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COSMOPOLIS

By PAUL BOURGET

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER IV

APPROACHING DANGER

"I could not act differently," repeated Dorsenne on the evening of that eventful day. He had given his entire afternoon to caring for Gorka. He made him lunch. He made him lie down. He watched him. He took him in a closed carriage to Portonaccio, the first stopping-place on the Florence line. Indeed, he made every effort not to leave alone for a moment the man whose frenzy he had rather suspended than appeased, at the price, alas, of his own peace of mind! For, once left alone, in solitude and in the apartments on the Place de la Trinite, where twenty details testified to the visit of Gorka, the weight of the perjured word of honor became a heavy load to the novelist, so much the more heavy when he discovered the calculating plan followed by Boleslas. His tardy penetration permitted him to review the general outline of their conversation. He perceived that not one of his interlocutor's sentences, not even the most agitated, had been uttered at random. From reply to reply, from confidence to confidence, he, Dorsenne, had become involved in the dilemma without being able to foresee or to avoid it; he would either have had to accuse a woman or to lie with one of those lies which a manly conscience does not easily pardon. He did not forgive himself for it.

"It is so much worse," said he to himself, "as it will prevent nothing. A person vile enough to pen anonymous letters will not stop there. She will find the means of again unchaining the madman.... But who wrote those letters? Gorka may have forged them in order to have an opportunity to ask me the question he did.... And yet, no.... There are two indisputable facts--his state of jealousy and his extraordinary



return. Both would lead one to suppose a third, a warning. But given by whom?... He told me of twelve anonymous letters.... Let us assume that he received one or two.... But who is the author of those?"

The immediate development of the drama in which Julien found himself involved was embodied in the answer to the question. It was not easy to formulate. The Italians have a proverb of singular depth which the novelist recalled at that moment. He had laughed a great deal when he heard sententious Egiste Brancadori repeat it. He repeated it to himself, and he understood its meaning. 'Chi non sa fingersi amico, non sa essere nemico. "He who does not know how to disguise himself as a friend, does not know how to be an enemy." In the little corner of society in which Countess Steno, the Gorkas and Lincoln Maitland moved, who was hypocritical and spiteful enough to practise that counsel?

"It is not Madame Steno," thought Julien; "she has related all herself to her lover. I knew a similar case. But it involved degraded Parisians, not a Dogesse of the sixteenth century found intact in the Venice of today, like a flower of that period preserved. Let us strike her off. Let us strike off, too, Madame Gorka, the truthful creature who could not even condescend to the smallest lie for a trinket which she desires. It is that which renders her so easily deceived. What irony!.... Let us strike off Florent. He would allow himself to be killed, if necessary, like a Mameluke at the door of the room where his genial brother-in-law was dallying with the Countess.... Let us strike off the American himself. I have met such a case, a lover weary of a mistress, denouncing himself to her in order to be freed from his love-affair. But he was a roue, and had nothing in common with this booby, who has a talent for painting as an elephant has a trunk--what irony! He married this octoroon to have money. But it was a base act which freed him from commerce, and permitted him to paint all he wanted, as he wanted. He allows Steno to love him because she is diabolically pretty, notwithstanding her forty years, and then she is, in spite of all, a real noblewoman, which flattered him. He has not one dollar's-worth of moral delicacy in his heart. But he has an abundance of knavery.... Let us, too, strike out his wife. She is such a veritable slave whom the mere presence of a white person annihilates to such a degree that she dares not look her husband in the face.... It is not Hafner. The sly fox is capable of doing anything by cunning, but is he capable of undertaking a useless and dangerous piece of rascality? Never.... Fanny is a saint escaped from the Golden Legend, no matter what Montfanon thinks! I have now reviewed the entire coterie.... I was about to forget Alba.... It is too absurd even to think of her.... Too absurd? Why?"

Dorsenne was, on formulating that fantastic thought, upon the point of retiring. He took up, as was his habit, one of the books on his table, in order to read a few pages, when once in bed. He had thus within his reach the works by which he strengthened his doctrine of intransitive intellectuality; they were Goethe's Memoirs; a volume of George Sand's correspondence, in which were the letters to Flaubert; the 'Discours de la Methode' by Descartes, and the essay by Burckhart on the Renaissance.

But, after turning over the leaves of one of those volumes, he closed it

without having read twenty lines. He extinguished his lamp, but he could not sleep. The strange suspicion which crossed his mind had something monstrous about it, applied thus to a young girl. What a suspicion and what a young girl! The preferred friend of his entire winter, she on whose account he had prolonged his stay in Rome, for she was the most graceful vision of delicacy and of melancholy in the framework of a tragical and solemn past. Any other than Dorsenne would not have admitted such an idea without being inspired with horror. But Dorsenne, on the contrary, suddenly began to dive into that sinister hypothesis, to help it forward, to justify it. No one more than he suffered from a moral deformity which the abuse of a certain literary work inflicts on some writers. They are so much accustomed to combining artificial characters with creations of their imaginations that they constantly fulfil an analogous need with regard to the individuals they know best. They have some friend who is dear to them, whom they see almost daily, who hides nothing from them and from whom they hide nothing. But if they speak to you of him you are surprised to find that, while continuing to love that friend, they trace to you in him two contradictory portraits with the same sincerity and the same probability.

They have a mistress, and that woman, even in the space sometimes of one day, sees them, with fear, change toward her, who has remained the same. It is that they have developed in them to a very intense degree the imagination of the human soul, and that to observe is to them only a pretext to construe. That infirmity had governed Julien from early maturity. It was rarely manifested in a manner more unexpected than in the case of charming Alba Steno, who was possibly dreaming of him at the very moment when, in the silence of the night, he was forcing himself to prove that she was capable of that species of epistolary parricide.

"After all," he said to himself, for there is iconoclasm in the excessively intellectual, and they delight in destroying their dearest moral or sentimental idols, the better to prove their strength, "after all, have I really understood her relations toward her mother? When I came to Rome in November, when I was to be presented to the Countess, what did not only one, but nine or ten persons tell me? That Madame Steno had a liaison with the husband of her daughter's best friend, and that the little one was grieving about it. I went to the house. I saw the child. She was sad that evening. I had the curiosity to wish to read her heart.... It is six months since then. We have met almost daily, often twice a day. She is so hermetically sealed that I am no farther advanced than I was on the first day. I have seen her glance at her mother as she did this morning, with loving, admiring eyes. I have seen her turn pale at a word, a gesture, on her part. I have seen her embrace Maud Gorka, and play tennis with that same friend so gayly, so innocently. I have seen that she could not bear the presence of Maitland in a room, and yet she asked the American to take her portrait.... Is she guileless?.... Is she a hypocrite? Or is she tormented by doubt-divining, not divining-believing, not believing in-her mother? Is she underhand in any case, with her eyes the color of the sea? Has she the ambiguous mind at once of a Russian and an Italian?.... This would be a solution of the problem, that she was a girl of extraordinary inward energy, who, both aware of her mother's intrigues and detesting them with

an equal hatred, had planned to precipitate the two men upon each other. For a young girl the undertaking is great. I will go to the Countess's to-morrow night, and I will amuse myself by watching Alba, to see. . . . If she is innocent, my deed will be inoffensive. If perchance she is not?"

It is vain to profess to one's own heart a complaisant dandyism of misanthropy. Such reflections leave behind them a tinge of a remorse, above all when they are, as these, absolutely whimsical and founded on a simple paradox of dilettantism. Dorsenne experienced a feeling of shame when he awoke the following morning, and, thinking of the mystery of the letters received by Gorka, he recalled the criminal romance he had constructed around the charming and tender form of his little friend; happily for his nerves, which were strained by the consideration of the formidable problem. If it is not some one in the Countess's circle, who has written those letters? He received, on rising, a voluminous package of proofs with the inscription: "Urgent." He was preparing to give to the public a collection of his first articles, under the title of 'Poussiere d'Idees.'

Dorsenne was a faithful literary worker. Usually, involved titles serve to hide in a book-stall shop--made goods, and romance writers or dramatic authors who pride themselves on living to write, and who seek inspiration elsewhere than in regularity of habits and the work-table, have their efforts marked from the first by sterility. Obscure or famous, rich or poor, an artist must be an artisan and practise these fruitful virtues--patient application, conscientious technicality, absorption in work. When he seated himself at his table Dorsenne was heart and soul in his business. He closed his door, he opened no letters nor telegrams, and he spent ten hours without taking anything but two eggs and some black coffee, as he did on this particular day, when looking over the essays of his twenty-fifth year with the talent of his thirty-fifth, retouching here a word, rewriting an entire page, dissatisfied here, smiling there at his thought. The pen flew, carrying with it all the sensibility of the intellectual man who had completely forgotten Madame Steno, Gorka, Maitland, and the calumniated Contessina, until he should awake from his lucid intoxication at nightfall. As he counted, in arranging the slips, the number of articles prepared, he found there were twelve.

"Like Gorka's letters," said he aloud, with a laugh. He now felt coursing through his veins the lightness which all writers of his kind feel when they have labored on a work they believe good. "I have earned my evening," he added, still in a loud voice. "I must now dress and go to Madame Steno's. A good dinner at the doctor's. A half-hour's walk. The night promises to be divine. I shall find out if they have news of the Palatine,"--the name he gave Gorka in his moments of gayety. "I shall talk in a loud voice of anonymous letters. If the author of those received by Boleslas is there, I shall be in the best position to discover him; provided that it is not Alba.... Decidedly--that would be sad!"

It was ten o'clock in the evening, when the young man, faithful to his programme, arrived at the door of the large house on the Rue du Vingt

Septembre occupied by Madame Steno. It was an immense modern structure, divided into two distinct parts; to the left a revenue building and to the right a house on the order of those which are to be seen on the borders of Park Monceau. The Villa Steno, as the inscription in gold upon the black marble door indicated, told the entire story of the Countess's fortune--that fortune appraised by rumor, with its habitual exaggeration, now at twenty, now at thirty, millions. She had in reality two hundred and fifty thousand francs' income. But as, in 1873, Count Michel Steno, her husband, died, leaving only debts, a partly ruined palace at Venice and much property heavily mortgaged, the amount of that income proved the truth of the title, "superior woman," applied by her friends to Alba's mother. Her friends likewise added: "She has been the mistress of Hafner, who has aided her with his financial advice," an atrocious slander which was so much the more false as it was before ever knowing the Baron that she had begun to amass her wealth. This is how she managed it:

At the close of 1873, when, as a young widow, living in retirement in the sumptuous and ruined dwelling on the Grand Canal, she was struggling with her creditors, one of the largest bankers in Rome came to propose to her a very advantageous scheme. It dealt with a large piece of land which belonged to the Steno estate, a piece of land in Rome, in one of the suburbs, between the Porta Salara and the Porta Pia, a sort of village which the deceased Cardinal Steno, Count Michel's uncle, had begun to lay out. After his demise, the land had been rented in lots to kitchen-gardeners, and it was estimated that it was worth about forty centimes a square metre. The financier offered four francs for it, under the pretext of establishing a factory on the site. It was a large sum of money. The Countess required twenty-four hours in which to consider, and, at the end of that time, she refused the offer, which won for her the admiration of the men of business who knew of the refusal. In 1882, less than ten years later, she sold the same land for ninety francs a metre. She saw, on glancing at a plan of Rome, and in recalling the history of modern Italy, first, that the new masters of the Eternal City would centre all their ambition in rebuilding it, then that the portion comprised between the Quirinal and the two gates of Salara and Pia would be one of the principal points of development; finally, that if she waited she would obtain a much greater sum than the first offer. And she had waited, applying herself to watching the administration of her possessions like the severest of intendants, depriving herself, stopping up gaps with unhoped-for profits. In 1875, she sold to the National Gallery a suite of four panels by Carpaccio, found in one of her country houses, for one hundred and twenty thousand francs. She had been as active and practical in her material life as she had been light and audacious in her sentimental experiences. The story circulated of her infidelity to Steno with Werekiew at St. Petersburg, where the diplomatist was stationed, after one year of marriage, was confirmed by the wantonness of her conduct, of which she gave evidence as soon as free.

At Rome, where she lived a portion of the year after the sale of her land, out of which she retained enough to build the double house, she continued to increase her fortune with the same intelligence. A very

advantageous investment in Acqua Marcia enabled her to double in five years the enormous profits of her first operation. And what proved still more the exceptional good sense with which the woman was endowed, when love was not in the balance, she stopped on those two gains, just at the time when the Roman aristocracy, possessed by the delirium of speculation, had begun to buy stocks which had reached their highest value.

To spend the evening at the Villa Steno, after spending all the morning of the day before at the Palais Castagna, was to realize one of those paradoxes of contradictory sensations such as Dorsenne loved, for poor Ardea had been ruined in having attempted to do a few years later that which Countess Catherine had done at the proper moment. He, too, had hoped for an increase in the value of property. Only he had bought the land at seventy francs a metre, and in '90 it was not worth more than twenty-five. He, too, had calculated that Rome would improve, and on the high-priced land he had begun to build entire streets, imagining he could become like the Dukes of Bedford and of Westminster in London, the owner of whole districts. His houses finished, they did not rent, however.

To complete the rest he had to borrow. He speculated in order to pay his debts, lost, and contracted more debts in order to pay the difference. His signature, as the proprietor of the Marzocco had said, was put to innumerable bills of exchange. The result was that on all the walls of Rome, including that of the Rue Vingt Septembre on which was the Villa Steno, were posted multi-colored placards announcing the sale, under the management of Cavalier Fossati, of the collection of art and of furniture of the Palais Castagna.

"To foresee is to possess power," said Dorsenne to himself, ringing at Madame Steno's door and summing up thus the invincible association of ideas which recalled to him the palace of the ruined Roman Prince at the door of the villa of the triumphant Venetian: "It is the real Alpha and Omega."

The comparison between the lot of Madame Steno and that of the heir of the Castagnas had almost caused the writer to forget his plan of inquiry as to the author of the anonymous letters. It was to be impressed upon him, however, when he entered the hall where the Countess received every evening. Ardea himself was there, the centre of a group composed of Alba Steno, Madame Maitland, Fanny Hafner and the wealthy Baron, who, standing aloof and erect, leaning against a console, seemed like a beneficent and venerable man in the act of blessing youth. Julien was not surprised on finding so few persons in the vast salon, any more than he was surprised at the aspect of the room filled with old tapestry, bric-a-brac, furniture, flowers, and divans with innumerable cushions.

He had had the entire winter in which to observe the interior of that house, similar to hundreds of others in Vienna, Madrid, Florence, Berlin, anywhere, indeed, where the mistress of the house applies herself to realizing an ideal of Parisian luxury. He had amused himself many an evening in separating from the almost international framework local features, those which distinguished the room from others of the same kind. No human being succeeds in being absolutely factitious in his home

or in his writings. The author had thus noted that the salon bore a date, that of the Countess's last journey to Paris in 1880. It was to be seen in the plush and silk of the curtains. The general coloring, in which green predominated, a liberty egotistical in so brilliant a blonde, had too warm a tone and betrayed the Italian. Italy was also to be found in the painted ceiling and in the frieze which ran all around, as well as in several paintings scattered about. There were two panels by Moretti de Brescia in the second style of the master, called his silvery manner, on account of the delicate and transparent fluidity of the coloring; a 'Souper chez le Pharisien' and a 'Jesus ressuscite sur le rivage', which could only have come from one of the very old palaces of a very ancient family. Dorsenne knew all that, and he knew, too, for what reasons he found almost empty at that time of the year the hall so animated during the entire winter, the hall through which he had seen pass a veritable carnival of visitors: great lords, artists, political men, Russians and Austrians, English and French--pellmell. The Countess was far from occupying in Rome the social position which her intelligence, her fortune and her name should have assured her. For, having been born a Navagero, she combined on her escutcheon the cross of gold of the Sebastien Navagero who was the first to mount the walls of Lepante, with the star of the grand Doge Michel.

