he probably would not go alone. Jean Jacques had done a good fire-insurance business over a course of years, but somehow he had not insured himself as heavily as he ought to have done; and in any case the fire-policy for the mill was not in his own hands. It was in the safe-keeping of M. Mornay at Montreal, who had warned M. Fille of the crisis in the money-master's affairs on the very day that the crisis came.

No one ever knew how it was that the mill took fire, but there was one man who had more than a shrewd suspicion, though there was no occasion for mentioning it. This was Sebastian Dolores. He had not set the mill afire. That would have been profitable from no standpoint, and he had no grudge against Jean Jacques. Why should he have a grudge? Jean Jacques' good fortune, as things were, made his own good fortune; for he ate and drank and slept and was clothed at his son-in-law's expense. But he guessed accurately who had set the mill on fire, and that it was done accidentally. He remembered that a man who smoked bad tobacco which had to be lighted over and over again, threw a burning match down after applying it to his pipe. He remembered that there was a heap of flour-bags near where the man stood when the match was thrown down; and that some loose strings for tying were also in a pile beside the bags. So it was easy for the thing to have happened if the man did not turn round after he threw the match down, but went swaying on out of the mill, and over to the Manor Cartier, and up staggering to bed; for he had been drinking potato-brandy, and he had been brought up on the mild wines of Spain! In other words, the man who threw down the lighted match which did the mischief was Sebastian Dolores himself.

He regretted it quite as much as he had ever regretted anything; and on the night of the fire there were tears in his large brown eyes which deceived the New Cure and others; though they did not deceive the widow of Palass Poucette, who had found him out, and who now had no pleasure at all in his aged gallantries. But the regret Dolores experienced would

not prevent him from doing Jean Jacques still greater injury if, and when, the chance occurred, should it be to his own advantage.

Jean Jacques shed no tears on the night that his beloved flour-mill became a blackened ruin, and his saw-mill had a narrow escape. He was like one in a dream, scarcely realizing that men were saying kind things to him; that the New Cure held his hand and spoke to him more like a brother than one whose profession it was to be good to those who suffered. In his eyes was the same half-rapt, intense, distant look which came into them when, at Vilray, he saw that red reflection in the sky over against St. Saviour's, and urged his horses onward.

The world knew that the burning of the mill was a blow to Jean Jacques, but it did not know how great and heavy the blow was. First one and then another of his friends said he was insured, and that in another six months the mill-wheel would be turning again. They said so to Jean Jacques when he stood with his eyes fixed on the burning fabric, which nothing could save; but he showed no desire to speak. He only nodded and kept on staring at the fire with that curious underglow in his eyes. Some chemistry of the soul had taken place in him in the hour when he drove to the Manor Cartier from Vilray, and it produced a strange fire, which merged into the reflection of the sky above the burning mill. Later, came things which were strange and eventful in his life, but that under-glow was for ever afterwards in his eyes. It was in singular contrast to the snapping fire which had been theirs all the days of his life till now--the snapping fire of action, will and design. It still was there when they said to him suddenly that the wind had changed, and that the flame and sparks were now blowing toward the saw-mill. Even when he gave orders, and set to work to defend the saw-mill, arranging a line of men with buckets on its roof, and so saving it, this look remained. It was something spiritual and immaterial, something, maybe, which had to do with the philosophy he had preached, thought and practised over long years. It did not disappear when at last, after midnight, everyone had gone, and the smouldering ruins of his greatest asset lay mournful in the wan light of the moon.

Kind and good friends like the Clerk of the Court and the New Cure had seen him to his bedroom at midnight, leaving him there with a promise that they would come on the morrow; and he had said goodnight evenly, and had shut the door upon them with a sort of smile. But long after they had gone, when Sebastian Dolores and Seraphe Corniche were asleep, he had got up again and left the house, to gaze at the spot where the big white mill with the red roof had been--the mill which had been there in the days of the Baron of Beaugard, and to which time had only added size and adornment. The gold-cock weathervane of the mill, so long the admiration of people living and dead, and indeed the symbol of himself, as he had been told, being so full of life and pride, courage and vigour--it lay among the ruins, a blackened relic of the Barbilles.

He had said in M. Fille's office not many hours before, "I will fight it all out alone," and here in the tragic quiet of the night he made his resolve a reality. In appearance he was not now like the "Seigneur" who sang to the sailors on the Antoine when she was fighting for the shore of

Gaspe; nevertheless there was that in him which would keep him much the same man to the end.

Indeed, as he got into bed that fateful night he said aloud: "They shall see that I am not beaten. If they give me time up there in Montreal I'll keep the place till Zoe comes back--till Zoe comes home."

As he lay and tried to sleep, he kept saying over to himself, "Till Zoe comes home."

He thought that if he could but have Zoe back, it all would not matter so much. She would keep looking at him and saying, "There's the man that never flinched when things went wrong; there's the man that was a friend to everyone."

At last a thought came to him--the key to the situation as it seemed, the one thing necessary to meet the financial situation. He would sell the biggest farm he owned, which had been to him in its importance like the flour-mill itself. He had had an offer for it that very day, and a bigger offer still a week before. It was mortgaged to within eight thousand dollars of what it could be sold for but, if he could gain time, that eight thousand dollars would build the mill again. M. Mornay, the Big Financier, would certainly see that this was his due--to get his chance to pull things straight. Yes, he would certainly sell the Barbille farm to-morrow. With this thought in his mind he went to sleep at last, and he did not wake till the sun was high.

It was a sun of the most wonderful brightness and warmth. Yesterday it would have made the Manor Cartier and all around it look like Arcady. But as it shone upon the ruins of the mill, when Jean Jacques went out into the working world again, it made so gaunt and hideous a picture that, in spite of himself, a cry of misery came from his lips.

Through all the misfortunes which had come to him the outward semblance of things had remained, and when he went in and out of the plantation of the Manor Cartier, there was no physical change in the surroundings, which betrayed the troubles and disasters fallen upon its overlord. There it all was just as it had ever been, and seeming to deny that anything had changed in the lives of those who made the place other than a dead or deserted world. When Carmen went, when Zoe fled, when his cousin Auguste Charron took his flight, when defeats at law abashed him, the house and mills, and stores and offices, and goodly trees, and well-kept yards and barns and cattle-sheds all looked the same. Thus it was that he had been fortified. In one sense his miseries had seemed unreal, because all was the same in the outward scene. It was as though it all said to him: "It is a dream that those you love have vanished, that ill-fortune sits by your fireside. One night you will go to bed thinking that wife and child have gone, that your treasury is nearly empty; and in the morning you will wake up and find your loved ones sitting in their accustomed places, and your treasury will be full to overflowing as of old."

So it was while the picture of his home scene remained unbroken and

serene; but the hideous mass of last night's holocaust was now before his eyes, with little streams of smoke rising from the cindered pile, and a hundred things with which his eyes had been familiar lay distorted, excoriated and useless. He realized with sudden completeness that a terrible change had come in his life, that a cyclone had ruined the face of his created world.

This picture did more to open up Jean Jacques' eyes to his real position in life than anything he had experienced, than any sorrow he had suffered. He had been in torment in the past, but he had refused to see that he was in Hades. Now it was as though he had been led through the streets of Hell by some dark spirit, while in vain he looked round for his old friends Kant and Hegel, Voltaire and Rousseau and Rochefoucauld, Plato and Aristotle.

While gazing at the dismal scene, however, and unheeding the idlers who poked about among the ruins, and watched him as one who was the centre of a drama, he suddenly caught sight of the gold Cock of Beaugard, which had stood on the top of the mill, in the very centre of the ruins.

Yes, there it was, the crested golden cock which had typified his own life, as he went head high, body erect, spurs giving warning, and a clarion in his throat ready to blare forth at any moment. There was the golden Cock of Beaugard in the cinders, the ashes and the dust. His chin dropped on his breast, and a cloud like a fog on the coast of Gaspe settled round him. Yet even as his head drooped, something else happened--one of those trivial things which yet may be the pivot of great things. A cock crowed--almost in his very ear, it seemed. He lifted his head quickly, and a superstitious look flashed into his face. His eyes fastened on the burnished head of the Cock among the ruins. To his excited imagination it was as though the ancient symbol of the Barbilles had spoken to him in its own language of good cheer and defiance. Yes, there it was, half covered by the ruins, but its head was erect in the midst of fire and disaster. Brought low, it was still alert above the wreckage. The child, the dreamer, the optimist, the egoist, and the man alive in Jean Jacques sprang into vigour again. It was as though the Cock of Beaugard had really summoned him to action, and the crowing had not been that of a barnyard bantam not a hundred feet away from him. Jean Jacques' head went up too.

"Me--I am what I always was, nothing can change me," he exclaimed defiantly. "I will sell the Barbille farm and build the mill again."

So it was that by hook or by crook, and because the Big Financier had more heart than he even acknowledged to his own wife, Jean Jacques did sell the Barbille farm, and got in cash--in good hard cash--eight thousand dollars after the mortgage was paid. M. Mornay was even willing to take the inadequate indemnity of the insurance policy on the mill, and lose the rest, in order that Jean Jacques should have the eight thousand dollars to rebuild. This he did because Jean Jacques showed such amazing courage after the burning of the mill, and spread himself out in a greater activity than his career had yet shown. He shaved through this financial crisis, in spite of the blow he had received by the loss of his

lawsuits, the flitting of his cousin, Auguste Charron, and the farm debts of this same cousin. It all meant a series of manipulations made possible by the apparent confidence reposed in him by M. Mornay.

On the day he sold his farm he was by no means out of danger of absolute insolvency--he was in fact ruined; but he was not yet the victim of those processes which would make him legally insolvent. The vultures were hovering, but they had not yet swooped, and there was the Manor saw-mill going night and day; for by the strangest good luck Jean Jacques received an order for M. Mornay's new railway (Judge Carcasson was behind that) which would keep his saw-mill working twenty-four hours in the day for six months.

"I like his pluck, but still, ten to one, he loses," remarked M. Mornay to Judge Carcasson. "He is an unlucky man, and I agree with Napoleon that you oughtn't to be partner with an unlucky man."

"Yet you have had to do with Monsieur Jean Jacques," responded the aged Judge.

M. Mornay nodded indulgently.

"Yes, without risk, up to the burning of the mill. Now I take my chances, simply because I'm a fool too, in spite of all the wisdom I see in history and in life's experiences. I ought to have closed him up, but I've let him go on, you see."

"You will not regret it," remarked the Judge. "He really is worth it."

"But I think I will regret it financially. I think that this is the last flare of the ambition and energy of your Jean Jacques. That often happens--a man summons up all his reserves for one last effort. It's partly pride, partly the undefeated thing in him, partly the gambling spirit which seizes men when nothing is left but one great spectacular success or else be blotted out. That's the case with your philosopher; and I'm not sure that I won't lose twenty thousand dollars by him yet."

"You've lost more with less justification," retorted the Judge, who, in his ninetieth year, was still as alive as his friend at sixty.

M. Mornay waved a hand in acknowledgment, and rolled his cigar from corner to corner of his mouth. "Oh, I've lost a lot more in my time, Judge, but with a squint in my eye! But I'm doing this with no astigmatism. I've got the focus."

The aged Judge gave a conciliatory murmur--he had a fine persuasive voice.

"You would never be sorry for what you have done if you had known his daughter--his Zoe. It's the thought of her that keeps him going. He wants the place to be just as she left it when she comes back."

"Well, well, let's hope it will. I'm giving him a chance," replied M. Mornay with his wineglass raised. "He's got eight thousand dollars in cash to build his mill again; and I hope he'll keep a tight hand on it

till the mill is up."

Keep a tight hand on it?

That is what Jean Jacques meant to do; but if a man wants to keep a tight hand on money he should not carry it about in his pocket in cold, hard cash. It was a foolish whim of Jean Jacques that he must have the eight thousand dollars in cash--in hundred-dollar bills--and not in the form of a cheque; but there was something childlike in him. When, as he thought, he had saved himself from complete ruin, he wanted to keep and gloat over the trophy of victory, and his trophy was the eight thousand dollars got from the Barbille farm. He would have to pay out two thousand dollars in cash to the contractors for the rebuilding of the mill at once,--they were more than usually cautious--but he would have six thousand left, which he would put in the bank after he had let people see that he was well fortified with cash.

The child in him liked the idea of pulling out of his pocket a few thousand dollars in hundred-dollar bills. He had always carried a good deal of money loose in his pocket, and now that his resources were so limited he would still make a gallant show. After a week or two he would deposit six thousand dollars in the bank; but he was so eager to begin building the mill, that he paid over the stipulated two thousand dollars to the contractors on the very day he received the eight thousand. A few days later the remaining six thousand were housed in a cupboard with an iron door in the wall of his office at the Manor Cartier.

"There, that will keep me in heart and promise," said Jean Jacques as he turned the key in the lock.

CHAPTER XVIII

JEAN JACQUES HAS AN OFFER

The day after Jean Jacques had got a new lease of life and become his own banker, he treated himself to one of those interludes of pleasure from which he had emerged in the past like a hermit from his cave. He sat on the hill above his lime-kilns, reading the little hand-book of philosophy which had played so big a part in his life. Whatever else had disturbed his mind and diverted him from his course, nothing had weaned him from this obsession. He still interlarded all his conversation with quotations from brilliant poseurs like Chateaubriand and Rochefoucauld, and from missionaries of thought like Hume and Hegel.

His real joy, however, was in withdrawing for what might be called a seance of meditation from the world's business. Some men make celebration in wine, sport and adventure; but Jean Jacques made it in flooding his mind with streams of human thought which often tried to run uphill, which were frequently choked with weeds, but still were like the pool of Siloam to his vain mind. They bathed that vain mind in the

illusion that it could see into the secret springs of experience.

So, on as bright a day as ever the New World offered, Jean Jacques sat reciting to himself a spectacular bit of logic from one of his idols, wedged between a piece of Aristotle quartz and Plato marble. The sound of it was good in his ears. He mouthed it as greedily and happily as though he was not sitting on the edge of a volcano instead of the moss-grown limestone on a hill above his own manor.

"The course of events in the life of a man, whatever their gravity or levity, are only to be valued and measured by the value and measure of his own soul. Thus, what in its own intrinsic origin and material should in all outer reason be a tragedy, does not of itself shake the foundations or make a fissure in the superstructure. Again--"

Thus his oracle, but Jean Jacques' voice suddenly died down, for, as he sat there, the face of a woman made a vivid call of recognition. He slowly awakened from his self-hypnotism, to hear a woman speaking to him; to see two dark eyes looking at him from under heavy black brows with bright, intent friendliness.

"They said at the Manor you had come this way, so I thought I'd not have my drive for nothing, and here I am. I wanted to say something to you, M'sieu' Jean Jacques."

It was the widow of Palass Poucette. She looked very fresh and friendly indeed, and she was the very acme of neatness. If she was not handsome, she certainly had a true and sweet comeliness of her own, due to the deep rose-colour of her cheeks, the ivory whiteness round the lustrous brown eyes, the regular shining teeth which showed so much when she smiled, and the look half laughing, half sentimental which dominated all.

Before she had finished speaking Jean Jacques was on his feet with his hat off. Somehow she seemed to be a part of that abstraction, that intoxication, in which he had just been drowning his accumulated anxieties. Not that Virginie Poucette was logical or philosophical, or a child of thought, for she was wholly the opposite-practical, sensuous, emotional, a child of nature and of Eve. But neither was Jean Jacques a real child of thought, though he made unconscious pretence of it. He also was a child of nature--and Adam. He thought he had the courage of his convictions, but it was only the courage of his emotions. His philosophy was but the bent or inclination of a mind with a capacity to feel things rather than to think them. He had feeling, the first essential of the philosopher, but there he stayed, an undeveloped chrysalis.

His look was abstracted still as he took the hand of the widow of Palass Poucette; but he spoke cheerfully. "It is a pleasure, madame, to welcome you among my friends," he said.

He made a little flourish with the book which had so long been his bosom friend, and added: "But I hope you are in no trouble that you come to me --so many come to me in their troubles," he continued with an air of

satisfaction.

"Come to you--why, you have enough troubles of your own!" she made answer. "It's because you have your own troubles that I'm here."

"Why you are here," he remarked vaguely.

There was something very direct and childlike in Virginie Poucette. She could not pretend; she wore her heart on her sleeve. She travelled a long distance in a little while.

"I've got no trouble myself," she responded. "But, yes, I have," she added. "I've got one trouble--it's yours. It's that you've been having hard times--the flour-mill, your cousin Auguste Charron, the lawsuits, and all the rest. They say at Vilray that you have all you can do to keep out of the Bankruptcy Court, and that--"

Jean Jacques started, flushed, and seemed about to get angry; but she put things right at once.

"People talk more than they know, but there's always some fire where there's smoke," she hastened to explain. "Besides, your father-in-law babbles more than is good for him or for you. I thought at first that M. Dolores was a first-class kind of man, that he had had hard times too, and I let him come and see me; but I found him out, and that was the end of it, you may be sure. If you like him, I don't want to say anything more, but I'm sure that he's no real friend to you-or to anybody. If that man went to confession--but there, that's not what I've come for. I've come to say to you that I never felt so sorry for anyone in my life as I do for you. I cried all night after your beautiful mill was burned down. You were coming to see me next day--you remember what you said in M. Fille's office--but of course you couldn't. Of course, there was no reason why you should come to see me really--I've 'only got two hundred acres and the house. It's a good house, though--Palass saw to that--and it's insured; but still I know you'd have come just the same if I'd had only two acres. I know. There's hosts of people you've been good to here, and they're sorry for you; and I'm sorrier than any, for I'm alone, and you're alone, too, except for the old Dolores, and he's no good to either of us--mark my words, no good to you! I'm sorry for you, M'sieu' Jean Jacques, and I've come to say that I'm ready to lend you two thousand dollars, if that's any help. I could make it more if I had time; but sometimes money on the spot is worth a lot more than what's just crawling to you--snailing along while you eat your heart out. Two thousand dollars is two thousand dollars--I know what it's worth to me, though it mayn't be much to you; but I didn't earn it. It belonged to a first-class man, and he worked for it, and he died and left it to me. It's not come easy, go easy with me. I like to feel I've got two thousand cash without having to mortgage for it. But it belonged to a number-one man, a man of brains--I've got no brains, only some sense --and I want another good man to use it and make the world easier for himself."

It was a long speech, and she delivered it in little gasps of oratory

which were brightened by her wonderfully kind smile and the heart--not to say sentiment--which showed in her face. The sentiment, however, did not prejudice Jean Jacques against her, for he was a sentimentalist himself. His feelings were very quick, and before she had spoken fifty words the underglow of his eyes was flooded by something which might have been mistaken for tears. It was, however, only the moisture of gratitude and the soul's good feeling.