But one particular trait of character had always prevented her from succeeding on that point. She could not bear ennui nor constraint, nor had she any vanity. She was positive and impassioned, in the manner of the men of wealth to whom their meditated--upon combinations serve to assure the conditions of their pleasures. Never had Madame Steno displayed diplomacy in the changes of her passions, and they had been numerous before the arrival of Gorka, to whom she had remained faithful two years, an almost incomprehensible thing! Never had she, save in her own home, observed the slightest bounds when there was a question of reaching the object of her desire. Moreover, she had not in Rome to support her any member of the family to which she belonged, and she had not joined either of the two sets into which, since 1870, the society of the city was divided. Of too modern a mind and of a manner too bold, she had not been received by the admirable woman who reigns at the Quirinal, and who had managed to gather around her an atmosphere of such noble elevation.

These causes would have brought about a sort of semi-ostracism, had the Countess not applied herself to forming a salon of her own, the recruits for which were almost altogether foreigners. The sight of new faces, the variety of conversation, the freedom of manner, all in that moving world, pleased the thirst for diversion which, in that puissant, spontaneous, and almost manly immoral nature, was joined with very just clear-sightedness. If Julien paused for a moment surprised at the door of the hall, it was not, therefore, on finding it empty at the end of the season; it was on beholding there, among the inmates, Peppino Ardea, whom he had not met all winter. Truly, it was a strange time to appear in new scenes when the hammer of the appraiser was already raised above all which had been the pride and the splendor of his name. But the grand-nephew of Urban VII, seated between sublime Fanny Hafner, in pale blue, and pretty Alba Steno, in bright red, opposite Madame Maitland, so

graceful in her mauve toilette, had in no manner the air of a man crushed by adversity.

The subdued light revealed his proud manly face, which had lost none of its gay hauteur. His eyes, very black, very brilliant, and very unsteady, seemed almost in the same glance to scorn and to smile, while his mouth, beneath its brown moustache, wore an expression of disdain, disgust, and sensuality. The shaven chin displayed a bluish shade, which gave to the whole face a look of strength, belied by the slender and nervous form. The heir of the Castagnas was dressed with an affectation of the English style, peculiar to certain Italians. He wore too many rings on his fingers, too large a bouquet in his buttonhole, and above all he made too many gestures to allow for a moment, with his dark complexion, of any doubt as to his nationality. It was he who, of all the group, first perceived Julien, and he said to him, or rather called out familiarly:

"Ah, Dorsenne! I thought you had gone away. We have not seen you at the club for fifteen days."

"He has been working," replied Hafner, "at some new masterpiece, at a romance which is laid in Roman society, I am sure. Mistrust him, Prince, and you, ladies, disarm the portrayer."

"I," resumed Ardea, laughing pleasantly, "will give him notes upon myself, if he wants them, as long as this, and I will illustrate his romance into the bargain with photographs which I once had a rage for taking.... See, Mademoiselle," he added, turning to Fanny, "that is how one ruins one's self. I had a mania for the instantaneous ones. It was very innocent, was it not? It cost me thirty thousand francs a year, for four years."

Dorsenne had heard that it was a watchword between Peppino Ardea and his friends to take lightly the disaster which came upon the Castagna family in its last and only scion. He was not expecting such a greeting. He was so disconcerted by it that he neglected to reply to the Baron's remark, as he would have done at any other time. Never did the founder of the 'Credit Austyr-Dalmate' fail to manifest in some such way his profound aversion for the novelist. Men of his species, profoundly cynical and calculating, fear and scorn at the same time a certain literature. Moreover, he had too much tact not to be aware of the instinctive repulsion with which he inspired Julien. But to Hafner, all social strength was tarified, and literary success as much as any other. As he was afraid, as on the staircase of the Palais Castagna, that he had gone too far, he added, laying his hand with its long, supple fingers familiarly upon the author's shoulder:

"This is what I admire in him: It is that he allows profane persons, such as we are, to plague him, without ever growing angry. He is the only celebrated author who is so simple.... But he is better than an author; he is a veritable man-of-the-world."

"Is not the Countess here?" asked Dorsenne, addressing Alba Steno,

and without replying any more to the action, so involuntarily insulting, of the Baron than he had to his sly malice or to the Prince's facetious offer. Madame Steno's absence had again inspired him with an apprehension which the young girl dissipated by replying:

"My mother is on the terrace.... We were afraid it was too cool for Fanny.".... It was a very simple phrase, which the Contessina uttered very simply, as she fanned herself with a large fan of white feathers. Each wave of it stirred the meshes of her fair hair, which she wore curled upon her rather high forehead. Julien understood her too well not to perceive that her voice, her gestures, her eyes, her entire being, betrayed a nervousness at that moment almost upon the verge of sadness.

Was she still reserved from the day before, or was she a prey to one of those inexplicable transactions, which had led Dorsenne in his meditations of the night to such strange suspicions? Those suspicions returned to him with the feeling that, of all the persons present, Alba was the only one who seemed to be aware of the drama which undoubtedly was brewing. He resolved to seek once more for the solution of the living enigma which that singular girl was. How lovely she appeared to him that evening with, those two expressions which gave her an almost tragical look! The corners of her mouth drooped somewhat; her upper lip, almost too short, disclosed her teeth, and in the lower part of her pale face was a bitterness so prematurely sad! Why? It was not the time to ask the question. First of all, it was necessary for the young man to go in search of Madame Steno on the terrace, which terminated in a paradise of Italian voluptuousness, the salon furnished in imitation of Paris. Shrubs blossomed in large terra-cotta vases. Statuettes were to be seen on the balustrade, and, beyond, the pines of the Villa Bonaparte outlined their black umbrellas against a sky of blue velvet, strewn with large stars. A vague aroma of acacias, from a garden near by, floated in the air, which was light, caressing, and warm. The soft atmosphere sufficed to convict of falsehood the Contessina, who had evidently wished to justify the *tete-a-tete* of her mother and of Maitland. The two lovers were indeed together in the perfume, the mystery and the solitude of the obscure and quiet terrace.

It took Dorsenne, who came from the bright glare of the salon, a moment to distinguish in the darkness the features of the Countess who, dressed all in white, was lying upon a willow couch with soft cushions of silk. She was smoking a cigarette, the lighted end of which, at each breath she drew, gave sufficient light to show that, notwithstanding the coolness of the night, her lovely neck, so long and flexible, about which was clasped a collar of pearls, was bare, as well as her fair shoulders and her perfect arms, laden with bracelets, which were visible through her wide, flowing sleeves. On advancing, Julien recognized, through the vegetable odors of that spring night, the strong scent of the Virginian tobacco which Madame Steno had used since she had fallen in love with Maitland, instead of the Russian "papyrus" to which Gorka had accustomed her. It is by such insignificant traits that amorous women recognize a love profoundly, insatiably sensual, the only one of which the Venetian was capable. Their passionate desire to give themselves up still more leads them to espouse, so to speak, the slightest habits of the men whom they



love in that way. Thus are explained those metamorphoses of tastes, of thoughts, even of appearance, so complete, that in six months, in three months of separation they become like different people. By the side of that graceful and supple vision, Lincoln Maitland was seated on a low chair. But his broad shoulders, which his evening coat set off in their amplitude, attested that before having studied "Art"--and even while studying it--he had not ceased to practise the athletic sports of his English education. As soon as he was mentioned, the term "large" was evoked. Indeed, above the large frame was a large face, somewhat red, with a large, red moustache, which disclosed, in broad smiles, his large, strong teeth.

Large rings glistened on his large fingers. He presented a type exactly opposite to that of Boleslas Gorka. If the grandson of the Polish Castellan recalled the dangerous finesse of a feline, of a slender and beautiful panther, Maitland could be compared to one of those mastiffs in the legends, with a jaw and muscles strong enough to strangle lions. The painter in him was only in the eye and in the hand, in consequence of a gift as physical as the voice to a tenor. But that instinct, almost abnormal, had been developed, cultivated to excess, by the energy of will in refinement, a trait so marked in the Anglo-Saxons of the New World when they like Europe, instead of detesting it. For the time being, the longing for refinement seemed reduced to the passionate inhalations of that divine, fair rose of love which was Madame Steno, a rose almost too full-blown, and which the autumn of forty years had begun to fade. But she was still charming. And how little Maitland heeded the fact that his wife was in the room near by, the windows of which cast forth a light which caused to stand out more prominently the shadow of the voluptuous terrace! He held his mistress's hand within his own, but abandoned it when he perceived Dorsenne, who took particular pains to move a chair noisily on approaching the couple, and to say, in a loud voice, with a merry laugh:

"I should have made a poor gallant abbe of the last century, for at night I can really see nothing. If your cigarette had not served me as a beacon-light I should have run against the balustrade."

"Ah, it is you, Dorsenne," replied Madame Steno, with a sharpness contrary to her habitual amiability, which proved to the novelist that first of all he was the "inconvenient third" of the classical comedies, then that Hafner had reported his imprudent remarks of the day before.

"So much the better," thought he, "I shall have forewarned her. On reflection she will be pleased. It is true that at this moment there is no question of reflection." As he said those words to himself, he talked aloud of the temperature of the day, of the probabilities of the weather for the morrow, of Ardea's good-humor. He made, indeed, twenty trifling remarks, in order to manage to leave the terrace and to leave the lovers to their tete-a-tete, without causing his withdrawal to become noticeable by indiscreet haste, as disagreeable as suggestive.

"When may we come to your atelier to see the portrait finished, Maitland?" he asked, still standing, in order the better to manage his

retreat.

"Finished?" exclaimed the Countess, who added, employing a diminutive which she had used for several weeks: "Do you then not know that Linco has again effaced the head?"

"Not the entire head," said the painter, "but the face is to be done over. You remember, Dorsenne, those two canvases by Pier della Francesca, which are at Florence, Duc Federigo d'Urbino and his wife Battista Sforza. Did you not see them in the same room with La Calomnie by Botticelli, with a landscape in the background? It is drawn like this," and he made a gesture with his thumb, "and that is what I am trying to obtain, the necessary curve on which all faces depend. There is no better painter in Italy."

"And Titian and Raphael?" interrupted Madame Steno.

"And the Sienese and the Lorenzetti, of whom you once raved? You wrote to me of them, with regard to my article on your exposition of 'eighty-six; do you remember?" inquired the writer.

"Raphael?" replied Maitland.... "Do you wish me to tell you what Raphael really was? A sublime builder. And Titian? A sublime upholsterer. It is true, I admired the Sienese very much," he added, turning toward Dorsenne. "I spent three months in copying the Simone Martini of the municipality, the Guido Riccio, who rides between two strongholds on a gray heath, where there is not a sign of a tree or a house, but only lances and towers. Do I remember Lorenzetti? Above all, the fresco at San Francesco, in which Saint Francois presents his order to the Pope, that was his best work.... Then, there is a cardinal, with his fingers on his lips, thus!" another gesture. "Well, I remember it, you see, because there is an anecdote. It is portrayed on a wall--oh, a grand portrayal, but without the subject, flutt!".... and he made a hissing sound with his lips, "while Pier della Francesca, Carnevale, Melozzo,".... he paused to find a word which would express the very complicated thought in his head, and he concluded: "That is painting."

"But the Assumption by Titian, and the Transfiguration by Raphael," resumed the Countess, who added in Italian, with an accent of enthusiasm: "Ah, the bellezza!"

"Do not worry, Countess," said Dorsenne, laughing heartily, "those are an artist's opinions. Ten years ago, I said that Victor Hugo was an amateur and Alfred de Musset a bourgeois. But," he added, "as I am not descended from the Doges nor the Pilgrim Fathers, I, a poor, degenerate Gallo-Roman, fear the dampness on account of my rheumatism, and ask your permission to reenter the house." Then, as he passed through the door of the salon: "Raphael, a builder! Titian, an upholsterer! Lorenzetti, a reproducer!" he repeated to himself. "And the descendant of the Doges, who listened seriously to those speeches, her ideal should be a madonna en chromo! Of the first order! As for Gorka, if he had not made me lose my entire day yesterday, I should think I had been dreaming, so little is there any question of him.... And Ardea, who continues to laugh at his

ruin. He is not bad for an Italian. But he talks too much about his affairs, and it is in bad taste!".... Indeed, as he turned toward the group assembled in a corner of the salon, he heard the Prince relating a story about Cavalier Fossati, to whom was entrusted the charge of the sale:

"How much do you think will be realized on all?" I asked him, finally. "Oh," he replied, "very little.... But a little and a little more end by making a great deal. With what an air he added: 'E gia il moschino e conte'--Already the gnat is a count.' The gnat was himself. 'A few more sales like yours, my Prince, and my son, the Count of Fossati, will have half a million. He will enter the club and address you with the familiar 'thou' when playing 'goffo' against you. That is what there is in this gia (already).... On my honor, I have not been happier than since I have, not a sou."

"You are an optimist, Prince," said Hafner, "and whatsoever our friend Dorsenne here present may claim, it is necessary to be optimistic."

"You are attacking him again, father," interrupted Fanny, in a tone of respectful reproach.

"Not the man," returned the Baron, "but his ideas--yes, and above all those of his school.... Yes, yes," he continued, either wishing to change the conversation, which Ardea persisted in turning upon his ruin, or finding very well organized a world in which strokes like that of the Credit Austro-Dalmate are possible, he really felt a deep aversion to the melancholy and pessimism with which Julien's works were tinged. And he continued: "On listening to you, Ardea, just now, and on seeing this great writer enter, I am reminded by contrast of the fashion now in vogue of seeing life in a gloomy light."

"Do you find it very gay?" asked Alba, brusquely.

"Good," said Hafner; "I was sure that, in talking against pessimism, I should make the Contessina talk.... Very gay?" he continued. "No. But when I think of the misfortunes which might have come to all of us here, for instance, I find it very tolerable. Better than living in another epoch, for example. One hundred and fifty years ago, Contessina, in Venice, you would have been liable to arrest any day under a warrant of the Council of Ten.... And you, Dorsenne, would have been exposed to the cudgel like Monsieur de Voltaire, by some jealous lord.... And Prince d'Ardea would have run the risk of being assassinated or beheaded at each change of Pope. And I, in my quality of Protestant, should have been driven from France, persecuted in Austria, molested in Italy, burned in Spain."

As can be seen, he took care to choose between his two inheritances. He had done so with an enigmatical good-nature which was almost ironical. He paused, in order not to mention what might have come to Madame Maitland before the suppression of slavery. He knew that the very pretty and elegant young lady shared the prejudices of her American compatriots against negro blood, and that she made every effort to hide the blemish

upon her birth to the point of never removing her gloves. It may, however, in justice be added, that the slightly olive tinge in her complexion, her wavy hair, and a vague bluish reflection in the whites of her eyes would scarcely have betrayed the mixture of race. She did not seem to have heeded the Baron's pause, but she arranged, with an absent air, the folds of her mauve gown, while Dorsenne replied: "It is a fine and specious argument.... Its only fault is that it has no foundation. For I defy you to imagine yourself what you would have been in the epoch of which you speak. We say frequently, 'If I had lived a hundred years ago.' We forget that a hundred years ago we should not have been the same; that we should not have had the same ideas, the same tastes, nor the same requirements. It is almost the same as imagining that you could think like a bird or a serpent."

"One could very well imagine what it would be never to have been born," interrupted. Alba Steno.

She uttered the sentence in so peculiar a manner that the discussion begun by Hafner was nipped in the bud.

The words produced their effect upon the chatter of the idlers who only partly believed in the ideas they put forth. Although there is always a paradox in condemning life amid a scene of luxury when one is not more than twenty, the Contessina was evidently sincere. Whence came that sincerity? From what corner of her youthful heart, wounded almost to death? Dorsenne was the only person who asked himself the question, for the conversation turned at once, Lydia Maitland having touched with her fan the sleeve of Alba, who was two seats from her, to ask her this question with an irony as charming, after the young girl's words, as it was involuntary:

"It is silk muslin, is it not?"