"Well there, well there," he said when she had finished, "I've never had anything like this in my life before. It's the biggest thing in the art of being a neighbour I've ever seen. You've only been in the parish three years, and yet you've shown me a confidence immense, inspiring! It is as the Greek philosopher said, 'To conceive the human mind aright is the greatest gift from the gods.' And to you, who never read a line of philosophy, without doubt, you have done the thing that is greatest. It says, 'I teach neighbourliness and life's exchange.' Madame, your house ought to be called Neighbourhood House. It is the epitome of the spirit, it is the shrine of--"

He was working himself up to a point where he could forget all the things that trouble humanity, in the inebriation of an idealistic soul which had a casing of passion, but the passion of the mind and not of the body; for Jean Jacques had not a sensual drift in his organism. If there had been a sensual drift, probably Carmen would still have been the lady of his manor, and he would still have been a magnate and not a potential bankrupt; for in her way Carmen had been a kind of balance to his judgment in the business of life, in spite of her own material and (at the very last) sensual strain. It was a godsend to Jean Jacques to have such an inspiration as Virginie Poucette had given him. He could not in these days, somehow, get the fires of his soul lighted, as he was wont to do in the old times, and he loved talking--how he loved talking of great things! He was really going hard, galloping strong, when Virginie interrupted him, first by an exclamation, then, as insistently he repeated the words, "It is the epitome of the spirit, the shrine of--"

She put out a hand, interrupting him, and said: "Yes, yes, M'sieu' Jean Jacques, that's as good as Moliere, I s'pose, or the Archbishop at Quebec, but are you going to take it, the two thousand dollars? I made a long speech, I know, but that was to tell you why I come with the money"--she drew out a pocketbook--"with the order on my lawyer to hand the cash over to you. As a woman I had to explain to you, there being lots of ideas about what a woman should do and what she shouldn't do; but there's nothing at all for you to explain, and Mere Langlois and a lot of others would think I'm vain enough now without your compliments. I'm a neighbour if you like, and I offer you a loan. Will you take it--that's all?"

He held out his hand in silence and took the paper from her. Putting his head a little on one side, he read it. At first he seemed hardly to get the formal language clear in his mind; however, or maybe his mind was still away in that abstraction into which he had whisked it when he began his reply to her fine offer; but he read it out aloud, first quickly, then very slowly, and he looked at the signature with a deeply meditative

air.

"Virginie Poucette--that's a good name," he remarked; "and also good for two thousand dollars!" He paused to smile contentedly over his own joke. "And good for a great deal more than that too," he added with a nod.

"Yes, ten times as much as that," she responded quickly, her eyes fixed on his face. She scarcely knew herself what she was thinking when she said it; but most people who read this history will think she was hinting that her assets might be united with his, and so enable him to wipe out his liabilities and do a good deal more besides. Yet, how could that be, since Carmen Dolores was still his wife if she was alive; and also they both were Catholics, and Catholics did not recognize divorce!

Truth is, Virginie Poucette's mind did not define her feelings at all clearly, or express exactly what she wanted. Her actions said one thing certainly; but if the question had been put to her, whether she was doing this thing because of a wish to take the place of Carmen Dolores in Jean Jacques' life she would have said no at once. She had not come to that --yet. She was simply moved by a sentiment of pity for Jean Jacques, and as she had no child, or husband, or sister, or brother, or father, or mother, but only relatives who tried to impose upon her, she needed an objective for the emotions of her nature, for the overflow of her unused affection and her unsatisfied maternal spirit. Here, then, was the most obvious opportunity--a man in trouble who had not deserved the bitter bad luck which had come to him. Even old Mere Langlois in the market-place at Vilray had admitted that, and had said the same later on in Virginie's home.

For an instant Jean Jacques was fascinated by the sudden prospect which opened out before him. If he asked her, this woman would probably loan him five thousand dollars--and she had mentioned nothing about security!

"What security do you want?" he asked in a husky voice.

"Security? I don't understand about that," she replied. "I'd not offer you the money if I didn't think you were an honest man, and an honest man would pay me back. A dishonest man wouldn't pay me back, security or no security."

"He'd have to pay you back if the security was right to start with," Jean Jacques insisted. "But you don't want security, because you think I'm an honest man! Well, for sure you're right. I am honest. I never took a cent that wasn't mine; but that's not everything. If you lend you ought to have security. I've lost a good deal from not having enough security at the start. You are willing to lend me money without security--that's enough to make me feel thirty again, and I'm fifty--I'm fifty," he added, as though with an attempt to show her that she could not think of him in any emotional way; though the day when his flour-mill was burned he had felt the touch of her fingers comforting and thrilling.

"You think Jean Jacques Barbille's word as good as his bond?" he continued. "So it is; but I'm going to pull this thing through alone."

That's what I said to you and Maitre Fille at his office. I meant it too
--help of God, it is the truth!"

He had forgotten that if M. Mornay had not made it easy for him, and had not refrained from insisting on his pound of flesh, he would now be insolvent and with no roof over him. Like many another man Jean Jacques was the occasional slave of formula, and also the victim of phases of his own temperament. In truth he had not realized how big a thing M. Mornay had done for him. He had accepted the chance given him as the tribute to his own courage and enterprise and integrity, and as though it was to the advantage of his greatest creditor to give him another start; though in reality it had made no difference to the Big Financier, who knew his man and, with wide-open eyes, did what he had done.

Virginie was not subtle. She did not understand, was never satisfied with allusions, and she had no gift for catching the drift of things. She could endure no peradventure in her conversation. She wanted plain speaking and to be literally sure.

"Are you going to take it?" she asked abruptly.

He could not bear to be checked in his course. He waved a hand and smiled at her. Then his eyes seemed to travel away into the distance, the look of the dreamer in them; but behind all was that strange, ruddy underglow of revelation which kept emerging from shadows, retreating and emerging, yet always there now, in much or in little, since the burning of the mill.

"I've lent a good deal of money without security in my time," he reflected, "but the only people who ever paid me back were a deaf and dumb man and a flyaway--a woman that was tired of selling herself, and started straight and right with the money I lent her. She had been the wife of a man who studied with me at Laval. She paid me back every penny, too, year by year for five years. The rest I lent money to never paid; but they paid, the dummy and the harlot that was, they paid! But they paid for the rest also! If I had refused these two because of the others, I'd not be fit to visit at Neighbourhood House where Virginie Poucette lives."

He looked closely at the order she had given him again, as though to let it sink in his mind and be registered for ever. "I'm going to do without any further use of your two thousand dollars," he continued cheer fully. "It has done its work. You've lent it to me, I've used it"--he put the hand holding it on his breast--"and I'm paying it back to you, but without interest." He gave the order to her.

"I don't see what you mean," she said helplessly, and she looked at the paper, as though it had undergone some change while it was in his hand.

"That you would lend it me is worth ten times two thousand to me, Virginie Poucette," he explained. "It gives me, not a kick from behind --I've not had much else lately--but it holds a light in front of me. It calls me. It says, 'March on, Jean Jacques--climb the mountain.'

It summons me to dispose my forces for the campaign which will restore the Manor Cartier to what it has ever been since the days of the Baron of Beaugard. It quickens the blood at my heart. It restores--"

Virginie would not allow him to go on. "You won't let me help you? Suppose I do lose the money--I didn't earn it; it was earned by Palass Poucette, and he'd understand, if he knew. I can live without the money, if I have to, but you would pay it back, I know. You oughtn't to take any extra risks. If your daughter should come back and not find you here, if she returned to the Manor Cartier, and--"

He made an insistent gesture. "Hush! Be still, my friend--as good a friend as a man could have. If my Zoe came back I'd like to feel--I'd like to feel that I had saved things alone; that no woman's money made me safe. If Zoe or if--"

He was going to say, "If Carmen came back," for his mind was moving in past scenes; but he stopped short and looked around helplessly. Then presently, as though by an effort, he added with a bravura note in his voice:

"The world has been full of trouble for a long time, but there have always been men to say to trouble, 'I am master, I have the mind to get above it all.' Well, I am one of them."

There was no note of vanity or bombast in his voice as he said this, and in his eyes that new underglow deepened and shone. Perhaps in this instant he saw more of his future than he would speak of to anyone on earth. Perhaps prevision was given him, and it was as the Big Financier had said to Maitre Fille, that his philosophy was now, at the last, to be of use to him. When his wife had betrayed him, and his wife and child had left him, he had said, "Moi je suis philosophe!" but he was a man of wealth in those days, and money soothes hurts of that kind in rare degree. Would he still say, whatever was yet to come, that he was a philosopher?

"Well, I've done what I thought would help you, and I can't say more than that," Virginie remarked with a sigh, and there was despondency in her eyes. Her face became flushed, her bosom showed agitation; she looked at him as she had done in Maitre Fille's office, and a wave of feeling passed over him now, as it did then, and he remembered, in response to her look, the thrill of his fingers in her palm. His face now flushed also, and he had an impulse to ask her to sit down beside him. He put it away from him, however, for the present, at any rate--who could tell what to-morrow might bring forth!--and then he held out his hand to her. His voice shook a little when he spoke; but it cleared, and began to ring, before he had said a dozen words.

"I'll never forget what you've said and done this morning, Virginie Poucette," he declared; "and if I break the back of the trouble that's in my way, and come out cock o' the walk again"--the gold Cock of Beaugard in the ruins near and the clarion of the bantam of his barnyard were in his mind and ears--"it'll be partly because of you. I hug that thought

to me."

"I could do a good deal more than that," she ventured, with a tremulous voice, and then she took her warm hand from his nervous grasp, and turned sharply into the path which led back towards the Manor. She did not turn around, and she walked quickly away.

There was confusion in her eyes and in her mind. It would take some time to make the confusion into order, and she was now hot, now cold, in all her frame, when at last she climbed into her wagon.

This physical unrest imparted itself to all she did that day. First her horses were driven almost at a gallop; then they were held down to a slow walk; then they were stopped altogether, and she sat in the shade of the trees on the road to her home, pondering--whispering to herself and pondering.

As her horses were at a standstill she saw a wagon approaching. Instantly she touched her pair with the whip, and moved on. Before the approaching wagon came alongside, she knew from the grey and the darkbrown horses who was driving them, and she made a strong effort for composure. She succeeded indifferently, but her friend, Mere Langlois, did not notice this fact as her wagon drew near. There was excitement in Mere Langlois' face.

"There's been a shindy at the 'Red Eagle' tavern," she said. "That father-in-law of M'sieu' Jean Jacques and Rocque Valescure, the landlord, they got at each other's throats. Dolores hit Valescure on the head with a bottle."

"He didn't kill Valescure, did he?"