"Yes," replied the Contessina, who rose and leaned over, to offer to the curious gaze of her pretty neighbor her arm, which gleamed frail, nervous, and softly fair through the transparent red material, with a bow of ribbon of the same color tied at her slender shoulder and her graceful wrist, while Ardea, by the side of Fanny, could be heard saying to the daughter of Baron Justus, more beautiful than ever that evening, in her pallor slightly tinged with pink by some secret agitation:

"You visited my palace yesterday, Mademoiselle?"

"No," she replied.

"Ask her why not, Prince," said Hafner.

"Father!" cried Fanny, with a supplication in her black eyes which Ardea had the delicacy to obey, as he resumed:

"It is a pity. Everything there is very ordinary. But you would have been interested in the chapel. Indeed, I regret that the most, those objects before which my ancestors have prayed so long and which end by

being listed in a catalogue.... They even took the reliquary from me, because it was by Ugolina da Siena. I will buy it back as soon as I can. Your father applauds my courage. I could not part from those objects without real sorrow."

"But it is the feeling she has for the entire palace," said the Baron.

"Father!" again implored Fanny.

"Come, compose yourself, I will not betray you," said Hafner, while Alba, taking advantage of having risen, left the group. She walked toward a table at the other extremity of the room, set in the style of an English table, with tea and iced drinks, saying to Julien, who followed her:

"Shall I prepare your brandy and soda, Dorsenne?"

"What ails you, Contessina?" asked the young man, in a whisper, when they were alone near the plateau of crystal and the collection of silver, which gleamed so brightly in the dimly lighted part of the room.

"Yes," he persisted, "what ails you? Are you still vexed with me?"

"With you?" said she. "I have never been. Why should I be?" she repeated. "You have done nothing to me."

"Some one has wounded you?" asked Julien.

He saw that she was sincere, and that she scarcely remembered the ill-humor of the preceding day. "You can not deceive a friend such as I am," he continued. "On seeing you fan yourself, I knew that you had some annoyance. I know you so well."

"I have no annoyance," she replied, with an impatient frown. "I can not bear to hear lies of a certain kind. That is all!"

"And who has lied?" resumed Dorsenne.

"Did you not hear Ardea speak of his chapel just now, he who believes in God as little as Hafner, of whom no one knows whether he is a Jew or a Gentile!.... Did you not see poor Fanny look at him the while? And did you not remark with what tact the Baron made the allusion to the delicacy which had prevented his daughter from visiting the Palais Castagna with us? And did that comedy enacted between the two men give you no food for thought?"

"Is that why Peppino is here?" asked Julien. "Is there a plan on foot for the marriage of the heiress of Papa Hafner's millions and the grand-nephew of Pope Urban VII? That will furnish me with a fine subject of conversation with some one of my acquaintance!.... And the mere thought of Montfanon learning such news caused him to laugh heartily, while he continued, "Do not look at me so indignantly, dear Contessina.

But I see nothing so sad in the story. Fanny to marry Peppino? Why not?

You yourself have told me that she is partly Catholic, and that her father is only awaiting her marriage to have her baptized. She will be happy then. Ardea will keep the magnificent palace we saw yesterday, and the Baron will crown his career in giving to a man ruined on the Bourse, in the form of a dowry, that which he has taken from others."

"Be silent," said the young girl, in a very grave voice, "you inspire me with horror. That Ardea should have lost all scruples, and that he should wish to sell his title of a Roman prince at as high a price as possible, to no matter what bidder, is so much the more a matter of indifference, for we Venetians do not allow ourselves to be imposed upon by the Roman nobility. We all had Doges in our families when the fathers of these people were bandits in the country, waiting for some poor monk of their name to become Pope. That Baron Hafner sells his daughter as he once sold her jewels is also a matter of indifference to me. But you do not know her. You do not know what a creature, charming and enthusiastic, simple and sincere, she is, and who will never, never mistrust that, first of all, her father is a thief, and, then, that he is selling her like a trinket in order to have grand-children who shall be at the same time grandnephews of the Pope, and, finally, that Peppino does not love her, that he wants her dowry, and that he will have for her as little feeling as they have for her." She glanced at Madame Maitland. "It is worse than I can tell you," she said, enigmatically, as if vexed by her own words, and almost frightened by them.

"Yes," said Julien, "it would be very sad; but are you sure that you do not exaggerate the situation? There is not so much calculation in life. It is more mediocre and more facile. Perhaps the Prince and the Baron have a vague project."

"A vague project?" interrupted Alba, shrugging her shoulders. "There is never anything vague with a Hafner, you may depend. What if I were to tell you that I am positive--do you hear--positive that it is he who holds between his fingers the largest part of the Prince's debts, and that he caused the sale by Ancona to obtain the bargain?"

"It is impossible!" exclaimed Dorsenne. "You saw him yourself yesterday thinking of buying this and that object."

"Do not make me say any more," said Alba, passing over her brow and her eyes two or three times her hand, upon which no ring sparkled--that hand, very supple and white, whose movements betrayed extreme nervousness. "I have already said too much. It is not my business, and poor Fanny is only to me a recent friend, although I think her very attractive and affectionate.... When I think that she is on the point of pledging herself for life, and that there is no one, that there can be no one, to cry: They lie to you! I am filled with compassion. That is all. It is childish!"

It is always painful to observe in a young person the exact perception of the sinister dealings of life, which, once entered into the mind, never allows of the carelessness so natural at the age of twenty.

The impression of premature disenchantment Alba Steno had many times given to Dorsenne, and it had indeed been the principal attraction to the curious observer of the feminine character, who still was struck by the terrible absence of illusion which such a view of the projects of Fanny's father revealed. Whence did she know them? Evidently from Madame Steno herself. Either the Baron and the Countess had talked of them before the young girl too openly to leave her in any doubt, or she had divined what they did not tell her, through their conversation. On seeing her thus, with her bitter mouth, her bright eyes, so visibly a prey to the fever of suppressed loathing, Dorsenne again was impressed by the thought of her perfect perspicacity. It was probable that she had applied the same force of thought to her mother's conduct. It seemed to him that on raising, as she was doing, the wick of the silver lamp beneath the large teakettle, that she was glancing sidewise at the terrace, where the end of the Countess's white robe could be seen through the shadow. Suddenly the mad thoughts which had so greatly agitated him on the previous day possessed him again, and the plan he had formed of imitating his model, Hamlet, in playing in Madame Steno's salon the role of the Danish prince before his uncle occurred to him. Absently, with his customary air of indifference, he continued:

"Rest assured, Ardea does not lack enemies. Hafner, too, has plenty of them. Some one will be found to denounce their plot, if there is a plot, to lovely Fanny. An anonymous letter is so quickly written."

He had no sooner uttered those words than he interrupted himself with the start of a man who handles a weapon which he thinks unloaded and which suddenly discharges.

It was, really, to discharge a duty in the face of his own scepticism that he had spoken thus, and he did not expect to see another shade of sadness flit across Alba's mobile and proud face.

There was in the corners of her mouth more disgust, her eyes expressed more scorn, while her hands, busy preparing the tea, trembled as she said, with an accent so agitated that her friend regretted his cruel plan:

"Ah! Do not speak of it! It would be still worse than her present ignorance. At least, now she knows nothing, and if some miserable person were to do as you say she would know in part without being sure.... How could you smile at such a supposition?.... No! Poor, gentle Fanny! I hope she will receive no anonymous letters. They are so cowardly and make so much trouble!"

"I ask your pardon if I have wounded you," replied Dorsenne. He had touched, he felt it, a tender spot in that heart, and perceived with grief that not only had Alba Steno not written the anonymous letters addressed to Gorka, but that, on the contrary, she had received some herself. From whom? Who was the mysterious denunciator who had warned in that abominable manner the daughter of Madame Steno after the lover? Julien shuddered as he continued: "If I smiled, it was because I believe Mademoiselle Hafner, in case the misfortune should come to her, sensible

enough to treat such advice as it merits. An anonymous letter does not deserve to be read. Any one infamous enough to make use of weapons of that sort does not deserve that one should do him the honor even to glance at what he has written."

"Is it not so?" said the girl. There was in her eyes, the pupils of which suddenly dilated, a gleam of genuine gratitude which convinced her companion that he had seen correctly. He had uttered just the words of which she had need. In the face of that proof, he was suddenly overwhelmed by an access of shame and of pity--of shame, because in his thoughts he had insulted the unhappy girl--of pity, because she had to suffer a blow so cruel, if, indeed, her mother had been exposed to her. It must have been on the preceding afternoon or that very morning that she had received the horrible letter, for, during the visit to the Palais Castagna, she had been, by turns, gay and quiet, but so childish, while on that particular evening it was no longer the child who suffered, but the woman. Dorsenne resumed:

"You see, we writers are exposed to those abominations. A book which succeeds, a piece which pleases, an article which is extolled, calls forth from the envious unsigned letters which wound us or those whom we love. In such cases, I repeat, I burn them unread, and if ever in your life such come to you, listen to me, little Countess, and follow the advice of your friend, Dorsenne, for he is your friend; you know it, do you not, your true friend?"

"Why should I receive anonymous letters?" asked the girl, quickly. "I have neither fame, beauty, nor wealth, and am not to be envied."

As Dorsenne looked at her, regretting that he had said so much, she forced her sad lips to smile, and added: "If you are really my friend, instead of making me lose time by your advice, of which I shall probably never have need, for I shall never become a great authoress, help me to serve the tea, will you? It should be ready." And with her slender fingers she raised the lid of the kettle, saying: "Go and ask Madame Maitland if she will take some tea this evening, and Fanny, too.... Ardea takes whiskey and the Baron mineral water.... You can ring for his glass of vichy.... There.... You have delayed me.... There are more callers and nothing is ready.... Ah," she cried, "it is Maud!"--then, with surprise, "and her husband!"

Indeed, the folding doors of the hall opened to admit Maud Gorka, a robust British beauty, radiant with happiness, attired in a gown of black crepe de Chine with orange ribbons, which set off to advantage her fresh color. Behind her came Boleslas. But he was no longer the traveller who, thirty-six hours before, had arrived at the Place de la Trinite-des-Monts, mad with anxiety, wild with jealousy, soiled by the dust of travel, his hair disordered, his hands and face dirty. It was, though somewhat thinner, the elegant Gorka whom Dorsenne had known--tall, slender, and perfumed, in full dress, a bouquet in his buttonhole, his lips smiling. To the novelist, knowing what he knew, the smile and the composure had something in them more terrible than the frenzy of the day before. He comprehended it by the manner in which the Pole gave him his



hand. One night and a day of reflection had undermined his work, and if Boleslas had enacted the comedy to the point of lulling his wife's suspicions and of deciding on the visit of that evening, it was because he had resolved not to consult any one and to lead his own inquiry. He was succeeding in the beginning; he had certainly perceived Madame Steno's white gown upon the terrace, while radiant Maud explained his unexpected return with her usual ingenuousness.

"This is what comes of sending to a doting father accounts of our boy's health.... I wrote him the other day that Luc had a little fever. He wrote to ask about its progress. I did not receive his letter. He became uneasy, and here he is."

"I will tell mamma," said Alba, passing out upon the terrace, but her haste seemed too slow to Dorsenne. He had such a presentiment of danger that he did not think of smiling, as he would have done on any other occasion, at the absolute success of the deception which he and Boleslas had planned on the preceding day, and of which the Count had said, with a fatuity now proven: "Maud will be so happy to see me that she will believe all."

It was a scene both simple and tragical--of that order in which in society the most horrible incidents occur without a sound, without a gesture, amid phrases of conventionality and in a festal framework! Two of the spectators, at least, besides Julien, understood its importance--Ardea and Hafner. For neither the one nor the other had failed to notice the relations between Madame Steno and Maitland, much less her position with regard to Gorka. The writer, the grand seigneur, and the business man had, notwithstanding the differences of age and of position, a large experience of analogous circumstances.

They knew of what presence of mind a courageous woman was capable, when surprised, as was the Venetian. All these have declared since that they had never imagined more admirable self-possession, a composure more superbly audacious, than that displayed by Madame Steno, at that decisive moment. She appeared on the threshold of the French window, surprised and delighted, just in the measure she conformably should be. Her fair complexion, which the slightest emotion tinged with carmine, was bewitchingly pink. Not a quiver of her long lashes veiled her deep blue eyes, which gleamed brightly. With her smile, which exhibited her lovely teeth, the color of the large pearls which were twined about her neck, with the emeralds in her fair hair, with her fine shoulders displayed by the slope of her white corsage, with her delicate waist, with the splendor of her arms from which she had removed the gloves to yield them to the caresses of Maitland, and which gleamed with more emeralds, with her carriage marked by a certain haughtiness, she was truly a woman of another age, the sister of those radiant princesses whom the painters of Venice evoke beneath the marble porticoes, among apostles and martyrs. She advanced to Maud Gorka, whom she embraced affectionately, then, pressing Boleslas's hand, she said in a voice so warm, in which at times there were deep tones, softened by the habitual use of the caressing dialect of the lagoon:

"What a surprise! And you could not come to dine with us? Well, sit down, both of you, and relate to me the Odyssey of the traveller," and, turning toward Maitland, who had followed her into the salon with the insolent composure of a giant and of a lover:

"Be kind, my little Linco, and fetch me my fan and my gloves, which I left on the couch."

At that moment Dorsenne, who had only one fear, that of meeting Gorka's eyes--he could not have borne their glance--was again by the side of Alba Steno. The young girl's face, just now so troubled, was radiant. It seemed as if a great weight had been lifted from the pretty Contessina's mind.

"Poor child," thought the writer, "she would not think her mother could be so calm were she guilty. The Countess's manner is the reply to the anonymous letter. Have they written all to her? My God! Who can it be?"

And he fell into a deep reverie, interrupted only by the hum of the conversation, in which he did not participate. It would have satisfied him had he observed, instead of meditated, that the truth with regard to the author of the anonymous letters might have become clear to him, as clear as the courage of Madame Steno in meeting danger--as the blind confidence of Madame Gorka--as the disdainful imperturbability of Maitland before his rival and the suppressed rage of that rival--as the finesse of Hafner in sustaining the general conversation--as the assiduous attentions of Ardea to Fanny--as the emotion of the latter--as clear as Alba's sense of relief. All those faces, on Boleslas's entrance, had expressed different feelings. Only one had, for several minutes, expressed the joy of crime and the avidity of ultimately satisfied hatred. But as it was that of little Madame Maitland, the silent creature, considered so constantly by him as stupid and insignificant, Dorsenne had not paid more attention to it than had the other witnesses the surprising reappearance of the betrayed lover.

Every country has a metaphor to express the idea that there is no worse water than that which is stagnant. Still waters run deep, say the English, and the Italians, Still waters ruin bridges.

These adages would not be accurate if one did not forget them in practise, and the professional analyst of the feminine heart had entirely forgotten them on that evening.

## CHAPTER V

### COUNTESS STENO

A woman less courageous than the Countess, less capable of looking a situation in the face and of advancing to it, such an evening would have marked the prelude to one of those nights of insomnia when the mind

exhausts in advance all the agonies of probable danger. Countess Steno did not know what weakness and fear were.

A creature of energy and of action, who felt herself to be above all danger, she attached no meaning to the word uneasiness. So she slept, on the night which followed that soiree, a sleep as profound, as refreshing, as if Gorka had never returned with vengeance in his heart, with threats in his eyes. Toward ten o'clock the following morning, she was in the tiny salon, or rather, the office adjoining her bedroom, examining several accounts brought by one of her men of business. Rising at seven o'clock, according to her custom, she had taken the cold bath in which, in summer as well as winter, she daily quickened her blood. She had breakfasted, 'a l'anglaise', following the rule to which she claimed to owe the preservation of her digestion, upon eggs, cold meat, and tea. She had made her complicated toilette, had visited her daughter to ascertain how she had slept, had written five letters, for her cosmopolitan salon compelled her to carry on an immense correspondence, which radiated between Cairo and New York, St. Petersburg and Bombay, taking in Munich, London, and Madeira, and she was as faithful in friendship as she was inconstant in love. Her large handwriting, so elegant in its composition, had covered pages and pages before she said: "I have a rendezvous at eleven o'clock with Maitland. Ardea will be here at ten to talk of his marriage. I have accounts from Finoli to examine. I hope that Gorka will not come, too, this morning.".... Persons in whom the feeling of love is very complete, but very physical, are thus. They give themselves and take themselves back altogether. The Countess experienced no more pity than fear in thinking of her betrayed lover. She had determined to say to him, "I no longer love you," frankly, openly, and to offer him his choice between a final rupture or a firm friendship.