"Not that--no. But Valescure is hurt bad--as bad. It was six to one and half a dozen to the other--both no good at all. But of course they'll arrest the old man--your great friend! He'll not give you any more fur-robies, that's sure. He got away from the tavern, though, and he's hiding somewhere. M'sieu' Jean Jacques can't protect him now; he isn't what he once was in the parish. He's done for, and old Dolores will have to go to trial. They'll make it hot for him when they catch him. No more fur-robies from your Spanish friend, Virginie ! You'll have to look somewhere else for your beaux, though to be sure there are enough that'd be glad to get you with that farm of yours, and your thrifty ways, if you keep your character."

Virginie was quite quiet now. The asperity and suggestiveness of the other's speech produced a cooling effect upon her.

"Better hurry, Mere Langlois, or everybody won't hear your story before sundown. If your throat gets tired, there's Brown's Bronchial Troches--" She pointed to an advertisement on the fence near by. "M. Fille's cook says they cure a rasping throat."

With that shot, Virginie Poucette whipped up her horses and drove on.

She did not hear what Mere Langlois called after her, for Mere Langlois had been slow to recover from the unexpected violence dealt by one whom she had always bullied.

"Poor Jean Jacques!" said Virginie Poucette to herself as her horses ate up the ground. "That's another bit of bad luck. He'll not sleep to-night. Ah, the poor Jean Jacques--and all alone--not a hand to hold; no one to rumple that shaggy head of his or pat him on the back! His wife and Ma'm'selle Zoe, they didn't know a good thing when they had it. No, he'll not sleep to-night-ah, my dear Jean Jacques!"

CHAPTER XIX

SEBASTIAN DOLORES DOES NOT SLEEP

But Jean Jacques did sleep well that night; though it would have been better for him if he had not done so. The contractor's workmen had arrived in the early afternoon, he had seen the first ton of debris removed from the ruins of the historic mill, and it was crowned by the gold Cock of Beaugard, all grimy with the fire, but jaunty as of yore. The cheerfulness of the workmen, who sang gaily an old chanson of mill-life as they tugged at the timbers and stones, gave a fillip to the spirits of Jean Jacques, to whom had come a red-letter day.

Like Mirza on the high hill of Bagdad he had had his philosophic meditations; his good talk with Virginie Poucette had followed; and the woman of her lingered in the feeling of his hand all day, as something kind and homelike and true. Also in the evening had come M. Fille, who brought him a message from Judge Carcasson, that he must make the world sing for himself again.

Contrary to what Mere Langlois had thought, he had not been perturbed by the parish noise about the savage incident at "The Red Eagle," and the desperate affair which would cause the arrest of his father-in-law. He was at last well inclined to be rid of Sebastian Dolores, who had ceased to be a comfort to him, and who brought him hateful and not kindly memories of his lost women, and the happy hours of the past they represented.

M. Fille had come to the Manor in much alarm, lest the news of the miserable episode at "The Red Eagle" should bring Jean Jacques down again to the depths. He was infinitely relieved, however, to find that the lord of the Manor Cartier seemed only to be grateful that Sebastian Dolores did not return, and nodded emphatically when M. Fille remarked that perhaps it would be just as well if he never did return.

As M. Fille sat with his host at the table in the sunset light, Jean Jacques seemed quieter and steadier of body and mind than he had been for a long, long time. He even drank three glasses of the cordial which Mere Langlois had left for him, with the idea that it might comfort him when

he got the bad news about Sebastian Dolores; and parting with M. Fille at the door, he waved a hand and said: "Well, good-night, master of the laws. Safe journey! I'm off to bed, and I'll sleep without rocking, that's very sure and sweet."

He stood and waved his hand several times to M. Fille--till he was out of sight indeed; and the Clerk of the Court smiled to himself long afterwards, recalling Jean Jacques' cheerful face as he had seen it at their parting in the gathering dusk. As for Jean Jacques, when he locked up the house at ten o'clock, with Dolores still absent, he had the air of a man from whose shoulders great weights had fallen.

"Now I've shut the door on him, it'll stay shut," he said firmly. "Let him go back to work. He's no good here to me, to himself, or to anyone. And that business of the fur-robe and Virginie Poucette--ah, that!"

He shook his head angrily, then seeing the bottle of cordial still uncorked on the sideboard, he poured some out and drank it very slowly, till his eyes were on the ceiling above him and every drop had gone home. Presently, with the bedroom lamp in his hand, he went upstairs, humming to himself the chanson the workmen had sung that afternoon as they raised again the walls of the mill:

"Distaff of flax flowing behind her
Margatton goes to the mill
On the old grey ass she goes,
The flour of love it will blind her
Ah, the grist the devil will grind her,
When Margatton goes to the mill!
On the old grey ass she goes,
And the old grey ass, he knows!"

He liked the sound of his own voice this night of his Reconstruction Period--or such it seemed to him; and he thought that no one heard his singing save himself. There, however, he was mistaken. Someone was hidden in the house--in the big kitchen-bunk which served as a bed or a seat, as needed. This someone had stolen in while Jean Jacques and M. Fille were at supper. His name was Dolores, and he had a horse just over the hill near by, to serve him when his work was done, and he could get away.

The constables of Vilray had twice visited the Manor to arrest him that day, but they had been led in another direction by a clue which he had provided; and afterwards in the dusk he had doubled back and hid himself under Jean Jacques' roof. He had very important business at the Manor Cartier.

Jean Jacques' voice ceased one song, and then, after a silence, it took up another, not so melodious. Sebastian Dolores had impatiently waited for this later "musicale" to begin--he had heard it often before; and when it was at last a regular succession of nasal explosions, he crawled out and began to do the business which had brought him to the Manor Cartier.

He did it all alone and with much skill; for when he was an anarchist in Spain, those long years ago, he had learned how to use tools with expert understanding. Of late, Spain had been much in his mind. He wanted to go back there. Nostalgia had possessed him ever since he had come again to the Manor Cartier after Zoe had left. He thought much of Spain, and but little of his daughter. Memory of her was only poignant, in so far as it was associated with the days preceding the wreck of the Antoine. He had had far more than enough of the respectable working life of the New World; but there never was sufficient money to take him back to Europe, even were it safe to go. Of late, however, he felt sure that he might venture, if he could only get cash for the journey. He wanted to drift back to the idleness and adventure and the "easy money" of the old anarchist days in Cadiz and Madrid. He was sick for the patio and the plaza, for the bull-fight, for the siesta in the sun, for the lazy glamour of the gardens and the red wine of Valladolid, for the redolent cigarette of the roadside tavern. This cold iron land had spoiled him, and he would strive to get himself home again before it was too late. In Spain there would always be some woman whom he could cajole; some comrade whom he could betray; some priest whom he could deceive, whose pocket he could empty by the recital of his troubles. But if, peradventure, he returned to Spain with money to spare in his pocket, how easy indeed it would all be, and how happy he would find himself amid old surroundings and old friends!

The way had suddenly opened up to him when Jean Jacques had brought home in hard cash, and had locked away in the iron-doored cupboard in the officewall, his last, his cherished, eight thousand dollars. Six thousand of that eight were still left, and it was concern for this six thousand which had brought Dolores to the Manor this night when Jean Jacques snored so loudly. The events of the day at "The Red Eagle" had brought things to a crisis in the affairs of Carmen's father. It was a foolish business that at the tavern--so, at any rate, he thought, when it was all over, and he was awake to the fact that he must fly or go to jail. From the time he had, with a bottle of gin, laid Valescure low, Spain was the word which went ringing through his head, and the way to Spain was by the Six Thousand Dollar Route, the New World terminal of which was the cupboard in the wall at the Manor Cartier.

Little cared Sebastian Dolores that the theft of the money would mean the end of all things for Jean Jacques Barbille--for his own daughter's husband. He was thinking of himself, as he had always done.

He worked for two whole hours before he succeeded in quietly forcing open the iron door in the wall; but it was done at last. Curiously enough, Jean Jacques' snoring stopped on the instant that Sebastian Dolores' fingers clutched the money; but it began cheerfully again when the door in the wall closed once more.

Five minutes after Dolores had thrust the six thousand dollars into his pocket, his horse was galloping away over the hills towards the River St. Lawrence. If he had luck, he would reach it by the morning. As it happened, he had the luck. Behind him, in the Manor Cartier, the man

who had had no luck and much philosophy, snored on till morning in unconscious content.

It was a whole day before Jean Jacques discovered his loss. When he had finished his lonely supper the next evening, he went to the cupboard in his office to cheer himself with the sight of the six thousand dollars. He felt that he must revive his spirits. They had been drooping all day, he knew not why.

When he saw the empty pigeon-hole in the cupboard, his sight swam. It was some time before it cleared, but, when it did, and he knew beyond peradventure the crushing, everlasting truth, not a sound escaped him. His heart stood still. His face filled with a panic confusion. He seemed like one bereft of understanding.

CHAPTER XX

"AU 'VOIR, M'SIEU' JEAN JACQUES"

It is seldom that Justice travels as swiftly as Crime, and it is also seldom that the luck is more with the law than with the criminal. It took the parish of St. Saviour's so long to make up its mind who stole Jean Jacques' six thousand dollars, that when the hounds got the scent at last the quarry had reached the water--in other words, Sebastian Dolores had achieved the St. Lawrence. The criminal had had near a day's start before a telegram was sent to the police at Montreal, Quebec, and other places to look out for the picaroon who had left his mark on the parish of St. Saviour's. The telegram would not even then have been sent had it not been for M. Fille, who, suspecting Sebastian Dolores, still refrained from instant action. This he did because he thought Jean Jacques would not wish his beloved Zoe's grandfather sent to prison. But when other people at last declared that it must have been Dolores, M. Fille insisted on telegrams being sent by the magistrate at Vilray without Jean Jacques' consent. He had even urged the magistrate to "rush" the wire, because it came home to him with stunning force that, if the money was not recovered, Jean Jacques would be a beggar. It was better to jail the father-in-law, than for the little money-master to take to the road a pauper, or stay on at St. Saviour's as an underling where he had been overlord.