The only annoyance depended upon the word of explanation, which she desired to see postponed until afternoon, when she would be free, an annoyance which, however, did not prevent her from examining with her usual accuracy the additions and multiplications of her intendant, who stood near her with a face such as Bonifagio gave to his Pharisees. He managed the seven hundred hectares of Piove, near Padua, Madame Steno's favorite estate. She had increased the revenue from it tenfold, by the draining of a sterile and often malignant lagoon, which, situated a metre below the water-level, had proved of surprising fertility; and she calculated the probable operations for weeks in advance with the detailed and precise knowledge of rural cultivation which is the characteristic of the Italian aristocracy and the permanent cause of its vitality.

"Then you estimate the gain from the silkworms at about fifty kilos of cocoons to an ounce?"

"Yes, Excellency," replied the intendant.

"One hundred ounces of yellow; one hundred times fifty makes five thousand," resumed the Countess. "At four francs fifty?"

"Perhaps five, Excellency," said the intendant.

"Let us say twenty-two thousand five hundred," said the Countess, "and as much for the Japanese.... That will bring us in our outlay for building."

"Yes, Excellency. And about the wine?"

"I am of the opinion, after what you have told me of the vineyard, that you should sell as quickly as possible to Kauffmann's agent all that remains of the last crop, but not at less than six francs. You know it is necessary that our casks be emptied and cleaned after the month of August.... If we were to fail this time, for the first year that we manufacture our wine with the new machine, it would be too bad."

"Yes, Excellency. And the horses?"

"I think that is an opportunity we should not let escape. My advice is that you take the express to Florence to-day at two o'clock. You will reach Verona to-morrow morning. You will conclude the bargain. The horses will be sent to Piove the same evening...."

We have finished just in time," she continued, arranging the intendant's papers. She put them herself in their envelope, which she gave him. She had an extremely delicate sense of hearing, and she knew that the door of the antechamber opened. It seemed that the administrator took away in his portfolio all the preoccupation of this extraordinary woman. For, after concluding that dry conversation, or rather that monologue, she had her clearest and brightest smile with which to receive the new arrival, who was, fortunately, Prince d'Ardea. She said to the servant:

"I wish to speak with the Prince. If any one asks for me, do not admit him and do not send any one hither. Bring me the card." Then, turning toward the young man, "Well, Simpaticone," it was the nickname she gave him, "how did you finish your evening?"

"You would not believe me," replied Peppino Ardea, laughing; "I, who no longer have anything, not even my bed. I went to the club and I played.... For the first time in my life I won."

He was so gay in relating his childish prank, he jested so merrily about his ruin, that the Countess looked at him in surprise, as he had looked at her on entering.... We understand ourselves so little, and we know so little about our own singularities of character, that each one was surprised at finding the other so calm. Ardea could not comprehend that Madame Steno should not be at least uneasy about Gorka's return and the consequences which might result therefrom. She, on the other hand, admired the strange youth who, in his misfortune, could find such joviality at his command. He had evidently expended as much care upon his toilette as if he had not to take some immediate steps to assure his future, and his waistcoat, the color of his shirt, his cravat, his yellow shoes, the flower in his buttonhole, all united to make of him an amiable and incorrigibly frivolous dandy. She felt the need which strong

characters have in the presence of weak ones; that of acting for the youth, of aiding him in spite of himself, and she attacked at once the question of marriage with Fanny Hafner. With her usual common-sense, and with her instinct of arranging everything, Madame Steno perceived in the union so many advantages for every one that she was in haste to conclude it as quickly as if it involved a personal affair.

The marriage was earnestly desired by the Baron, who had spoken of it to her for months. It suited Fanny, who would be converted to Catholicism with the consent of her father. It suited the Prince, who at one stroke would be freed from his embarrassment. Finally, it suited the name of Castagna. Although Peppino was its only representative at that time, and as, by an old family tradition, he bore a title different from the patronymic title of Pope Urban VII, the sale of the celebrated palace had called forth a scandal to which it was essential to put an end. The Countess had forgotten that she had assisted, without a protestation, in that sale. Had she not known through Hafner that he had bought at a low price an enormous heap of the Prince's bills of exchange? Did she not know the Baron well enough to be sure that M. Noe Ancona, the implacable creditor who sold the palace, was only the catspaw of this terrible friend? In a fit of ill-humor at the Baron, had she not herself accused him in Alba's presence of this very simple plan, to bring Ardea to a final catastrophe in order to offer him salvation in the form of the union with Fanny, and to execute at the same time an excellent operation? For, once freed from the mortgages which burdened them, the Prince's lands and buildings would regain their true value, and the imprudent speculator would find himself again as rich, perhaps richer.

"Come," said Madame Steno to the Prince, after a moment's silence and without any preamble, "it is now time to talk business. You dined by the side of my little friend yesterday; you had the entire evening in which to study her. Answer me frankly, would she not make the prettiest little Roman princess who could kneel in her wedding-gown at the tomb of the apostles? Can you not see her in her white gown, under her veil, alighting at the staircase of Saint Peter's from the carriage with the superb horses which her father has given her? Close your eyes and see her in your thoughts. Would she not be pretty? Would she not?"

"Very pretty," replied Ardea, smiling at the tempting vision Madame Steno had conjured up, "but she is not fair. And you know, to me, a woman who is not fair--ah, Countess! What a pity that in Venice, five years ago, on a certain evening--do you remember?"

"How much like you that is!" interrupted she, laughing her deep, clear laugh. "You came to see me this morning to talk to me of a marriage, unhoped for with your reputation of gamester, of supper-giver, of 'mauvais sujet'; of a marriage which fulfils conditions most improbable, so perfect are they--beauty, youth, intelligence, fortune, and even, if I have read my little friend aright, the beginning of an interest, of a very deep interest. And, for a little, you would make a declaration to me. Come, come!" and she extended to him for a kiss her beautiful hand, on which gleamed large emeralds. "You are forgiven. But answer--yes or no. Shall I make the proposal? If it is yes, I will go

to the Palace Savorelli at two o'clock. I will speak to my friend Hafner. He will speak to his daughter, and it will not depend upon me if you have not their reply this evening or to-morrow morning. Is it yes? Is it no?"

"This evening? To-morrow?" exclaimed the Prince, shaking his head with a most comical gesture. "I can not decide like that. It is an ambush! I come to talk, to consult you."

"And on what?" asked Madame Steno, with a vivacity almost impatient. "Can I tell you anything you do not already know? In twenty-four hours, in forty-eight, in six months, what difference will there be, I pray you? We must look at things as they are, however. To-morrow, the day after, the following days, will you be less embarrassed?"

"No," said the Prince, "but--"

"There is no but," she resumed, allowing him to say no more than she had allowed her intendant. The despotism natural to puissant personalities scorned to be disguised in her, when there were practical decisions in which she was to take part. "The only serious objection you made to me when I spoke to you of this marriage six months ago was that Fanny was not a Catholic. I know today that she has only to be asked to be converted. So do not let us speak of that."

"No," said the Prince, "but--"

"As for Hafner," continued the Countess, "you will say he is my friend and that I am partial, but that partiality even is an opinion. He is precisely the father-in-law you need. Do not shake your head. He will repair all that needs repairing in your fortune. You have been robbed, my poor Peppino. You told me so yourself.... Become the Baron's son-in-law, and you will have news of your robbers. I know.... There is the Baron's origin and the suit of ten years ago with all the 'pettogolezzi' to which it gave rise. All that has not the common meaning. The Baron began life in a small way. He was from a family of Jewish origin--you see, I do not deceive you--but converted two generations back, so that the story of his change of religion since his stay in Italy is a calumny, like the rest. He had a suit in which he was acquitted. You would not require more than the law, would you?"

"No, but--"

"For what are you waiting, then?" concluded Madame Steno. "That it may be too late? How about your lands?"

"Ah! let me breathe, let me fan myself," said Ardea, who, indeed, took one of the Countess's fans from the desk. "I, who have never known in the morning what I would do in the evening, I, who have always lived according to my pleasure, you ask me to take in five minutes the resolution to bind myself forever!"

"I ask you to decide what you wish to do," returned the Countess. "It is

very amusing to travel at one's pleasure. But when it is a question of arranging one's life, this childishness is too absurd. I know of only one way: to see one's aim and to march directly to it. Yours is very clear--to get out of this dilemma. The way is not less clear; it is marriage with a girl who has five millions dowry. Yes or no, will you have her?.... Ah," said she, suddenly interrupting herself, "I shall not have a moment to myself this morning, and I have an appointment at eleven o'clock!".... She looked at the timepiece on her table, which indicated twenty-five minutes past ten. She had heard the door open. The footman was already before her and presented to her a card upon a salver. She took the card, looked at it, frowned, glanced again at the clock, seemed to hesitate, then: "Let him wait in the small salon, and say that I will be there immediately," said she, and turning again toward Ardea: "You think you have escaped. You have not. I do not give you permission to go before I return. I shall return in fifteen minutes. Would you like some newspapers? There are some. Books? There are some. Tobacco? This box is filled with cigars.... In a quarter of an hour I shall be here and I will have your reply. I wish it, do you hear? I wish it".... And on the threshold with another smile, using that time a term of patois common in Northern Italy and which is only a corruption of 'schiavo' or servant: 'Ciao Simpaticone.'

"What a woman!" said Peppino Ardea, when the door was closed upon the Countess. "Yes, what a pity that five years ago in Venice I was not free! Who knows? If I had dared, when she took me to my hotel in her gondola. She was about to leave San Giobbe. She had not yet accepted Boleslas. She would have advised--have directed me. I should have speculated on the Bourse, as she did, with Hafner's counsel. But not in the quality of son-in-law. I should not have been obliged to marry. And she would not now have such bad tobacco.".... He was on the point of lighting one of the Virginian cigarettes, a present from Maitland. He threw it away, making a grimace with his air of a spoiled child, at the risk of scorching the rug which lay upon the marble floor; and he passed into the antechamber in order to fetch his own case in the pocket of the light overcoat he had prudently taken on coming out after eight o'clock.

As he lighted one of the cigarettes in that case, filled with so-called Egyptian tobacco, mixed with opium and saltpetre, which he preferred to the tobacco of the American, he mechanically glanced at the card which the servant had left on going from the room--the card of the unknown visitor for whom Madame Steno had left him.

Ardea read upon it, with astonishment, these words:

Count Boleslas Gorka.

"She is better than I thought her," said he, on reentering the deserted office. "She had no need to bid me not to go. I think I should wait to see her return from that conversation."

It was indeed Boleslas whom the Countess found in the salon, which she had chosen as the room the most convenient for the stormy explanation she anticipated. It was isolated at the end of the hall, and was like

a pendant to the terrace. It formed, with the dining-room, the entire ground-floor, or, rather, the entresol of the house. Madame Steno's apartments, as well as the other small salon in which Peppino was, were on the first floor, together with the rooms set apart for the Contessina and her German governess, Fraulein Weber, for the time being on a journey.

The Countess had not been mistaken. At the first glance exchanged on the preceding day with Gorka, she had divined that he knew all. She would have suspected it, nevertheless, since Hafner had told her the few words indiscreetly uttered by Dorsenne on the clandestine return of the Pole to Rome. She had not at that time been mistaken in Boleslas's intentions, and she had no sooner looked in his face than she felt herself to be in peril. When a man has been the lover of a woman as that man had been hers, with the vibrating communion of a voluptuousness unbroken for two years, that woman maintains a sort of physiological, quasi-animal instinct. A gesture, the accent of a word, a sigh, a blush, a pallor, are signs for her that her intuition interprets with infallible certainty. How and why is that instinct accompanied by absolute oblivion of former caresses? It is a particular case of that insoluble and melancholy problem of the birth and death of love. Madame Steno had no taste for reflection of that order. Like all vigorous and simple creatures, she acknowledged and accepted it. As on the previous day, she became aware that the presence of her former lover no longer touched in her being the chord which had rendered her so weak to him during twenty-five months, so indulgent to his slightest caprices. It left her as cold as the marble of the bas-relief by Mino da Fiesole fitted into the wall just above the high chair upon which he leaned.

Boleslas, notwithstanding the paroxysm of lucid fury which he suffered at that moment, and which rendered him capable of the worst violence, had on his part a knowledge of the complete insensibility in which his presence left her. He had seen her so often, in the course of their long liaison, arrive at their morning rendezvous at that hour, in similar toilettes, so fresh, so supple, so youthful in her maturity, so eager for kisses, tender and ardent. She had now in her blue eyes, in her smile, in her entire person, some thing at once so gracious and so inaccessible, which gives to an abandoned lover the mad longing to strike, to murder, a woman who smiles at him with such a smile. At the same time she was so beautiful in the morning light, subdued by the lowered blinds, that she inspired him with an equal desire to clasp her in his arms whether she would or no. He had recognized, when she entered the room, the aroma of a preparation which she had used in her bath, and that trifle alone had aroused his passion far more than when the servant told him Madame Steno was engaged, and he wondered whether she was not alone with Maitland. Those impassioned, but suppressed, feelings trembled in the accent of the very simple phrase with which he greeted her. At certain moments, words are nothing; it is the tone in which they are uttered. And to the Countess that of the young man was terrible.

"I am disturbing you?" he asked, bowing and barely touching with the tips of his fingers the hand she had extended to him on entering.  
"Excuse me, I thought you alone. Will you be pleased to name another



time for the conversation which I take the liberty of demanding?"

"No, no," she replied, not permitting him to finish his sentence. "I was with Peppino Ardea, who will await me," said she, gently. "Moreover, you know I am in all things for the immediate. When one has something to say, it should be said, one, two, three?.... First, there is not much to say, and then it is better said.... There is nothing that will sooner render difficult easy explanations and embroil the best of friends than delay and maintaining silence."

"I am very happy to find you in such a mind," replied Boleslas, with a sarcasm which distorted his handsome face into a smile of atrocious hatred. The good-nature displayed by her cut him to the heart, and he continued, already less self-possessed: "It is indeed an explanation which I think I have the right to ask of you, and which I have come to claim."

"To claim, my dear?" said the Countess, looking him fixedly in the face without lowering her proud eyes, in which those imperative words had kindled a flame.

If she had been admirable the preceding evening in facing as she had done the return of her discarded lover, on coming direct from the tete-a-tete with her new one, perhaps, at that moment, she was doubly so, when she did not have her group of intimate friends to support her. She was not sure that the madman who confronted her was not armed, and she believed him perfectly capable of killing her, while she could not defend herself. But a part had to be played sooner or later, and she played it without flinching. She had not spoken an untruth in saying to Peppino Ardea: "I know only one way: to see one's aim and to march directly to it." She wanted a definitive rupture with Boleslas. Why should she hesitate as to the means?

She was silent, seeking for words. He continued:

"Will you permit me to go back three months, although that is, it seems, a long space of time for a woman's memory? I do not know whether you recall our last meeting? Pardon, I meant to say the last but one, since we met last night. Do you concede that the manner in which we parted then did not presage the manner in which we met?"

"I concede it," said the Countess, with a gleam of angry pride in her eyes, "although I do not very much like your style of expression. It is the second time you have addressed me as an accuser, and if you assume that attitude it will be useless to continue."

"Catherine!".... That cry of the young man, whose anger was increasing, decided her whom he thus addressed to precipitate the issue of a conversation in which each reply was to be a fresh burst of rancor.