As for Jean Jacques, in his heart of hearts he knew who had robbed him. He realized that it was one of the radii of the comedy-tragedy which began on the Antoine, so many years before; and it had settled in his mind at last that Sebastian Dolores was but part of the dark machinery of fate, and that what was now had to be.

For one whole day after the robbery he was like a man paralysed--dispossessed of active being; but when his creditors began to swarm, when M. Mornay sent his man of business down to foreclose his mortgages before others could take action, Jean Jacques waked from his apathy. He began

an imitation of his old restlessness, and made essay again to pull the strings of his affairs. They were, however, so confused that a pull at one string tangled them all.

When the constables and others came to him, and said that they were on the trail of the robber, and that the rogue would be caught, he nodded his head encouragingly; but he was sure in his own mind that the flight of Dolores would be as successful as that of Carmen and Zoe.

This is the way he put it: "That man--we will just miss finding him, as I missed Zoe at the railroad junction when she went away, as I missed catching Carmen at St. Chrisanthine. When you are at the shore, he will be on the river; when you are getting into the train, he will be getting out. It is the custom of the family. At Bordeaux, the Spanish detectives were on the shore gnashing their teeth, when he was a hundred yards away at sea on the Antoine. They missed him like that; and we'll miss him too. What is the good! It was not his fault--that was the way of his bringing up beyond there at Cadiz, where they think more of a toreador than of John the Baptist. It was my fault. I ought to have banked the money. I ought not to have kept it to look at like a gamin with his marbles. There it was in the wall; and there was Dolores a long way from home and wanting to get back. He found the way by a gift of the tools; and I wish I had the same gift now; for I've got no other gift that'll earn anything for me."

These were the last dark or pessimistic words spoken at St. Saviour's by Jean Jacques; and they were said to the Clerk of the Court, who could not deny the truth of them; but he wrung the hand of Jean Jacques nevertheless, and would not leave him night or day. M. Fille was like a little cruiser protecting a fort when gunboats swarm near, not daring to attack till their battleship heaves in sight. The battleship was the Big Financier, who saw that a wreck was now inevitable, and was only concerned that there should be a fair distribution of the assets. That meant, of course, that he should be served first, and then that those below the salt should get a share.

Revelation after revelation had been Jean Jacques' lot of late years, but the final revelation of his own impotence was overwhelming. When he began to stir about among his affairs, he was faced by the fact that the law stood in his way. He realized with inward horror his shattered egotism and natural vanity; he saw that he might just as well be in jail; that he had no freedom; that he could do nothing at all in regard to anything he owned; that he was, in effect, a prisoner of war where he had been the general commanding an army.

Yet the old pride intervened, and it was associated with some innate nobility; for from the hour in which it was known that Sebastian Dolores had escaped in a steamer bound for France, and could not be overhauled, and the chances were that he would never have to yield up the six thousand dollars, Jean Jacques bustled about cheerfully, and as though he had still great affairs of business to order and regulate. It was a make-believe which few treated with scorn. Even the workmen at the mill humoured him, as he came several times every day to inspect the work of

rebuilding; and they took his orders, though they did not carry them out. No one really carried out any of his orders except Seraphe Corniche, who, weeping from morning till night, protested that there never was so good a man as M'sieu' Jean Jacques; and she cooked his favourite dishes, giving him no peace until he had eaten them.

The days, the weeks went on, with Jean Jacques growing thinner and thinner, but going about with his head up like the gold Cock of Beaugard, and even crowing now and then, as he had done of yore. He faced the inevitable with something of his old smiling volubility; treating nothing of his disaster as though it really existed; signing off this asset and that; disposing of this thing and that; stripping himself bare of all the properties on his life's stage, in such a manner as might have been his had he been receiving gifts and not yielding up all he owned. He chatted as his belongings were, figuratively speaking, being carried away--as though they were mechanical, formal things to be done as he had done them every day of a fairly long life; as a clerk would check off the boxes or parcels carried past him by the porters. M. Fille could hardly bear to see him in this mood, and the New Cure hovered round him with a mournful and harmlessly deceptive kindness. But the end had to come, and practically all the parish was present when it came. That was on the day when the contents of the Manor were sold at auction by order of the Court. One thing Jean Jacques refused absolutely and irrevocably to do from the first--refused it at last in anger and even with an oath: he would not go through the Bankruptcy Court. No persuasion had any effect. The very suggestion seemed to smirch his honour. His lawyer pleaded with him, said he would be able to save something out of the wreck, and that his creditors would be willing that he should take advantage of the privileges of that court; but he only said in reply:

"Thank you, thank you altogether, monsieur, but it is impossible--'non possumus, non possumus, my son,' as the Pope said to Bonaparte. I owe and I will pay what I can; and what I can't pay now I will try to pay in the future, by the cent, by the dollar, till all is paid to the last copper. It is the way with the Barbilles. They have paid their way and their debts in honour, and it is in the bond with all the Barbilles of the past that I do as they do. If I can't do it, then that I have tried to do it will be endorsed on the foot of the bill."

No one could move him, not even Judge Carcasson, who from his armchair in Montreal wrote a feeble-handed letter begging him to believe that it was "well within his rights as a gentleman"--this he put in at the request of M. Mornay--to take advantage of the privileges of the Bankruptcy Court. Even then Jean Jacques had only a few moments' hesitation. What the Judge said made a deep impression; but he had determined to drink the cup of his misfortune to the dregs. He was set upon complete renunciation; on going forth like a pilgrim from the place of his troubles and sorrows, taking no gifts, no mercies save those which heaven accorded him.

When the day of the auction came everything went. Even his best suit of clothes was sold to a blacksmith, while his fur-coat was bought by a horse-doctor for fifteen dollars. Things that had been part of his life for a generation found their way into hands where he would least have

wished them to go--of those who had been envious of him, who had cheated or deceived him, of people with whom he had had nothing in common. The red wagon and the pair of little longtailed stallions, which he had driven for six years, were bought by the owner of a rival flour-mill in the parish of Vilray; but his best sleigh, with its coon-skin robes, was bought by the widow of Palass Poucette, who bought also the famous bearskin which Dolores had given her at Jean Jacques' expense, and had been returned by her to its proper owner. The silver fruitdish, once (it was said) the property of the Baron of Beaugard, which each generation of Barbilles had displayed with as much ceremony as though it was a chalice given by the Pope, went to Virginie Poucette. Virginie also bought the furniture from Zoe's bedroom as it stood, together with the little upright piano on which she used to play. The Cure bought Jean Jacques' writing-desk, and M. Fille purchased his armchair, in which had sat at least six Barbilles as owners of the Manor. The beaver-hat which Jean Jacques wore on state occasions, as his grandfather had done, together with the bonnet rouge of the habitant, donned by him in his younger days --they fell to the nod of Mere Langlois, who declared that, as she was a cousin, she would keep the things in the family. Mere Langlois would have bought the fruit-dish also if she could have afforded to bid against Virginie Poucette; but the latter would have had the dish if it had cost her two hundred dollars. The only time she had broken bread in Jean Jacques' house, she had eaten cake from this fruit-dish; and to her, as to the parish generally, the dish so beautifully shaped, with its graceful depth and its fine-chased handles, was symbol of the social caste of the Barbilles, as the gold Cock of Beaugard was sign of their civic and commercial glory.

Jean Jacques, who had moved about all day with an almost voluble affability, seeming not to realize the tragedy going on, or, if he realized it, rising superior to it, was noticed to stand still suddenly when the auctioneer put up the fruit-dish for sale. Then the smile left his face, and the reddish glow in his eyes, which had been there since the burning of the mill, fled, and a touch of amazement and confusion took its place. All in a moment he was like a fluttered dweller of the wilds to whom comes some tremor of danger.

His mouth opened as though he would forbid the selling of the heirloom; but it closed again, because he knew he had no right to withhold it from the hammer; and he took on a look like that which comes to the eyes of a child when it faces humiliating denial. Quickly as it came, however, it vanished, for he remembered that he could buy the dish himself. He could buy it himself and keep it. . . . Yet what could he do with it? Even so, he could keep it. It could still be his till better days came.

The auctioneer's voice told off the value of the fruitdish--"As an heirloom, as an antique; as a piece of workmanship impossible of duplication in these days of no handicraft; as good pure silver, bearing the head of Louis Quinze--beautiful, marvellous, historic, honourable," and Jean Jacques made ready to bid. Then he remembered he had no money--he who all his life had been able to take a roll of bills from his pocket as another man took a packet of letters. His glance fell in shame, and the words died on his lips, even as M. Manotel, the auctioneer, was about

to add another five-dollar bid to the price, which already was standing at forty dollars.

It was at this moment Jean Jacques heard a woman's voice bidding, then two women's voices. Looking up he saw that one of the women was Mere Langlois and the other was Virginie Poucette, who had made the first bid. For a moment they contended, and then Mere Langlois fell out of the contest, and Virginie continued it with an ambitious farmer from the next county, who was about to become a Member of Parliament. Presently the owner of a river pleasure-steamer entered into the costly emulation also, but he soon fell away; and Virginie Poucette stubbornly raised the bidding by five dollars each time, till the silver symbol of the Barbilles' pride had reached one hundred dollars. Then she raised the price by ten dollars, and her rival, seeing that he was face to face with a woman who would now bid till her last dollar was at stake, withdrew; and Virginie was left triumphant with the heirloom.

At the moment when Virginie turned away with the handsome dish from M. Manotel, and the crowd cheered her gaily, she caught Jean-Jacques' eye, and she came straight towards him. She wanted to give the dish to him then and there; but she knew that this would provide annoying gossip for many a day, and besides, she thought he would refuse. More than that, she had in her mind another alternative which might in the end secure the heirloom to him, in spite of all. As she passed him, she said:

"At least we keep it in the parish. If you don't have it, well, then..."

She paused, for she did not quite know what to say unless she spoke what was really in her mind, and she dared not do that.

"But you ought to have an heirloom," she added, leaving unsaid what was her real thought and hope. With sudden inspiration, for he saw she was trying to make it easy for him, he drew the great silver-watch from his pocket, which the head of the Barbilles had worn for generations, and said:

"I have the only heirloom I could carry about with me. It will keep time for me as long as I'll last. The Manor clock strikes the time for the world, and this watch is set by the Manor clock."

"Well said--well and truly said, M'sieu' Jean Jacques," remarked the lean watchmaker and so-called jeweller of Vilray, who stood near. "It is a watch which couldn't miss the stroke of Judgment Day."

It was at that moment, in the sunset hour, when the sale had drawn to a close, and the people had begun to disperse, that the avocat of Vilray who represented the Big Financier came to Jean Jacques and said:

"M'sieu', I have to say that there is due to you three hundred and fifty dollars from the settlement, excluding this sale, which will just do what was expected of it. I am instructed to give it to you from the creditors. Here it is."

He took out a roll of bills and offered it to Jean Jacques.

"What creditors?" asked Jean Jacques.

"All the creditors," responded the other, and he produced a receipt for Jean Jacques to sign. "A formal statement will be sent you, and if there is any more due to you, it will be added then. But now--well, there it is, the creditors think there is no reason for you to wait."

Jean Jacques did not yet take the roll of bills. "They come from M. Mornay?" he asked with an air of resistance, for he did not wish to be under further obligations to the man who would lose most by him.

The lawyer was prepared. M. Mornay had foreseen the timidity and sensitiveness of Jean Jacques, had anticipated his mistaken chivalry--for how could a man decline to take advantage of the Bankruptcy Court unless he was another Don Quixote! He had therefore arranged with all the creditors for them to take responsibility with 'himself, though he provided the cash which manipulated this settlement.

"No, M'sieu' Jean Jacques," the lawyer replied, this comes from all the creditors, as the sum due to you from all the transactions, so far as can be seen as yet. Further adjustment may be necessary, but this is the interim settlement."

Jean Jacques was far from being ignorant of business, but so bemused was his judgment and his intelligence now, that he did not see there was no balance which could possibly be his, since his liabilities vastly exceeded his assets. Yet with a wave of the hand he accepted the roll of bills, and signed the receipt with an air which said, "These forms must be observed, I suppose."

What he would have done if the three hundred and fifty dollars had not been given him, it would be hard to say, for with gentle asperity he had declined a loan from his friend M. Fille, and he had but one silver dollar in his pocket, or in the world. Indeed, Jean Jacques was living in a dream in these dark days--a dream of renunciation and sacrifice, and in the spirit of one who gives up all to some great cause. He was not yet even face to face with the fulness of his disaster. Only at moments had the real significance of it all come to him, and then he had shivered as before some terror menacing his path. Also, as M. Mornay had said, his philosophy was now in his bones and marrow rather than in his words. It had, after all, tintured his blood and impregnated his mind. He had babbled and been the egotist, and played cock o' the walk; and now at last his philosophy was giving some foundation for his feet. Yet at this auction-sale he looked a distracted, if smiling, whimsical, rather bustling figure of misfortune, with a tragic air of exile, of isolation from all by which he was surrounded. A profound and wayworn loneliness showed in his figure, in his face, in his eyes.

The crowd thinned in time, and yet very many lingered to see the last of this drama of lost fortunes. A few of the riff-raff, who invariably

attend these public scenes, were now rather the worse for drink, from the indifferent liquor provided by the auctioneer, and they were inclined to horseplay and coarse chaff. More than one ribald reference to Jean Jacques had been checked by his chivalrous fellow-citizens; indeed, M. Fille had almost laid himself open to a charge of assault in his own court by raising his stick at a loafer, who made insulting references to Jean Jacques. But as the sale drew to a close, an air of rollicking humour among the younger men would not be suppressed, and it looked as though Jean Jacques' exit would be attended by the elements of farce and satire.

In this world, however, things do not happen logically, and Jean Jacques made his exit in a wholly unexpected manner. He was going away by the train which left a new railway junction a few miles off, having gently yet firmly declined M. Fille's invitation, and also the invitations of others--including the Cure and Mere Langlois--to spend the night with them and start off the next day. He elected to go on to Montreal that very night, and before the sale was quite finished he prepared to start. His carpet-bag containing a few clothes and necessaries had been sent on to the junction, and he meant to walk to the station in the cool of the evening.

M. Manotel, the auctioneer, hoarse with his heavy day's work, was announcing that there were only a few more things to sell, and no doubt they could be had at a bargain, when Jean Jacques began a tour of the Manor. There was something inexpressibly mournful in this lonely pilgrimage of the dismantled mansion. Yet there was no show of cheap emotion by Jean Jacques; and a wave of the hand prevented any one from following him in his dry-eyed progress to say farewell to these haunts of childhood, manhood, family, and home. There was a strange numbness in his mind and body, and he had a feeling that he moved immense and reflective among material things. Only tragedy can produce that feeling. Happiness makes the universe infinite and stupendous, despair makes it small and even trivial.

It was when he had reached the little office where he had done the business of his life--a kind of neutral place where he had ever isolated himself from the domestic scene--that the final sensation, save one, of his existence at the Manor came to him. Virginie Poucette had divined his purpose when he began the tour of the house, and going by a roundabout way, she had placed herself where she could speak with him alone before he left the place for ever--if that was to be. She was not sure that his exit was really inevitable--not yet.

When Jean Jacques saw Virginie standing beside the table in his office where he had worked over so many years, now marked Sold, and waiting to be taken away by its new owner, he started and drew back, but she held out her hand and said:

"But one word, M'sieu' Jean Jacques; only one word from a friend--indeed a friend."

"A friend of friends," he answered, still in abstraction, his eyes having

that burnished light which belonged to the night of the fire; but yet realizing that she was a sympathetic soul who had offered to lend him money without security.

"Oh, indeed yes, as good a friend as you can ever have!" she added.

Something had waked the bigger part of her, which had never been awake in the days of Palass Poucette. Jean Jacques was much older than she, but what she felt had nothing to do with age, or place or station. It had only to do with understanding, with the call of nature and of a motherhood crying for expression. Her heart ached for him.

"Well, good-bye, my friend," he said, and held out his hand. "I must be going now."

"Wait," she said, and there was something insistent and yet pleading in her voice. "I've got something to say. You must hear it. . . . Why should you go? There is my farm--it needs to be worked right. It has got good chances. It has water-power and wood and the best flax in the province--they want to start a flax-mill on it--I've had letters from big men in Montreal. Well, why shouldn't you do it instead? There it is, the farm, and there am I a woman alone. I need help. I've got no head. I have to work at a sum of figures all night to get it straight. . . . Ah, m'sieu', it is a need both sides! You want someone to look after you; you want a chance again to do things; but you want someone to look after you, and it is all waiting there on the farm. Palass Poucette left behind him seven sound horses, and cows and sheep, and a threshing-machine and a fanning-mill, and no debts, and two thousand dollars in the bank. You will never do anything away from here. You must stay here, where--where I can look after you, Jean Jacques."

The light in his eyes flamed up, died down, flamed up again, and presently it covered all his face, as he grasped what she meant.

"Wonder of God, do you forget?" he asked. "I am married--married still, Virginie Poucette. There is no divorce in the Catholic Church--no, none at all. It is for ever and ever."

"I said nothing about marriage," she said bravely, though her face suffused.

"Hand of Heaven, what do you mean? You mean to say you would do that for me in spite of the Cure and--and everybody and everything?"

"You ought to be taken care of," she protested. "You ought to have your chance again. No one here is free to do it all but me. You are alone. Your wife that was--maybe she is dead. I am alone, and I'm not afraid of what the good God will say. I will settle with Him myself. Well, then, do you think I'd care what--what Mere Langlois or the rest of the world would say? . . . I can't bear to think of you going away with nothing, with nobody, when here is something and somebody--somebody who would be good to you. Everybody knows that you've been badly used--everybody. I'm young enough to make things bright and warm in your life,

and the place is big enough for two, even if it isn't the Manor Cartier."

"Figure de Christ, do you think I'd let you do it--me?" declared Jean Jacques, with lips trembling now and his shoulders heaving. Misfortune and pain and penalty he could stand, but sacrifice like this and--and whatever else it was, were too much for him. They brought him back to the dusty road and everyday life again; they subtracted him from his big dream, in which he had been detached from the details of his catastrophe.

"No, no, no," he added. "You go look another way, Virginie. Turn your face to the young spring, not to the dead winter. To-morrow I'll be gone to find what I've got to find. I've finished here, but there's many a good man waiting for you--men who'll bring you something worth while besides themselves. Make no mistake, I've finished. I've done my term of life. I'm only out on ticket-of-leave now--but there, enough, I shall always want to think of you. I wish I had something to give you--but yes, here is something." He drew from his pocket a silver napkin-ring. "I've had that since I was five years old. My uncle Stefan gave it to me. I've always used it. I don't know why I put it in my pocket this morning, but I did. Take it. It's more than money. It's got something of Jean Jacques about it. You've got the Barbille fruit-dish--that is a thing I'll remember. I'm glad you've got it, and--"

"I meant we should both eat from it," she said helplessly.

"It would cost too much to eat from it with you, Virginie--"

He stopped short, choked, then his face cleared, and his eyes became steady.

"Well then, good-bye, Virginie," he said, holding out his hand.

"You don't think I'd say to any other living man what I've said to you?" she asked.

He nodded understandingly. "That's the best part of it. It was for me of all the world," he answered. "When I look back, I'll see the light in your window--the light you lit for the lost one--for Jean Jacques Barbille."

Suddenly, with eyes that did not see and hands held out before him, he turned, felt for the door and left the room.