"Well?" she inquired, crossing her arms in a manner so imperious that he paused in his menace, and she continued: "Listen, Boleslas, we have talked ten minutes without saying anything, because neither of us has the

courage to put the question such as we know and feel it to be. Instead of writing to me, as you did, letters which rendered replies impossible to me; instead of returning to Rome and hiding yourself like a malefactor; instead of coming to my home last night with that threatening face; instead of approaching me this morning with the solemnity of a judge, why did you not question me simply, frankly, as one who knows that I have loved him very, very much?.... Having been lovers, is that a reason for detesting each other when we cease those relations?"

"When we cease those relations!" replied Gorka. "So you no longer love me? Ah, I knew it; I guessed it after the first week of that fatal absence! But to think that you should tell it to me some day like that, in that calm voice which is a horrible blasphemy for our entire past. No, I do not believe it. I do not yet believe it. Ah, it is too infamous."

"Why?" interrupted the Countess, raising her head with still more haughtiness.... "There is only one thing infamous in love, and that is a falsehood. Ah, I know it. You men are not accustomed to meeting true women, who have the respect, the religion of their sentiment. I have that respect; I practise that religion. I repeat that I loved you a great deal, Boleslas. I did not hide it from you formerly. I was as loyal to you as truth itself. I have the consciousness of being so still, in offering you, as I do, a firm friendship, the friendship of man for man, who only asks to prove to you the sincerity of his devotion."

"I, a friendship with you, I--I--I?" exclaimed Boleslas. "Have I had enough patience in listening to you as I have listened? I heard you lie to me and scented the lie in the same breath. Why do you not ask me as well to form a friendship for him with whom you have replaced me? Ah, so you think I am blind, and you fancy I did not see that Maitland near you, and that I did not know at the first glance what part he was playing in your life? You did not think I might have good reasons for returning as I did? You did not know that one does not dally with one whom one loves as I love you?.... It is not true.... You have not been loyal to me, since you took this man for a lover while you were still my mistress. You had not the right, no, no, no, you had not the right!.... And what a man!.... If it had been Ardea, Dorsenne, no matter whom, that I might not blush for you.... But that brute, that idiot, who has nothing in his favor, neither good looks, birth, elegance, mind nor talent, for he has none--he has nothing but his neck and shoulders of a bull.... It is as if you had deceived me with a lackey.... No..... it is too terrible.... Ah, Catherine, swear to me that it is not true. Tell me that you no longer love me, I will submit, I will go away, I will accept all, provided that you swear to me you do not love that man--swear, swear!"... he added, grasping her hands with such violence that she uttered a slight exclamation, and, disengaging herself, said to him:

"Cease; you pain me. You are mad, Gorka; that can be your sole excuse.... I have nothing to swear to you. What I feel, what I think, what I do no longer concerns you after what I have told you.... Believe what it pleases you to believe.... But," and the irritation of an enamored woman, wounded in the man she adores, possessed her, "you shall

not speak twice of one of my friends as you have just spoken. You have deeply offended me, and I will not pardon you. In place of the friendship I offered you so honestly, we will have no further connections excepting those of society. That is what you desired.... Try not to render them impossible to yourself. Be correct at least in form. Remember you have a wife, I have a daughter, and that we owe it to them to spare them the knowledge of this unhappy rupture.... God is my witness, I wished to have it otherwise."

"My wife! Your daughter!" cried Boleslas with bitterness. "This is indeed the hour to remember them and to put them between you and my just vengeance! They never troubled you formerly, the two poor creatures, when you began to win my love?.... It was convenient for you that they should be friends! And I lent myself to it!.... I accepted such baseness--that to-day you might take shelter behind the two innocents!... No, it shall not be.... you shall not escape me thus. Since it is the only point on which I can strike you, I will strike you there. I hold you by that means, do you hear, and I will keep you. Either you dismiss that man, or I will no longer respect anything. My wife shall know all! Her! So much the better! For some time I have been stifled by my lies.... Your daughter, too, shall know all. She shall judge you now as she would judge you one day."

As he spoke he advanced to her with a manner so cruel that she recoiled. A few more moments and the man would have carried out his threat. He was about to strike her, to break objects around him, to call forth a terrible scandal. She had the presence of mind of an audacity more courageous still. An electric bell was near at hand. She pressed it, while Gorka said to her, with a scornful laugh, "That was the only affront left you to offer me--to summon your servants to defend you."

"You are mistaken," she replied. "I am not afraid. I repeat you are mad, and I simply wish to prove it to you by recalling you to the reality of your situation.... Bid Mademoiselle Alba come down," said she to the footman whom her ring had summoned. That phrase was the drop of cold water which suddenly broke the furious jet of vapor. She had found the only means of putting an end to the terrible scene. For, notwithstanding his menace, she knew that Maud's husband always recoiled before the young girl, the friend of his wife, of whose delicacy and sensibility he was aware.

Gorka was capable of the most dangerous and most cruel deeds, in an excess of passion augmented by vanity.

He had in him a chivalrous element which would paralyze his frenzy before Alba. As for the immorality of that combination of defence which involved her daughter in her rupture with a vindictive lover, the Countess did not think of that. She often said: "She is my comrade, she is my friend.".... And she thought so. To lean upon her in that critical moment was only natural to her. In the tempest of indignation which shook Gorka, the sudden appeal to innocent Alba appeared to him the last degree of cynicism. During the short space of time which elapsed between the departure of the footman and the arrival of the young girl,

he only uttered these words, repeating them as he paced the floor, while his former mistress defied him with her bold gaze:

"I scorn you, I scorn you; ah, how I scorn you!" Then, when he heard the door open: "We will resume our conversation, Madame."

"When you wish," replied Countess Steno, and to her daughter, who entered, she said: "You know the carriage is to come at ten minutes to eleven, and it is now the quarter. Are you ready?"

"You can see," replied the young girl, displaying her pearl-gray gloves, which she was just buttoning, while on her head a large hat of black tulle made a dark and transparent aureole around her fair head. Her delicate bust was displayed to advantage in the corsage Maitland had chosen for her portrait, a sort of cuirass of a dark-blue material, finished at the neck and wrists with bands of velvet of a darker shade. The fine lines of cuffs and a collar gave to that pure face a grace of youth younger than her age.

She had evidently come at her mother's call, with the haste and the smile of that age. Then, to see Gorka's expression and the feverish brilliance of the Countess's eyes had given her what she called, in an odd but very appropriate way, the sensation of "a needle in the heart," of a sharp, fine point, which entered her breast to the left. She had slept a sleep so profound, after the soiree of the day before, on which she had thought she perceived in her mother's attitude between the Polish count and the American painter a proof of certain innocence.

She admired her mother so much, she thought her so intelligent, so beautiful, so good, that to doubt her was a thought not to be borne! There were times when she doubted her. A terrible conversation about the Countess, overheard in a ballroom, a conversation between two men, who did not know Alba to be behind them, had formed the principal part of the doubt, which, by turns, had increased and diminished, which had abandoned and tortured her, according to the signs, as little decisive as Madame Steno's tranquillity of the preceding day or her confusion that morning. It was only an impression, very rapid, instantaneous, the prick of a needle, which merely leaves after it a drop of blood, and yet she had a smile with which to say to Boleslas:

"How did Maud rest? How is she this morning? And my little friend Luc?"

"They are very well," replied Gorka. The last stage of his fury, suddenly arrested by the presence of the young girl, was manifested, but only to the Countess, by the simple phrase to which his eyes and his voice lent an extreme bitterness: "I found them as I left them.... Ah! They love me dearly.... I leave you to Peppino, Countess," added he, walking toward the door. "Mademoiselle, I will bear your love to Maud." ....He had regained all the courtesy which a long line of savage 'grands seigneurs', but 'grands seigneurs' nevertheless, had instilled in him. If his bow to Madame Steno was very ceremonious, he put a special grace in the low bow with which he took leave of the Contessina. It was merely a trifle, but the Countess was keen enough to perceive it. She was

touched by it, she whom despair, fury, and threats had found so impassive. For an instant she was vaguely humiliated by the success which she had gained over the man whom she would, voluntarily, five minutes before, have had cast out of doors by her servants. She was silent, oblivious even of her daughter's presence, until the latter recalled her to herself by saying:

"Shall I put on my veil and fetch my parasol?"

"You can join me in the office, whither I am going to talk with Ardea," replied her mother; adding, "I shall perhaps have some news to tell you in the carriage which will give you pleasure!".... She had again her bright smile, and she did not mistrust while she resumed her conversation with Peppino that poor Alba, on reentering her chamber, wiped from her pale cheeks two large tears, and that she opened, to re-read it, the infamous anonymous letter received the day before. She knew by heart all the perfidious phrases. Must it not have been that the mind which had composed them was blinded by vengeance to such a degree that it had no scruples about laying before the innocent child a denunciation which ran thus:

"A true friend of Mademoiselle Steno warns her that she is compromised, more than a marriageable young girl should be, in playing, with regard to M. Maitland the role she has already played with regard to M. Goyka. There are conditions of blindness so voluntary that they become complicity."

Those words, enigmatical to any one else, but to the Contessina horribly clear, had been, like the letters of which Boleslas had told Dorsenne, cut from a journal and pasted on a sheet of paper. How had Alba trembled on reading that note for the first time, with an emotion increased by the horror of feeling hovering over her and her mother a hatred so relentless! Later in the day how much had the words exchanged with Dorsenne comforted her, and how reassured had she been by the Countess's imperturbability on the entrance of Boleslas Gorka! Fragile peace, which had vanished when she saw her mother and the husband of her best friend face to face, with traces in their eyes, in their gestures, upon their countenances, of an angry scene! The thought "Why were they thus! What had they said?" again occurred to her to sadden her. Suddenly she crushed in her hand with violence the anonymous letter, which gave a concrete form to her sorrow and her suspicion, and, lighting a taper, she held it to the paper, which the flames soon reduced to ashes. She ran her fingers through the debris until there was very little left, and then, opening the window, she cast it to the winds.

She looked at her glove after doing this--her glove, a few moments before, of so delicate a gray, now stained by the smoky dust. It was symbolical of the stain which the letter, even when destroyed, had left upon her mind. The gloves, too, inspired her with horror. She hastily drew them off, and, when she descended to rejoin Madame Steno, it was not any more possible to perceive on those hands, freshly gloved, the traces of that tragical childishness, than it was possible to discern, beneath the large veil which she had tied over her hat, the traces of tears.

She found the mother for whom she was suffering so much, wearing, too, a large sun-hat, but a white one with a white veil, beneath which could be seen her fair hair, her sparkling blue eyes and pink-and-white complexion; her form was enveloped in a gown of a material and cut more youthful than her daughter's, while, radiant with delight, she said to Peppino Ardea:

"Well, I congratulate you on having made up your mind. The step shall be taken to-day, and you will be grateful to me all your life!"

"Yet," replied the young man, "I understand myself. I shall regret my decision all the afternoon. It is true," he added, philosophically, "that I should regret it just as much if I had not made it."

"You have guessed that we were talking of Fanny's marriage," said Madame Steno to her daughter several minutes later, when they were seated side by side, like two sisters, in the victoria which was bearing them toward Maitland's studio.

"Then," asked the Contessina, "you think it will be arranged?"

"It is arranged," gayly replied Madame Steno. "I am commissioned to make the proposition.... How happy all three will be!.... Hafner has aimed at it this long time! I remember how, in 1880, after his suit, he came to see me in Venice--you and Fanny played on the balcony of the palace--he questioned me about the Quirinal, the Vatican and society.... Then he concluded, pointing to his daughter, 'I shall make a Roman princess of the little one!'"

The 'dogaresse' was so delighted at the thought of the success of her negotiations, so delighted, too, to go, as she was going, to Maitland's studio, behind her two English cobs, which trotted so briskly, that she did not see on the sidewalk Boleslas Gorka, who watched her pass.

Alba was so troubled by that fresh proof of her mother's lack of conscience that she did not notice Maud's husband either. Baron Hafner's and Prince d'Ardea's manner toward Fanny had inspired her the day before with a dolorous analogy between the atmosphere of falsehood in which that poor girl lived and the atmosphere in which she at times thought she herself lived. That analogy again possessed her, and she again felt the "needle in the heart" as she recalled what she had heard before from the Countess of the intrigue by which Baron Justus Hafner had, indeed, ensnared his future son-in-law. She was overcome by infinite sadness, and she lapsed into one of her usual silent moods, while the Countess related to her Peppino's indecision. What cared she for Boleslas's anger at that moment? What could he do to her? Gorka was fully aware of her utter carelessness of the scene which had taken place between them, as soon as he saw the victoria pass. For some time he remained standing, watching the large white and black hats disappear down the Rue du Vingt Septembre.

This thought took possession of him at once. Madame Steno and her daughter were going to Maitland's atelier.... He had no sooner conceived

that bitter suspicion than he felt the necessity of proving it at once. He entered a passing cab, just as Ardea, having left the Villa, Steno after him, sauntered up, saying:

"Where are you going? May I go with you that we may have a few moments' conversation?"

"Impossible," replied Gorka. "I have a very urgent appointment, but in an hour I shall perhaps have occasion to ask a service of you. Where shall I find you?"

"At home," said Peppino, "lunching."

"Very well," replied Boleslas, and, raising himself, he whispered in the cabman's ear, in a voice too low for his friend to hear what he said: "Ten francs for you if in five minutes you drive me to the corner of the Rue Napoleon III and the Place de la Victor-Emmanuel."

The man gathered up his reins, and, by some sleight-of-hand, the jaded horse which drew the botte was suddenly transformed into a fine Roman steed, the botte itself into a light carriage as swift as the Tuscan carrozzelle, and the whole disappeared in a cross street, while Peppino said to himself:

"There is a fine fellow who would do so much better to remain with his friend Ardea than to go whither he is going. This affair will end in a duel. If I had not to liquidate that folly," and he pointed out with the end of his cane a placard relative to the sale of his own palace, "I would amuse myself by taking Caterina from both of them. But those little amusements must wait until after my marriage."

As we have seen, the cunning Prince had not been mistaken as to the course taken by the cab Gorka had hailed. It was indeed into the neighborhood of the atelier occupied by Maitland that the discarded lover hastened, but not to the atelier. The madman wished to prove to himself that the exhibition of his despair had availed him nothing, and that, scarcely rid of him, Madame Steno had repaired to the other. What would it avail him to know it and what would the evidence prove? Had the Countess concealed those sittings--those convenient sittings--as the jealous lover had told Dorsenne? The very thought of them caused the blood to flow in his veins much more feverishly than did the thoughts of the other meetings. For those he could still doubt, notwithstanding the anonymous letters, notwithstanding the tete-a-tete on the terrace, notwithstanding the insolent "Linco," whom she had addressed thus before him, while of the long intimacies of the studio he was certain. They maddened him, and, at the same time, by that strange contradiction which is characteristic of all jealousy, he hungered and thirsted to prove them.

He alighted from his cab at the corner he had named to his cabman, and from which point he could watch the Rue Leopardi, in which was his rival's house. It was a large structure in the Moorish style, built by the celebrated Spanish artist, Juan Santigosa, who had been obliged to

sell all five years before--house, studio, horses, completed paintings, sketches begun--in order to pay immense losses at gaming. Florent Chapron had at the time bought the sort of counterfeit Alhambra, a portion of which he rented to his brother-in-law. During the few moments that he stood at the corner, Boleslas Gorka recalled having visited that house the previous year, while taking, in the company of Madame Steno, Alba, Maud, and Hafner, one of those walks of which fashionable women are so fond in Rome as well as in Paris. An irrational instinct had rendered the painter and his paintings antipathetic to him at their first meeting. Had he had sufficient cause? Suddenly, on leaning forward in such a manner as to see without being seen, he perceived a victoria which entered the Rue Leopardi, and in that victoria the black hat of Mademoiselle Steno and the light one of her mother. In two minutes more the elegant carriage drew up at the Moorish structure, which gleamed among the other buildings in that street, for the most part unfinished, with a sort of insolent, sumptuousness.

The two ladies alighted and disappeared through the door, which closed upon them, while the coachman started up his horses at the pace of animals which are returning to their stable. He checked them that they might not become overheated, and the fine cobs trembled impatiently in their harnesses. Evidently the Countess and Alba were in the studio for a long sitting. What had Boleslas learned that he did not already know? Was he not ridiculous, standing upon the sidewalk of the square in the centre of which rose the ruin of an antique reservoir, called, for a reason more than doubtful, the trophy of Marius. With one glance the young man took in this scene--the empty victoria turning in the opposite direction, the large square, the ruin, the row of high houses, his cab. He appeared to himself so absurd for being there to spy out that of which he was only too sure, that he burst into a nervous laugh and reentered his cab, giving his own address to the cabman: Palazzetto Doria, Place de Venise. The cab that time started off leisurely, for the man comprehended that the mad desire to arrive hastily no longer possessed his fare. By a sudden metamorphosis, the swift Roman steed became a common nag, and the vehicle a heavy machine which rumbled along the streets. Boleslas yielded to depression, the inevitable reaction of an excess of violence such as he had just experienced. His composure could not last. The studio, in which was Madame Steno, began to take a clear form in the jealous lover's mind in proportion as he drove farther from it. In his thoughts he saw his former mistress walking about in the framework of tapestry, armor, studies begun, as he had frequently seen her walking in his smoking-room, with the smile upon her lips of an amorous woman, touching the objects among which her lover lives. He saw impassive Alba, who served as chaperon in the new intrigue of her mother's with the same naivete she had formerly employed in shielding their liaison. He saw Maitland with his indifferent glance of the day before, the glance of a preferred lover, so sure of his triumph that he did not even feel jealous of the former lover.

The absolute tranquillity of one who replaces us in an unfaithful mistress's affections augments our fury still more if we have the misfortune to be placed in a position similar to Gorka's. In a moment his rival's evocation became to him impossible to bear. He was very near



his own home, for he was just at that admirable square encumbered with the debris of basilica, the Forum of Trajan, which the statue of St. Peter at the summit of the column overlooks. Around the base of the sculptured marble, legends attest the triumph of the humble Galilean fisherman who landed at the port of the Tiber 1800 years ago, unknown, persecuted, a beggar. What a symbol and what counsel to say with the apostle: "Whither shall we go, Lord? Thou alone hast the words of eternal life!"

But Gorka was neither a Montfanon nor a Dorsenne to hear within his heart or his mind the echo of such precepts. He was a man of passion and of action, who only saw his passion and his actions in the position in which fortune threw him. A fresh access of fury recalled to him Maitland's attitude of the preceding day. This time he would no longer control himself. He violently pulled the surprised coachman's sleeve, and called out to him the address of the Rue Leopardi in so imperative a tone that the horse began again to trot as he had done before, and the cab to go quickly through the labyrinth of streets. A wave of tragical desire rolled into the young man's heart. No, he would not bear that affront. He was too bitterly wounded in the most sensitive chords of his being, in his love as well as his pride. Both struggled within him, and another instinct as well, urging him to the mad step he was about to take. The ancient blood of the Palatines, with regard to which Dorsenne always jested, boiled in his veins. If the Poles have furnished many heroes for dramas and modern romances, they have remained, through their faults, so dearly atoned for, the race the most chivalrously, the most madly brave in Europe. When men of so intemperate and so complex an excitability are touched to a certain depth, they think of a duel as naturally as the descendants of a line of suicides think of killing themselves.

Joyous Ardea, with his Italian keenness, had seen at a glance the end to which Gorka's nature would lead him. The betrayed lover required a duel to enable him to bear the treason. He might wound, he might, perhaps, kill his rival, and his passion would be satisfied, or else he would risk being killed himself, and the courage he would display braving death would suffice to raise him in his own estimation. A mad thought possessed him and caused him to hasten toward the Rue Leopardi, to provoke his rival suddenly and before Madame Steno! Ah, what pleasure it would give him to see her tremble, for she surely would tremble when she saw him enter the studio! But he would be correct, as she had so insolently asked him to be. He would go, so to speak, to see Alba's portrait. He would dissemble, then he would be better able to find a pretext for an argument. It is so easy to find one in the simplest conversation, and from an argument a quarrel is soon born. He would speak in such a manner that Maitland would have to answer him. The rest would follow. But would Alba Steno be present? Ha, so much the better! He would be so much more at ease, if the altercation arose before her, to deceive his own wife as to the veritable reason of the duel. Ah, he would have his dispute at any price, and from the moment that the seconds had exchanged visits the American's fate would be decided. He knew how to render it impossible for the fellow to remain longer in Rome. The young man was greatly wrought up by the romance of the provocation and the duel.

"How it refreshes the blood to be avenged upon two fools," said he to himself, descending from his cab and inquiring at the door of the Moorish house.

"Monsieur Maitland?" he asked the footman, who at one blow dissipated his excitement by replying with this simple phrase, the only one of which he had not thought in his frenzy:

"Monsieur is not at home."

"He will be at home to me," replied Boleslas. "I have an appointment with Madame and Mademoiselle Steno, who are awaiting me."

"Monsieur's orders are strict," replied the servant.

Accustomed, as are all servants entrusted with the defence of an artist's work, to a certain rigor of orders, he yet hesitated, in the face of the untruth which Gorka had invented on the spur of the moment, and he was about to yield to his importunity when some one appeared on the staircase of the hall. That some one was none other than Florent Chapron. Chance decreed that the latter should send for a carriage in which to go to lunch, and that the carriage should be late. At the sound of wheels stopping at the door, he looked out of one of the windows of his apartment, which faced the street. He saw Gorka alight. Such a visit, at such an hour, with the persons who were in the atelier, seemed to him so dangerous that he ran downstairs immediately. He took up his hat and his cane, to justify his presence in the hall by the very natural excuse that he was going out. He reached the middle of the staircase just in time to stop the servant, who had decided to "go and see," and, bowing to Boleslas with more formality than usual:

"My brother-in-law is not there, Monsieur," said he; and he added, turning to the footman, in order to dispose of him in case an altercation should arise between the importunate visitor and himself, "Nero, fetch me a handkerchief from my room. I have forgotten mine."

"That order could not be meant for me, Monsieur," insisted Boleslas. "Monsieur Maitland has made an appointment with me, with Madame Steno, in order to show us Alba's portrait."

"It is no order," replied Florent. "I repeat to you that my brother-in-law has gone out. The studio is closed, and it is impossible for me to undertake to open it to show you the picture, since I have not the key. As for Madame and Mademoiselle Steno, they have not been here for several days; the sittings have been interrupted."

"What is still more extraordinary, Monsieur," replied the other, "is that I saw them with my own eyes, five minutes ago, enter this house and I, too, saw their carriage drive away.".... He felt his anger increase and direct itself altogether against the watch-dog so suddenly raised upon the threshold of his rival's house.

Florent, on his part, had begun to lose patience. He had within him the violent irritability of the negro blood, which he did not acknowledge, but which slightly tinted his complexion. The manner of Madame Steno's former lover seemed to him so outrageous that he replied very dryly, as he opened the door, in order to oblige the caller to leave:

"You are mistaken,--Monsieur, that is all."

"You are aware, Monsieur," replied Boleslas, "of the fact that you just addressed me in a tone which is not the one which I have a right to expect from you.... When one charges one's self with a certain business, it is at least necessary to introduce a little form."

"And I, Monsieur," replied Chapron, "would be very much obliged to you if, when you address me, you would not do so in enigmas. I do not know what you mean by 'a certain business,' but I know that it is unbecoming a gentleman to act as you have acted at the door of a house which is not yours and for reasons that I can not comprehend."

"You will comprehend them very soon, Monsieur," said Boleslas, beside himself, "and you have not constituted yourself your brother's slave without motives."

He had no sooner uttered that sentence than Florent, incapable any longer of controlling himself, raised his cane with a menacing gesture, which the Polish Count arrested just in time, by seizing it in his right hand. It was the work of a second, and the two men were again face to face, both pale with anger, ready to collar one another rudely, when the sound of a door closing above their heads recalled to them their dignity. The servant descended the stairs. It was Chapron who first regained his self-possession, and he said to Boleslas, in a voice too low to be heard by any one but him:

"No scandal, Monsieur, eh? I shall have the honor of sending two of my friends to you."

"It is I, Monsieur," replied Gorka, "who will send you two. You shall answer to me for your manner, I assure you."

"Ha! Whatsoever you like," said the other. "I accept all your conditions in advance.... But one thing I ask of you," he added, "that no names be mentioned. There would be too many persons involved. Let it appear that we had an argument on the street, that we disagreed, and that I threatened you."

"So be it," said Boleslas, after a pause. "You have my word. There is a man," said he to himself five minutes later, when again rolling through the streets in his cab, after giving the cabman the address of the Palais Castagna. "Yes, there is a man.... He was very insolent just now, and I lacked composure. I am too nervous. I should be sorry to injure the boy. But, patience, the other will lose nothing by waiting."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE INCONSISTENCY OF AN OLD CHOUAN

While the madman, Boleslas, hastened to Ardea to ask his cooperation in the most unreasonable of encounters, with a species of savage delight, Florent Chapron was possessed by only one thought: at any price to prevent his brother-in-law from suspecting his quarrel with Madame Steno's former lover and the duel which was to be the result. His passionate friendship for Lincoln was so strong that it prevented the nervousness which usually precedes a first duel, above all when he who appears upon the ground has all his life neglected practising with the sword or pistol. To a fencer, and to one accustomed to the use of firearms, a duel means a number of details which remove the thought of danger. The man conceives the possibilities of the struggle, of a deed to be bravely accomplished. That is sufficient to inspire him with a composure which absolute ignorance can not inspire, unless it is supported by one of those deep attachments often so strong within us. Such was the case with Florent.

Dorsenne's instinct, which could so easily read the heart, was not mistaken there; the painter had in his wife's brother a friend of self-sacrificing devotion. He could exact anything of the Mameluke, or, rather, of that slave, for it was the blood of the slaves, of his ancestors, which manifested itself in Chapron by so total an absorption of his personality. The atavism of servitude has these two effects which are apparently contradictory: it produces fathomless capacities of sacrifice or of perfidy. Both of these qualities were embodied in the brother and in the sister. As happens, sometimes, the two characteristics of their race were divided between them; one had inherited all the virtue of self-sacrifice, the other all the puissance of hypocrisy.

But the drama called forth by Madame Steno's infidelity, and finally by Gorka's rashness, would only expose to light the moral conditions which Dorsenne had foreseen without comprehending. He was completely ignorant of the circumstances under which Florent had developed, of those under which Maitland and he had met, of how Maitland had decided to marry Lydia; finally an exceptional and lengthy history which it is necessary to sketch here at least, in order to render clear the singular relations of those three beings.

As we have seen, the allusion coarsely made by Boleslas to negro blood marked the moment when Florent lost all self-control, to the point even of raising his cane to his insolent interlocutor. That blemish, hidden with the most jealous care, represented to the young man what it had represented to his father, the vital point of self-love, secret and constant humiliation. It was very faint, the trace of negro blood which flowed in their veins, so faint that it was necessary to be told of it, but it was sufficient to render a stay in America so much the more intolerable to both, as they had inherited all the pride of their name,

a name which the Emperor mentioned at St. Helena as that of one of his bravest officers. Florent's grandfather was no other, indeed, than the Colonel Chapron who, as Napoleon desired information, swam the Dnieper on horseback, followed a Cossack on the opposite shore, hunted him like a stag, laid him across his saddle and took him back to the French camp. When the Empire fell, that hero, who had compromised himself in an irreparable manner in the army of the Loire, left his country and, accompanied by a handful of his old comrades, went to found in the southern part of the United States, in Alabama, a sort of agricultural colony, to which they gave the name--which it still preserves--of Arcola, a naive and melancholy tribute to the fabulous epoch which, however, had been dear to them.

Who would have recognized the brilliant colonel, who penetrated by the side of Montbrun the heart of the Grande Redoute, in the planter of forty-five, busy with his cotton and his sugar-cane, who made a fortune in a short time by dint of energy and good sense? His success, told of in France, was the indirect cause of another emigration to Texas, led by General Lallemand, and which terminated so disastrously. Colonel Chapron had not, as can be believed, acquired in roaming through Europe very scrupulous notions on the relations of the two sexes. Having made the mother of his child a pretty and sweet-tempered mulattress whom he met on a short trip to New Orleans, and whom he brought back to Arcola, he became deeply attached to the charming creature and to his son, so much the more so as, with a simple difference of complexion and of hair, the child was the image of him. Indeed, the old warrior, who had no relatives in his native land, on dying, left his entire fortune to that son, whom he had christened Napoleon. While he lived, not one of his neighbors dared to treat the young man differently from the way in which his father treated him.

But it was not the same when the prestige of the Emperor's soldier was not there to protect the boy against that aversion to race which is morally a prejudice, but socially interprets an instinct of preservation of infallible surety. The United States has grown only on that condition.

[Those familiar with the works of Bourget will recognize here again his well known antipathy for the United States of America. Mark Twain in the late 1800's felt obliged to rebut some of Bourget's prejudice: "What Paul Bourget thinks of us." D.W.]

The mixture of blood would there have dissolved the admirable Anglo-Saxon energy which the struggle against a nature at once very rich and very mutinous has exalted to such surprising splendor. It is not necessary to ask those who are the victims of such an instinct to comprehend the legal injustice. They only feel its ferocity. Napoleon Chapron, rejected in several offers of marriage, thwarted in his plans, humiliated under twenty trifling circumstances by the Colonel's former companions, became a species of misanthrope. He lived, sustained by a twofold desire, on the one hand to increase his fortune, and on the other to wed a white woman. It was not until 1857, at the age of thirty-five, that he realized the second of his two projects. In the course of a trip to

Europe, he became interested on the steamer in a young English governess, who was returning from Canada, summoned home by family troubles. He met her again in London. He helped her with such delicacy in her distress, that he won her heart, and she consented to become his wife. From that union were born, one year apart, Florent and Lydia.

Lydia had cost her mother her life, at the moment when the War of Secession jeopardized the fortune of Chapron, who, fortunately for him, had, in his desire to enrich himself quickly, invested his money a little on all sides. He was only partly ruined, but that semi-ruin prevented him from returning to Europe, as he had intended. He was compelled to remain in Alabama to repair that disaster, and he succeeded, for at his death, in 1880, his children inherited more than four hundred thousand dollars each. The incomparable father's devotion had not limited itself to the building up of a large fortune. He had the courage to deprive himself of the presence of the two beings whom he adored, to spare them the humiliation of an American school, and he sent them after their twelfth year to England, the boy to the Jesuits of Beaumont, the girl to the convent of the Sacred Heart, at Roehampton. After four years there, he sent them to Paris, Florent to Vaugirard, Lydia to the Rue de Varenne, and just at the time that he had realized the amount he considered requisite, when he was preparing to return to live near them in a country without prejudices, a stroke of apoplexy took him off suddenly. The double wear of toil and care had told upon one of those organisms which the mixture of the black and white races often produces, athletic in appearance, but of a very keen sensibility, in which the vital resistance is not in proportion to the muscular vigor.

Whatever care the man, so deeply grieved by the blemish upon his birth, had taken to preserve his children from a similar experience, he had not been able to do so, and soon after his son entered Beaumont his trials began. The few boys with whom Florent was thrown in contact, in the hotels or in his walks, during his sojourn in America, had already made him feel that humiliation from which his father had suffered so much. The youth of twelve, silent and absurdly sensitive, who made his appearance on the lawn of the peaceful English college on an autumn morning, brought with him a self-love already bleeding, to whom it was a delightful surprise to find himself among comrades of his age who did not even seem to suspect that any difference separated them from him. It required the perception of a Yankee to discern, beneath the nails of the handsome boy with the dark complexion, the tiny drops of negro blood, so far removed. Between an octoroon and a creole a European can never tell the difference. Florent had been represented as what he really was, the grandson of one of the Emperor's best officers. His father had taken particular pains to designate him as French, and his companions only saw in him a pupil like themselves, coming from Alabama--that is to say, from a country almost as chimerical as Japan or China.