She leaned helplessly against the table. "The poor Jean Jacques--the poor Jean Jacques!" she murmured. "Cure or no Cure, I'd have done it," she declared, with a ring to her voice. "Ah, but Jean Jacques, come with me!" she added with a hungry and compassionate gesture, speaking into space. "I could make life worth while for us both."

A moment later Virginie was outside, watching the last act in the career of Jean Jacques in the parish of St. Saviour's.

This was what she saw.

The auctioneer was holding up a bird-cage containing a canary-Carmen's bird-cage, and Zoe's canary which had remained to be a vocal memory of her in her old home.

"Here," said the rhetorical, inflammable auctioneer, "here is the choicest lot left to the last. I put it away in the bakery, meaning to sell it at noon, when everybody was eating-food for the soul and food for the body. I forgot it. But here it is, worth anything you like to anybody that loves the beautiful, the good, and the harmonious. What do I hear for this lovely saffron singer from the Elysian fields? What did the immortal poet of France say of the bird in his garret, in 'L'Oiseau de Mon Crenier'? What did he say:

'Sing me a song of the bygone hour,
A song of the stream and the sun;
Sing of my love in her bosky bower,
When my heart it was twenty-one.'

"Come now, who will renew his age or regale her youth with the divine notes of nature's minstrel? Who will make me an offer for this vestal virgin of song--the joy of the morning and the benediction of the evening? What do I hear? The best of the wine to the last of the feast! What do I hear?--five dollars--seven dollars--nine dollars--going at nine dollars--ten dollars--Well, ladies and gentlemen, the bird can sing--ah, voila !"

He stopped short for a moment, for as the evening sun swept its veil of rainbow radiance over the scene, the bird began to sing. Its little throat swelled, it chirruped, it trilled, it called, it soared, it lost itself in a flood of ecstasy. In the applausive silence, the emotional recess of the sale, as it were, the man to whom the bird and the song meant most, pushed his way up to the stand where M. Manotel stood. When the people saw who it was, they fell back, for there was that in his face which needed no interpretation. It filled them with a kind of awe.

He reached up a brown, eager, affectionate hand--it had always been that --fat and small, but rather fine and certainly emotional, though not material or sensual.

"Go on with your bidding," he said.

He was going to buy the thing which had belonged to his daughter, was beloved by her--the living oracle of the morning, the muezzin of his mosque of home. It had been to the girl who had gone as another such a bird had been to the mother of the girl, the voice that sang, "Praise God," in the short summer of that bygone happiness of his. Even this cage and its homebird were not his; they belonged to the creditors.

"Go on. I buy--I bid," Jean Jacques said in a voice that rang. It had no blur of emotion. It had resonance. The hammer that struck the bell of his voice was the hammer of memory, and if it was plaintive it also was clear, and it was also vibrant with the silver of lost hopes.

M. Manotel humoured him, while the bird still sang. "Four dollars--five dollars: do I hear no more than five dollars?--going once, going twice, going three times--gone!" he cried, for no one had made a further bid; and indeed M. Manotel would not have heard another voice than Jean Jacques' if it had been as loud as the falls of the Saguenay. He was a kind of poet in his way, was M. Manotel. He had been married four times, and he would be married again if he had the chance; also he wrote verses for tombstones in the churchyard at St. Saviour's, and couplets for fetes and weddings.

He handed the cage to Jean Jacques, who put it down on the ground at his feet, and in an instant had handed up five dollars for one of the idols of his own altar. Anyone else than M. Manotel, or perhaps M. Fille or the New Cure, would have hesitated to take the five dollars, or, if they had done so, would have handed it back; but they had souls to understand this Jean Jacques, and they would not deny him his insistent independence. And so, in a moment, he was making his way out of the crowd with the cage in his hand, the bird silent now.

As he went, some one touched his arm and slipped a book into his hand. It was M. Fille, and the book was his little compendium of philosophy which his friend had retrieved from his bedroom in the early morning.

"You weren't going to forget it, Jean Jacques?" M. Fille said reproachfully. "It is an old friend. It would not be happy with any one else."

Jean Jacques looked M. Fille in the eyes. "Moi--je suis philosophe," he said without any of the old insistence and pride and egotism, but as one would make an affirmation or repeat a creed.

"Yes, yes, to be sure, always, as of old," answered M. Fille firmly; for, from that formula might come strength, when it was most needed, in a sense other and deeper far than it had been or was now. "You will remember that you will always know where to find us--eh?" added the little Clerk of the Court.

The going of Jean Jacques was inevitable; all persuasion had failed to induce him to stay--even that of Virginie; and M. Fille now treated it as though it was the beginning of a new career for Jean Jacques, whatever that career might be. It might be he would come back some day, but not to things as they were, not ever again, nor as the same man.

"You will move on with the world outside there," continued M. Fille, "but we shall be turning on the same swivel here always; and whenever you come--there, you understand. With us it is *semper fidelis*, always the same."

Jean Jacques looked at M. Fille again as though to ask him a question, but presently he shook his head in negation to his thought.

"Well, good-bye," he said cheerfully--"A la bonne heure!"

By that M. Fille knew that Jean Jacques did not wish for company as he went--not even the company of his old friend who had loved the bright whimsical emotional Zoe; who had hovered around his life like a protecting spirit.

"A bi'tot," responded M. Fille, declining upon the homely patois.

But as Jean Jacques walked away with his little book of philosophy in his pocket, and the bird-cage in his hand, someone sobbed. M. Fille turned and saw. It was Virginie Poucette. Fortunately for Virginie other women did the same, not for the same reason, but out of a sympathy which was part of the scene.

It had been the intention of some friends of Jean Jacques to give him a cheer when he left, and even his sullen local creditors, now that the worst had come, were disposed to give him a good send-off; but the incident of the canary in its cage gave a turn to the feeling of the crowd which could not be resisted. They were not a people who could cut and dry their sentiments; they were all impulse and simplicity, with an obvious cocksure shrewdness too, like that of Jean Jacques--of the old Jean Jacques. He had been the epitome of all their faults and all their virtues.

No one cheered. Only one person called, "Au 'voir, M'sieu' Jean Jacques!" and no one followed him--a curious, assertive, feebly-brisk, shock-headed figure in the brown velveteen jacket, which he had bought in Paris on his Grand Tour.

"What a ridiculous little man!" said a woman from Chalfonte over the water, who had been buying freely all day for her new "Manor," her husband being a member of the provincial legislature.

The words were no sooner out of her mouth than two women faced her threateningly.

"For two pins I'd slap your face," said old Mere Langlois, her great breast heaving. "Popinjay--you, that ought to be in a cage like his canary."

But Virginie Poucette also was there in front of the offender, and she also had come from Chalfonte--was born in that parish; and she knew what she was facing.

"Better carry a bird-cage and a book than carry swill to swine," she said; and madame from Chalfonte turned white, for it had been said that her father was once a swine-herd, and that she had tried her best to forget it when, with her coarse beauty, she married the well-to-do farmer who was now in the legislature.

"Hold your tongues, all of you, and look at that," said M. Manotel, who had joined the agitated group. He was pointing towards the departing Jean Jacques, who was now away upon his road.

Jean Jacques had raised the cage on a level with his face, and was evidently speaking to the bird in the way birds love--that soft kissing sound to which they reply with song.

Presently there came a chirp or two, and then the bird thrust up its head, and out came the full blessedness of its song, exultant, home-like, intimate.

Jean Jacques walked on, the bird singing by his side; and he did not look back.

CHAPTER XXI

IF SHE HAD KNOWN IN TIME

Nothing stops when we stop for a time, or for all time, except ourselves. Everything else goes on--not in the same way; but it does go on. Life did not stop at St. Saviour's after Jean Jacques made his exit. Slowly the ruined mill rose up again, and very slowly indeed the widow of Palass Poucette recovered her spirits, though she remained a widow in spite of all appeals; but M. Fille and his sister never were the same after they lost their friend. They had great comfort in the dog which Jean Jacques had given to them, and they roused themselves to a malicious pleasure when Bobon, as he had been called by Zoe, rushed out at the heels of an importunate local creditor who had greatly worried Jean Jacques at the last. They waited in vain for a letter from Jean Jacques, but none came; nor did they hear anything from him, or of him, for a long, long time.

Jean Jacques did not mean that they should. When he went away with his book of philosophy and his canary he had but one thing in his mind, and that was to find Zoe and make her understand that he knew he had been in the wrong. He had illusions about starting life again, in which he probably did not believe; but the make-believe was good for him. Long before the crash came, in Zoe's name--not his own--he had bought from the Government three hundred and twenty acres of land out near the Rockies and had spent five hundred dollars in improvements on it.

There it was in the West, one remaining asset still his own--or rather Zoe's--but worth little if he or she did not develop it. As he left St. Saviour's, however, he kept fixing his mind on that "last domain," as he called it to himself. If this was done intentionally, that he might be saved from distraction and despair, it was well done; if it was a real illusion--the old self-deception which had been his bane so often in the past--it still could only do him good at the present. It prevented him from noticing the attention he attracted on the railway journey from St. Saviour's to Montreal, cherishing his canary and his book as he went.

He was not so self-conscious now as in the days when he was surprised that Paris did not stop to say, "Bless us, here is that fine fellow, Jean

Jacques Barbille of St. Saviour's!" He could concentrate himself more now on things that did not concern the impression he was making on the world. At present he could only think of Zoe and of her future.

When a patronizing and aggressive commercial traveller in the little hotel on a side-street where he had taken a room in Montreal said to him, "Bien, mon vieux" (which is to say, "Well, old cock"), "aren't you a long way from home?" something of a new dignity came into Jean Jacques' bearing, very different from the assurance of the old days, and in reply he said:

"Not so far that I need be careless about my company." This made the landlady of the little hotel laugh quite hard, for she did not like the braggart "drummer" who had treated her with great condescension for a number of years. Also Madame Glozel liked Jean Jacques because of his canary. She thought there must be some sentimental reason for a man of fifty or more carrying a bird about with him; and she did not rest until she had drawn from Jean Jacques that he was taking the bird to his daughter in the West. There, however, madame was stayed in her search for information. Jean Jacques closed up, and did but smile when she adroitly set traps for him, and at last asked him outright where his daughter was.

Why he waited in Montreal it would be hard to say, save that it was a kind of middle place between the old life and the new, and also because he must decide what was to be his plan of search. First the West--first Winnipeg, but where after that? He had at last secured information of where Zoe and Gerard Fynes had stayed while in Montreal; and now he followed clues which would bring him in touch with folk who knew them. He came to know one or two people who were with Zoe and Gerard in the last days they spent in the metropolis, and he turned over and over in his mind every word said about his girl, as a child turns a sweetmeat in its mouth. This made him eager to be off; but on the very day he decided to start at once for the West, something strange happened.

It was towards the late afternoon of a Saturday, when the streets were full of people going to and from the shops in a marketing quarter, that Madame Glozel came to him and said:

"M'sieu', I have an idea, and you will not think it strange, for you have a kind heart. There is a woman--look you, it is a sad, sad story hers. She is ill and dying in a room a little way down the street. But yes, I am sure she is dying--of heart disease it is. She came here first when the illness took her, but she could not afford to stay. She went to those cheaper lodgings down the street. She used to be on the stage over in the States, and then she came back here, and there was a man--married to him or not I do not know, and I will not think. Well, the man--the brute--he left her when she got ill--but yes, forsook her absolutely! He was a land-agent or something like that, and all very fine to your face, to promise and to pretend--just make-believe. When her sickness got worse, off he went with 'Au revoir, my dear--I will be back to supper.' Supper! If she'd waited for her supper till he came back, she'd have waited as long as I've done for the fortune the gipsy

promised me forty years ago. Away he went, the rogue, without a thought of her, and with another woman. That's what hurt her most of all. Straight from her that could hardly drag herself about--ah, yes, and has been as handsome a woman as ever was!--straight from her he went to a slut. She was a slut, m'sieu'--did I not know her? Did Ma'm'selle Slut not wait at table in this house and lead the men a dance here night and day-day and night till I found it out! Well, off he went with the slut, and left the lady behind. . . . You men, you treat women so."

Jean Jacques put out a hand as though to argue with her. "Sometimes it is the other way," he retorted. "Most of us have seen it like that."

"Well, for sure, you're right enough there, m'sieu'," was the response. "I've got nothing to say to that, except that it's a man that runs away with a woman, or that gets her to leave her husband when she does go. There's always a man that says, 'Come along, I'm the better chap for you.'"

Jean Jacques wearily turned his head away towards the cage where his canary was beginning to pipe its evening lay.

"It all comes to the same thing in the end," he said pensively; and then he who had been so quiet since he came to the little hotel--Glozel's, it was called--began to move about the room excitedly, running his fingers through his still bushy hair, which, to his credit, was always as clean as could be, burnished and shiny even at his mid-century period. He began murmuring to himself, and a frown settled on his fore head. Mme. Glozel saw that she had perturbed him, and that no doubt she had roused some memories which made sombre the sunny little room where the canary sang; where, to ravish the eyes of the pessimist, was a picture of Louis XVI. going to heaven in the arms of St. Peter.

When started, however, the good woman could no more "slow down" than her French pony would stop when its head was turned homewards from market. So she kept on with the history of the woman down the street.

"Heart disease," she said, nodding with assurance and finality; "and we know what that is--a start, a shock, a fall, a strain, and pht! off the poor thing goes. Yes, heart disease, and sometimes with such awful pain. But so; and yesterday she told me she had only a hundred dollars left. 'Enough to last me through,' she said to me. Poor thing, she lifted up her eyes with a way she has, as if looking for something she couldn't find, and she says, as simple as though she was asking about the price of a bed-tick, 'It won't cost more than fifty dollars to bury me, I s'pose?' Well, that made me squeamish, for the poor dear's plight came home to me so clear, and she young enough yet to get plenty out of life, if she had the chance. So I asked her again about her people--whether I couldn't send for someone belonging to her. 'There's none that belongs to me,' she says, 'and there's no one I belong to.'

"I thought very likely she didn't want to tell me about herself; perhaps because she had done wrong, and her family had not been good to her. Yet it was right I should try and get her folks to come, if she had any

folks. So I said to her, 'Where was your home?' And now, what do you think she answered, m'sieu'?' 'Look there,' she said to me, with her big eyes standing out of her head almost--for that's what comes to her sometimes when she is in pain, and she looks more handsome then than at any other time--'Look there,' she said to me, 'it was in heaven, that's where--my home was; but I didn't know it. I hadn't been taught to know the place when I saw it.'

"Well, I felt my skin go goosey, for I saw what was going on in her mind, and how she was remembering what had happened to her some time, somewhere; but there wasn't a tear in her eyes, and I never saw her cry--never once, m'sieu'--well, but as brave as brave. Her eyes are always dry--burning. They're like two furnaces scorching up her face. So I never found out her history, and she won't have the priest. I believe that's because she wants to die unknown, and doesn't want to confess. I never saw a woman I was sorrier for, though I think she wasn't married to the man that left her. But whatever she was, there's good in her--I haven't known hundreds of women and had seven sisters for nothing. Well, there she is--not a friend near her at the last; for it's coming soon, the end--no one to speak to her, except the woman she pays to come in and look after her and nurse her a bit. Of course there's the landlady too, Madame Popincourt, a kind enough little cricket of a woman, but with no sense and no head for business. And so the poor sick thing has not a single pleasure in the world. She can't read, because it makes her head ache, she says; and she never writes to any one. One day she tried to sing a little, but it seemed to hurt her, and she stopped before she had begun almost. Yes, m'sieu', there she is without a single pleasure in the long hours when she doesn't sleep."

"There's my canary--that would cheer her up," eagerly said Jean Jacques, who, as the story of the chirruping landlady continued, became master of his agitation, and listened as though to the tale of some life for which he had concern. "Yes, take my canary to her, madame. It picked me up when I was down. It'll help her--such a bird it is! It's the best singer in the world. It's got in its throat the music of Malibran and Jenny Lind and Grisi, and all the stars in heaven that sang together. Also, to be sure, it doesn't charge anything, but just as long as there's daylight it sings and sings, as you know."

"M'sieu'--oh, m'sieu', it was what I wanted to ask you, and I didn't dare!" gushingly declared madame. "I never heard a bird sing like that--just as if it knew how much good it was doing, and with all the airs of a grand seigneur. It's a prince of birds, that. If you mean it, m'sieu', you'll do as good a thing as you have ever done."

"It would have to be much better, or it wouldn't be any use," remarked Jean Jacques.

The woman made a motion of friendliness with both hands. "I don't believe that. You may be queer, but you've got a kind eye. It won't be for long she'll need the canary, and it will cheer her. There certainly was never a bird so little tied to one note. Now this note, now that, and so amusing. At times it's as though he was laughing at you."

"That's because, with me for his master, he has had good reason to laugh," remarked Jean Jacques, who had come at last to take a despondent view of himself.

"That's bosh," rejoined Mme. Glozel; "I've seen several people odder than you."

She went over to the cage eagerly, and was about to take it away.

"Excuse me," interposed Jean Jacques, "I will carry the cage to the house. Then you will go in with the bird, and I'll wait outside and see if the little rascal sings."

"This minute?" asked madame.

"For sure, this very minute. Why should the poor lady wait? It's a lonely time of day, this, the evening, when the long night's ahead."

A moment later the two were walking along the street to the door of Mme. Popincourt's lodgings, and people turned to look at the pair, one carrying something covered with a white cloth, evidently a savoury dish of some kind--the other with a cage in which a handsome canary hopped about, well pleased with the world.

At Mme. Popincourt's door Mme. Glozel took the cage and went upstairs. Jean Jacques, left behind, paced backwards and forwards in front of the house waiting and looking up, for Mme. Glozel had said that behind the front window on the third floor was where the sick woman lived. He had not long to wait. The setting sun shining full on the window had roused the bird, and he began to pour out a flood of delicious melody which flowed on and on, causing the people in the street to stay their steps and look up. Jean Jacques' face, as he listened, had something very like a smile. There was that in the smile belonging to the old pride, which in days gone by had made him say when he looked at his domains at the Manor Cartier--his houses, his mills, his store, his buildings and his lands--"It is all mine. It all belongs to Jean Jacques Barbille."

Suddenly, however, there came a sharp pause in the singing, and after that a cry--a faint, startled cry. Then Mme. Glozel's head was thrust out of the window three floors up, and she called to Jean Jacques to come quickly. As she bade him come, some strange premonition flashed to Jean Jacques, and with thumping heart he hastened up the staircase. Outside a bedroom door, Mme. Glozel met him. She was so excited she could only whisper.

"Be very quiet," she said. "There is something strange. When the bird sang as it did--you heard it--she sat like one in a trance. Then her face took on a look glad and frightened too, and she stared hard at the cage. 'Bring that cage to me,' she said. I brought it. She looked sharp at it, then she gave a cry and fell back. As I took the cage away I saw what she had been looking at--a writing at the bottom of the cage. It was the name Carmen."

With a stifled cry Jean Jacques pushed her aside and entered the room. As he did so, the sick woman in the big armchair, so pale yet so splendid in her death-beauty, raised herself up. With eyes that Francesca might have turned to the vision of her fate, she looked at the opening door, as though to learn if he who came was one she had wished to see through long, relentless days.

"Jean Jacques--ah, my beautiful Jean Jacques!" she cried out presently in a voice like a wisp of sound, for she had little breath; and then with a smile she sank back, too late to hear, but not too late to know, what Jean Jacques said to her.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Being generous with other people's money
I had to listen to him, and he had to pay me for listening
Law. It is expensive whether you win or lose
Protest that it is right when it knows that it is wrong

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