All who in early youth have known the torture of apprehension will be able to judge of the poor child's agony when, after four months of a life amid the warmth of sympathy, one of the Jesuit fathers who directed the college announced to him, thinking it would afford him pleasure, the expected arrival of an American, of young Lincoln Maitland. This was

to Florent so violent a shock that he had a fever for forty-eight hours. In after years he could remember what thoughts possessed him on the day when he descended from his room to the common refectory, sure that as soon as he was brought face to face with the new pupil he would have to sustain the disdainful glance suffered so frequently in the United States. There was no doubt in his mind that, his origin once discovered, the atmosphere of kindness in which he moved with so much surprise would soon be changed to hostility. He could again see himself crossing the yard; could hear himself called by Father Roberts--the master who had told him of the expected new arrival--and his surprise when Lincoln Maitland had given him the hearty handshake of one demi-compatriot who meets another. He was to learn later that that reception was quite natural, coming from the son of an Englishman, educated altogether by his mother, and taken from New York to Europe before his fifth year, there to live in a circle as little American as possible. Chapron did not reason in that manner. He had an infinitely tender heart. Gratitude entered it--gratitude as impassioned as had been his fear. One week later Lincoln Maitland and he were friends, and friends so intimate that they never parted.

The affection, which was merely to the indifferent nature of Maitland a simple college episode, became to Florent the most serious, most complete sentiment of his life. Those fraternities of election, the loveliest and most delicate of the heart of man, usually dawn thus in youth. It is the ideal age of passionate friendship, that period between ten and sixteen, when the spirit is so pure, so fresh, still so virtuous, so fertile in generous projects for the future. One dreams of a companionship almost mystical with the friend from whom one has no secret, whose character one sees in such a noble light, on whose esteem one depends as upon the surest recompense, whom one innocently desires to resemble. Indeed, they are, between the innocent lads who work side by side on a problem of geometry or a lesson in history, veritable poems of tenderness at which the man will smile later, finding so far different from him in all his tastes, him whom he desired to have for a brother. It happens, however, in certain natures of a sensibility particularly precocious and faithful at the same time, that the awakening of effective life is so strong, so encroaching, that the impassioned friendship persists, first through the other awakening, that of sensuality, so fatal to all the senses of delicacy, then through the first tumult of social experience, not less fatal to our ideal of youth.

That was the case with Florent Chapron, whether his character, at once somewhat wild and yet submissive, rendered him more qualified for that renunciation of his personality than friendship demands, whether, far from his father and his sister and not having any mother, his loving heart had need of attaching itself to some one who could fill the place of his relatives, or whether Maitland exercised over him a special prestige by his opposite qualities. Fragile and somewhat delicate, was he seduced by the strength and dexterity which his friend exhibited in all his exercises? Timid and naturally taciturn, was he governed by the assurance of that athlete with the loud laugh, with the invincible energy? Did the surprising tendency toward art which the other one showed conquer him, as well as sympathy for the misfortunes which were

confided to him and which touched him more than they touched him who experienced them?

Gordon Maitland, Lincoln's father, of an excellent family of New York, had been killed at the battle of Chancellorsville, during the same war which had ruined Florent's father in part. Mrs. Maitland, the poor daughter of a small rector of a Presbyterian church at Newport, and who had only married her husband for his money, had but one idea, when once a widow--to go abroad. Whither? To Europe, vague and fascinating spot, where she fancied she would be distinguished by her intelligence and her beauty. She was pretty, vain and silly, and that voyage in pursuit of a part to play in the Old World caused her to pass two years first in one hotel and then in another, after which she married the second son of a poor Irish peer, with the new chimera of entering that Olympus of British aristocracy of which she had dreamed so much. She became a Catholic, and her son with her, to obtain the result which cost her dear, for not only was the lord who had given her his name brutal, a drunkard and cruel, but he added to all those faults that of being one of the greatest gamblers in the entire United Kingdom. He kept his stepson away from home, beat his wife, and died toward 1880, after dissipating the poor creature's fortune and almost all of Lincoln's. At that time the latter, whom his stepfather had naturally left to develop in his own way, and who, since leaving Beaumont, had studied painting at Venice, Rome and Paris, was in the latter city and one of the first pupils in Bonnat's studio. Seeing his mother ruined, without resources at forty-four years of age, persuaded himself of his glorious future, he had one of those magnificent impulses such as one has in youth and which prove much less the generosity than the pride of life. Of the fifteen thousand francs of income remaining to him, he gave up to his mother twelve thousand five hundred. It is expedient to add that in less than a year afterward he married the sister of his college friend and four hundred thousand dollars. He had seen poverty and he was afraid of it. His action with regard to his mother seemed to justify in his own eyes the purely interested character of the combination which freed his brush forever. There are, moreover, such artistic consciences. Maitland would not have pardoned himself a concession of art. He considered rascals the painters who begged success by compromise in their style, and he thought it quite natural to take the money of Mademoiselle Chapron, whom he did not love, and for whom, now that he had grown to manhood and knew several of her compatriots, he likewise felt the prejudice of race. "The glory of the colonel of the Empire and friendship for that good Florent," as he said, "covered all."

Poor and good Florent! That marriage was to him the romance of his youth realized. He had desired it since the first week that Maitland had given him the cordial handshake which had bound them. To live in the shadow of his friend, become at once his brother-in-law and his ideal--he did not dream of any other solution of his own destiny. The faults of Maitland, developed by age, fortune, and success--we recall the triumph of his 'Femme en violet et en jeune' in the Salon of 1884--found Florent as blind as at the epoch when they played cricket together in the fields at Beaumont. Dorsenne very justly diagnosed there one of those hypnotisms of admiration such as artists, great or small, often inspire around them.



But the author, who always generalized too quickly, had not comprehended that the admirer with Florent was grafted on a friend worthy to be painted by La Fontaine or by Balzac, the two poets of friendship, the one in his sublime and tragic *Cousin Pons*, the other in that short but fine fable, in which is this verse, one of the most tender in the French language:

Vous metes, en dormant, un peu triste apparu.

Florent did not love Lincoln because he admired him; he admired him because he loved him. He was not wrong in considering the painter as one of the most gifted who had appeared for thirty years. But Lincoln would have had neither the bold elegance of his drawing, nor the vivid strength of coloring, nor the ingenious finesse of imagination if the other had lent himself with less ardor to the service of the work and to the glory of the artist. When Lincoln wanted to travel he found his brother-in-law the most diligent of couriers. When he had need of a model he had only to say a word for Florent to set about finding one. Did Lincoln exhibit at Paris or London, Florent took charge of the entire proceeding--seeing the journalists and picture dealers, composing letters of thanks for the articles, in a handwriting so like that of the painter that the latter had only to sign it. Lincoln desired to return to Rome. Florent had discovered the house on the Rue Leopardi, and he settled it even before Maitland, then in Egypt, had finished a large study begun at the moment of the departure of the other.

Florent had, by virtue of the affection felt for his brother-in-law, come to comprehend the paintings as well as the painter himself. These words will be clear to those who have been around artists and who know what a distance separates them from the most enlightened amateur. The amateur can judge and feel. The artist only, who has wielded the implements, knows, before a painting, how it is done, what stroke of the brush has been given, and why; in short, the trituration of the matter by the workman. Florent had watched Maitland work so much, he had rendered him so many effective little services in the studio, that each of his brother-in-law's canvases became animated to him, even to the slightest details. When he saw them on the wall of the gallery they told him of an intimacy which was at once his greatest joy and his greatest pride. In short, the absorption of his personality in that of his former comrade was so complete that it had led to this anomaly, that Dorsenne himself, notwithstanding his indulgence for psychological singularities, had not been able to prevent himself from finding almost monstrous: Florent was Lincoln's brother-in-law, and he seemed to find it perfectly natural that the latter should have adventures outside, if the emotion of those adventures could be useful to his talent!

Perhaps this long and yet incomplete analysis will permit us the better to comprehend what emotions agitated the young man as he reascended the staircase of his house--of their house, Lincoln's and his--after his unexpected dispute with Boleslas Gorka. It will attenuate, at least with respect to him, the severity of simple minds. All passion, when developed in the heart, has the effect of etiolating around it the vigor of other instincts. Chapron was too fanatical a friend to be a very

equitable brother. It seemed to him very simple and very legitimate that his sister should be at the service of the genius of Lincoln, as he himself was. Moreover, if, since the marriage with her brother's friend, his sister had been stirred by the tempest of a moral tragedy, Florent did not suspect it. When had he studied Lydia, the silent, reserved Lydia, of whom he had once for all formed an opinion, as is the almost invariable custom of relative with relative? Those who have seen us when young are like those who see us daily. The images which they trace of us always reproduce what we were at a certain moment--scarcely ever what we are. Florent considered his sister very good, because he had formerly found her so; very gentle, because she had never resisted him; not intelligent, because she did not seem sufficiently interested in the painter's work; as for the suffering and secret rebellion of the oppressed creature, crushed between his blind partiality and the selfishness of a scornful husband, he did not even suspect them, much less the terrible resolution of which that apparent resignation was capable.

If he had trembled when Madame Steno began to interest herself in Lincoln, it was solely for the work of the latter, so much the more as for a year he had perceived not a decline but a disturbance in the painting of that artist, too voluntary not to be unequal. Then Florent had seen, on the other hand, the nerve of Maitland reawakened in the warmth of that little intrigue.

The portrait of Alba promised to be a magnificent study, worthy of being placed beside the famous 'Femme en violet et en jaune,' which those envious of Lincoln always remembered. Moreover, the painter had finished with unparalleled ardor two large compositions partly abandoned. In the face of that proof of a fever of production more and more active, how would not Florent have blessed Madame Steno, instead of cursing her, so much the more that it sufficed him to close his eyes and to know that his conscience was in repose when opposite his sister? He knew all, however. The proof of it was in his shudder when Dorsenne announced to him the clandestine arrival in Rome of Madame Steno's other lover, and one proof still more certain, the impulse which had precipitated him upon Boleslas, who was parleying with the servant, and now it was he who had accepted the duel which an exasperated rival had certainly come to propose to his dear Lincoln, and he thought only of the latter.

"He must know nothing until afterward. He would take the affair upon himself, and I have a chance to kill him, that Gorka--to wound him, at least. In any case, I will arrange it so that a second duel will be rendered difficult to that lunatic.... But, first of all, let us make sure that we have not spoken too loudly and that they have not heard upstairs the ill-bred fellow's loud voice."

It was in such terms that he qualified his adversary of the morrow. For very little more he would have judged Gorka unpardonable not to thank Lincoln, who had done him the honor to supplant him in the Countess's favor!

In the meantime, let us cast a glance at the atelier! When the friend,

devoted to complicity, but also to heroism, entered the vast room, he could see at the first glance that he had been mistaken and that no sound of voices had reached that peaceful retreat.

The atelier of the American painter was furnished with a harmonious sumptuousness which real artists know how to gather around them. The large strip of sky seen through the windows looked down upon a corner veritably Roman--of the Rome of to-day, which attests an uninterrupted effort toward forming a new city by the side of the old one. One could see an angle of the old garden and the fragment of an antique building, with a church steeple beyond. It was on a background of azure, of verdure and of ruins, in a horizon larger and more distant, but composed of the same elements, that was to arise the face of the young girl, designed after the manner, so sharp and so modelled, of the 'Pier della Francesca', with whom Maitland had been preoccupied for six months.

All great composers, of an originality more composite than genitive, have these infatuations.

Maitland was at his easel, dressed with that correct elegance which is the almost certain mark of Anglo-Saxon artists. With his little varnished shoes, his fine black socks, spotted with red, his coat of quilted silk, his light cravat and the purity of his linen, he had the air of a gentleman who applied himself to an amateur effort, and not of the patient and laborious worker he really was. But his canvases and his studies, hung on all sides, among tapestries, arms and trinkets, bespoke patient labor. It was the history of an energy bent upon the, acquisition of a personality constantly fleeting. Maitland manifested in a supreme degree the trait common to almost all his compatriots, even those who came in early youth to Europe, that intense desire not to lack civilization, which is explained by the fact that the American is a being entirely new, endowed with an activity incomparable, and deprived of traditional saturation. He is not born cultivated, matured, already fashioned virtually, if one may say so, like a child of the Old World. He can create himself at his will. With superior gifts, but gifts entirely physical, Maitland was a self-made man of art, as his grand father had been a self-made man of money, as his father had been a self-made man of war. He had in his eye and in his hand two marvellous implements for painting, and in his perseverance in developing a still more marvellous one. He lacked constantly the something necessary and local which gives to certain very inferior painters the inexpressible superiority of a savor of soil. It could not be said that he was not inventive and new, yet one experienced on seeing no matter which one of his paintings that he was a creature of culture and of acquisition. The scattered studies in the atelier first of all displayed the influence of his first master, of solid and simple Bonnat. Then he had been tempted by the English pre-Raphaelites, and a fine copy of the famous 'Song of Love', by Burne-Jones, attested that reaction on the side of an art more subtle, more impressed by that poetry which professional painters treat scornfully as literary. But Lincoln was too vigorous for the languors of such an ideal, and he quickly turned to other teachings. Spain conquered him, and Velasquez, the colorist of so peculiar a fancy that, after a visit to the Museum of the Prado, one carries away the idea that one has

just seen the only painting worthy of the name.

The spirit of the great Spaniard, that despotic stroke of the brush which seems to draw the color in the groundwork of the picture, to make it stand out in almost solid lights, his absolute absence of abstract intentions and his newness which affects entirely to ignore the past, all in that formula of art, suited Maitland's temperament. To him, too, he owed his masterpiece, the 'Femme en violet et en jaune', but the restless seeker did not adhere to that style. Italy and the Florentines next influenced him, just those the most opposed to Velasquez; the Pollajuoli, Andrea del Castagna, Paolo Uccello and Piero della Francesca. Never would one have believed that the same hand which had wielded with so free a brush the color of the 'Femme en violet...' could be that which sketched the contour of the portrait of Alba with so severe, so rigid a drawing.

At the moment Florent entered the studio that work so completely absorbed the attention of the painter that he did not hear the door open any more than did Madame Steno, who was smoking cigarettes, reclining indolently and blissfully upon the divan, her half-closed eyes fixed upon the man she loved. Lincoln only divined another presence by a change in Alba's face. God! How pale she was, seated in the immobility of her pose in a large, heraldic armchair, with a back of carved wood, her hands grasping the arms, her mouth so bitter, her eyes so deep in their fixed glance!... Did she divine that which she could not, however, know, that her fate was approaching with the visitor who entered, and who, having left the studio fifteen minutes before, had to justify his return by an excuse.

"It is I," said he. "I forgot to ask you, Lincoln, if you wish to buy Ardea's three drawings at the price they offer."

"Why did you not tell me of it yesterday, my little Linco?" interrupted the Countess. "I saw Peppino again this morning.... I would have from him his lowest figure."

"That would only be lacking," replied Maitland, laughing his large laugh. "He does not acknowledge those drawings, dear dogaresse.... They are a part of the series of trinkets he carefully subtracted from his creditor's inventory and put in different places. There are some at seven or eight antiquaries', and we may expect that for the next ten years all the cockneys of my country will be allured by this phrase, 'This is from the Palais Castagna. I have it by a little arrangement.'"

His eyes sparkled as he imitated one of the most celebrated bric-a-brac dealers in Rome, with the incomparable art of imitation which distinguishes all the old habitués of Parisian studios.

"At present these three drawings are at an antiquary's of Babuino, and very authentic."

"Except when they are represented as Vincis," said Florent, "when Leonardo was left-handed, and their hatchings are made from left to right."

"And you think Ardea would not agree with me in it?" resumed the Countess.

"Not even with you," said the painter. "He had the assurance last night, when I mentioned them before him, to ask me the address in order to go to see them."

"How did you learn their production?" questioned Madame Steno.

"Ask him," said Maitland, pointing to Chapron with the end of his brush.

"When there is a question of enriching his old Maitland's collection, he becomes more of a merchant than the merchants themselves. They tell him all.... Vinci or no Vinci, it is the pure Lombard style. Buy them. I want them."

"I will go, then," replied Florent. "Countess. . . . Contessina."

He bowed to Madame Steno and her daughter. The mother bestowed upon him her pleasantest smile. She was not one of those mistresses to whom their lovers' intimate friends are always enemies. On the contrary, she enveloped them in the abundant and blissful sympathy which love awoke in her. Besides, she was too cunning not to feel that Florent approved of her love. But, on the other hand, the intense aversion which Alba at that moment felt toward her mother's suspected intrigues was expressed by the formality with which she inclined her head in response to the farewell of the young man, who was too happy to have found that the dispute had not been heard.

"From now until to-morrow," thought he, on redescending the staircase, "there will be no one to warn Lincoln.... The purchase of the drawings was an invention to demonstrate my tranquillity.... Now I must find two discreet seconds."

Florent was a very deliberate man, and a man who had at his command perfect evenness of temperament whenever it was not a question of his enthusiastic attachment to his brother-in-law. He had the power of observation habitual to persons whose sensitive amour propre has frequently been wounded. He therefore deferred until later his difficult choice and went to luncheon, as if nothing had happened, at the restaurant where he was expected. Certainly the proprietor did not mistrust, in replying to the questions of his guest relative to the most recent portraits of Lenbach, that the young man, so calm, so smiling, had on hand a duel which might cost him his life. It was only on leaving the restaurant that Florent, after mentally reviewing ten of his older acquaintances, resolved to make a first attempt upon Dorsenne. He recalled the mysterious intelligence given him by the novelist, whose sympathy for Maitland had been publicly manifested by an eloquent article. Moreover, he believed him to be madly in love with Alba Steno. That was one probability more in favor of his discretion.

Dorsenne would surely maintain silence with regard to a meeting in connection with which, if it were known, the cause of the contest would surely be mentioned. It was only too clear that Gorka and Chapron had no

real reason to quarrel and fight a duel. But at ten-thirty, that is to say, three hours after the unreasonable altercation in the vestibule, Florent rang at the door of Julien's apartments. The latter was at home, busy upon the last correction of the proofs of 'Poussiere d'Idees'. His visitor's confidence upset him to such a degree that his hands trembled as he arranged his scattered papers. He remembered the presence of Boleslas on that same couch, at the same time of the day, forty-eight hours before. How the drama would progress if that madman went away in that mood! He knew only too well that Maitland's brother-in-law had not told him all.

"It is absurd," he cried, "it is madness, it is folly!.... You are not going to fight about an argument such as you have related to me? You talked at the corner of the street, you exchanged a few angry words, and then, suddenly, seconds, a duel.... Ah, it is absurd."

"You forget that I offered him a violent insult in raising my cane to him," interrupted Florent, "and since he demands satisfaction I must give it to him."

"Do you believe," said the writer, "that the public will be contented with those reasons? Do you think they will not look for the secret motives of the duel? Do I know the story of a woman?.... You see, I ask no questions. I rely upon what you confide in me. But the world is the world, and you will not escape its remarks."

"It is precisely for that reason that I ask absolute discretion of you," replied Florent, "and for that reason that I have come to ask you to serve me as a second.... There is no one in whom I trust as implicitly as I do in you.... It is the only excuse for my step."

"I thank you," said Dorsenne. He hesitated a moment. Then the image of Alba, which had haunted him since the previous day, suddenly presented itself to his mind. He recalled the sombre anguish he had surprised in the young girl's eyes, then her comforted glance when her mother smiled at once upon Gorka and Maitland. He recalled the anonymous letter and the mysterious hatred which impended over Madame Steno. If the quarrel between Boleslas and Florent became known, there was no doubt that it would be said generally that Florent was fighting for his brother-in-law on account of the Countess. No doubt, too, that the report would reach the poor Contessina. It was sufficient to cause the writer to reply: "Very well! I accept. I will serve you. Do not thank me. We are losing valuable time. You will require another second. Of whom have you thought?"

"Of no one," returned Florent. "I confess I have counted on you to aid me."

"Let us make a list," said Julien. "It is the best way, and then cross off the names."

Dorsenne wrote down a number of their acquaintances, and they indeed crossed them off, according to his expression, so effectually that after

a minute examination they had rejected all of them. They were then as much perplexed as ever, when suddenly Dorsenne's eyes brightened, he uttered a slight exclamation, and said brusquely:

"What an idea! But it is an idea!... Do you know the Marquis de Montfanon?" he asked Florent.

"He with one arm?" replied the latter. "I saw him once with reference to a monument I put up at Saint Louis des Francais."

"He told me of it," said Dorsenne. "For one of your relatives, was it not?"

"Oh, a distant cousin," replied Florent; "one Captain Chapron, killed in 'forty-nine in the trenches before Rome."

"Now, to our business," cried Dorsenne, rubbing his hands. "It is Montfanon who must be your second. First of all, he is an experienced duellist, while I have never been on the ground. That is very important. You know the celebrated saying: 'It is neither swords nor pistols which kill; it is the seconds.'... And then if the matter has to be arranged, he will have more prestige than your servant."

"It is impossible," said Florent; "Marquis de Montfanon.... He will never consent. I do not exist for him."

"That is my affair," cried Dorsenne. "Let me take the necessary steps in my own name, and then if he agrees you can make it in yours.... Only we have no time to lose. Do not leave your house until six o'clock. By that time I shall know upon what to depend."

If, at first, the novelist had felt great confidence in the issue of his strange attempt with reference to his old friend, that confidence changed to absolute apprehension when he found himself, half an hour later, at the house which Marquis Claude Francois occupied in one of the oldest parts of Rome, from which location he could obtain an admirable view of the Forum. How many times had Julien come, in the past six months, to that Marquis who dived constantly in the sentiment of the past, to gaze upon the tragical and grand panorama of the historical scene! At the voice of the recluse, the broken columns rose, the ruined temples were rebuilt, the triumphal view was cleared from its mist. He talked, and the formidable epopee of the Roman legend was evoked, interpreted by the fervent Christian in that mystical and providential sense, which all, indeed, proclaims in that spot, where the Mamertine prison relates the trial of St. Peter, where the portico of the temple of Faustine serves as a pediment to the Church of St. Laurent, where Ste.-Marie-Liberatrice rises upon the site of the Temple of Vesta--'Sancta Maria, libera nos a poenis inferni'--Montfanon always added when he spoke of it, and he pointed out the Arch of Titus, which tells of the fulfilment of the prophecies of Our Lord against Jerusalem, while, opposite, the groves reveal the out lines of a nunnery upon the ruins of the dwellings of the Caesars. And, at the extreme end, the Coliseum recalls to mind the ninety thousand spectators come to see the martyrs suffer.

Such were the sights where lived the former pontifical zouave, and, on ringing the bell of the third etage, Julien said to himself: "I am a simpleton to come to propose to such a man what I have to propose. Yet it is not to be a second in an ordinary duel, but simply to prevent an adventure which might cost the lives of two men in the first place, then the honor of Madame Steno, and, lastly, the peace of mind of three innocent persons, Madame Gorka, Madame Maitland and my little friend Alba.... He alone has sufficient authority to arrange all. It will be an act of charity, like any other.... I hope he is at home," he concluded, hearing the footstep of the servant, who recognized the visitor and who anticipated all questions.

"The Marquis went out this morning before eight o'clock. He will not return until dinner-time."

"Do you know where he has gone?"

"To hear mass in a catacomb, and to be present at a procession," replied the footman, who took Dorsenne's card, adding: "The Trappists of Saint Calixtus certainly know where the Marquis is.... He lunched with them."

"We shall see," said the young man to himself, somewhat disappointed. His carriage rolled in the direction of Porte St. Sebastien, near which was the catacomb and the humble dwelling contiguous to it--the last morsel of the Papal domains kept by the poor monks. "Montfanon will have taken communion this morning," thought he, "and at the very word duel he will listen to nothing more. However, the matter must be arranged; it must be.... What would I not give to know the truth of the scene between Gorka and Florent? By what strange and diabolical ricochet did the Palatine hit upon the latter when his business was with the brother-in-law?.... Will he be angry that I am his adversary's second?.... Bah!... After our conversation of the other day our friendship is ended.... Good, I am already at the little church of 'Domine, quo vadis.'--[Lord, whither art thou going?]"-- I might say to myself: 'Juliane, quo vadis?' 'To perform an act a little better than the majority of my actions,' I might reply."

That impressionable soul which vibrated at the slightest contact was touched by the souvenir of one of the innumerable pious legends which nineteen centuries of Catholicism have suspended at all the corners of Rome and its surrounding districts. He recalled the touching story of St. Peter flying from persecution and meeting our Lord: "Lord, whither art thou going?" asked the apostle. "To be crucified a second time," replied the Saviour, and Peter was ashamed of his weakness and returned to martyrdom. Montfanon himself had related that episode to the novelist, who again began to reflect upon the Marquis's character and the best means of approaching him. He forgot to glance at the vast solitude of the Roman suburbs before him, and so deep was his reverie that he almost passed unheeded the object of his search. Another disappointment awaited him at the first point in his voyage of exploration.

The monk who came at his ring to open the door of the inclosure



contiguous to St. Calixtus, informed him that he of whom he was in search had left half an hour before.

"You will find him at the Basilica of Saint Neree and Saint Achilles," added the Trappist; "it is the fete of those two saints, and at five o'clock there will be a procession in their catacombs.... It is a fifteen minutes' ride from here, near the tower Marancia, on the Via Ardeatina."

"Shall I miss him a third time?" thought Dorsenne, alighting from the carriage finally, and proceeding on foot to the opening which leads to the subterranean Necropolis dedicated to the two saints who were the eunuchs of Domitilla, the niece of Emperor Vespasian. A few ruins and a dilapidated house alone mark the spot where once stood the pious Princess's magnificent villa. The gate was open, and, meeting no one who could direct him, the young man took several steps in the subterranean passage. He perceived that the long gallery was lighted. He entered there, saying to himself that the row of tapers, lighted every ten paces, assuredly marked the line which the procession would follow, and which led to the central basilica. Although his anxiety as to the issue of his undertaking was extreme, he could not help being impressed by the grandeur of the sight presented by the catacomb thus illuminated. The uneven niches reserved for the dead, asleep in the peace of the Lord for so many centuries, made recesses in the corridors and gave them a solemn and tragical aspect. Inscriptions were to be seen there, traced on the stone, and all spoke of the great hope which those first Christians had cherished, the same which believers of our day cherish.

Julien knew enough of symbols to understand the significance of the images between which the persecuted of the primitive church had laid their fathers. They are so touching and so simple! The anchor represents safety in the storm; the gentle dove and the ewe, symbols of the soul, which flies away and seeks its shepherd; the phoenix, whose wings announce the resurrection. Then there were the bread and the wine, the branches of the olive and the palm. The silent cemetery was filled with a faint aroma of incense, noticed by Dorsenne on entering. High mass, celebrated in the morning, left the sacred perfume diffused among those bones, once the forms of human beings who kneeled there amid the same holy aroma. The contrast was strong between that spot, where everything spoke of things eternal, and the drama of passion, worldly and culpable, the progress of which agitated even Dorsenne. At that moment he appeared to himself in the light of a profaner, although he was obeying generous and humane instincts. He experienced a sense of relief when, at a bend in one of the corridors which he had selected from among many others, he found himself face to face with a priest, who held in his hand a basket filled with the petals of flowers, destined, no doubt, for the procession. Dorsenne inquired of him the way to the Basilica in Italian, while the reply was given in perfect French.

"Perhaps you know the Marquis de Montfanon, father?" asked the novelist.

"I am one of the chaplains of Saint Louis," said the priest, with a smile, adding: "You will find him in the Basilica."

"Now, the moment has come," thought Dorsenne, "I must be subtle.... After all, it is charity I am about to ask him to do.... Here I am. I recognize the staircase and the opening above."

A corner of the sky, indeed, was to be seen, and a ray of light entered which permitted the writer to distinguish him whom he was seeking among the few persons assembled in the ruined chapel, the most venerable of all those which encircle Rome with a hidden girdle of sanctuaries. Montfanon, too recognizable, alas! by the empty sleeve of his black redingote, was seated on a chair, not very far from the altar, on which burned enormous tapers. Priests and monks were arranging baskets filled with petals, like those of the chaplain, whom Dorsenne had just met. A group of three curious visitors commented in whispers upon the paintings, scarcely visible on the discolored stucco of the ceiling. Montfanon was entirely absorbed in the book which he held in his one hand. The large features of his face, ennobled and almost transfigured by the ardor of devotion, gave him the admirable expression of an old Christian soldier. 'Bonus miles Christi'--a good soldier of Christ--had been inscribed upon the tomb of the chief under whom he had been wounded at Patay. One would have taken him for a guardian layman of the tombs of the martyrs, capable of confessing his faith like them, even to the death. And when Julien determined to approach and to touch him lightly on the shoulder, he saw that, in the nobleman's clear, blue eyes, ordinarily so gay, and sometimes so choleric, sparkled unshed tears. His voice, too, naturally sharp, was softened by the emotion of the thought which his reading, the place, the time, the occupation of his day had awakened within him.

"Ah, you here?" said he to his young friend, without any astonishment. "You have come for the procession. That is well. You will hear sung the lovely lines: 'Hi sunt quos fatue mundus abhorruit.'" He pronounced out as usual, 'à l'italienne'; for his liturgic training had been received in Rome. "The season is favorable for the ceremonies. The tourists have gone. There will only be people here who pray and who feel, like you.... And to feel is half of prayer. The other half is to believe. You will become one of us. I have always predicted it. There is no peace but here."

"I would gladly have come only for the procession," replied Dorsenne, "but my visit has another motive, dear friend," said he, in a still lower tone. "I have been seeking for you for more than an hour, that you might aid me in rendering a great service to several people, in preventing a very great misfortune, perhaps."

"I can help you to prevent a very great misfortune?" repeated Montfanon.

"Yes," replied Dorsenne, "but this is not the place in which to explain to you the details of the long and terrible adventure.... At what hour is the ceremony? I will wait for you, and tell it to you on leaving here."

"It does not begin until five o'clock-five-thirty," said Montfanon, looking at his watch, "and it is now fifteen minutes past four. Let us

leave the catacomb, if you wish, and you can repeat your story to me up above. A very great misfortune? Well," he added, pressing the hand of the young man whom, personally, he liked as much as he detested his views, "rest assured, my dear child, we will prevent it!"

There was in the manner in which he uttered those words the tranquillity of a mind which knows not uneasiness, that of a believer who feels sure of always accomplishing all that he wishes to do. It would not have been Montfanon, that is to say, a species of visionary, who loved to argue with Dorsenne, because he knew that in spite of all he was understood, if he had not continued, as they walked along the lighted corridor, while remounting toward daylight:

"If it is all the same to you, sir apologist of the modern world, I should like to pause here and ask you frankly: Do you not feel yourself more contemporary with all the dead who slumber within these walls than with a radical elector or a free-mason deputy? Do you not feel that if these martyrs had not come to pray beneath these vaults eighteen hundred years ago, the best part of your soul would not exist? Where will you find a poetry more touching than that of these symbols and of these epitaphs? That admirable De Rossi showed me one at Saint Calixtus last year. My tears flow as I recall it. 'Pete pro Phoebe et pro virginio ejus'. Pray for Phoebus and for--How do you translate the word 'virginus', the husband who has known only one wife, the virgin husband of a virgin spouse? Your youth will pass, Dorsenne. You will one day feel what I feel, the happiness which is wanting on account of bygone errors, and you will comprehend that it is only to be found in Christian marriage, whose entire sublimity is summed up in thus prayer: 'Pro virginio ejus'.... You will be like me then, and you will find in this book," he held up 'l'Eucologe', which he clasped in his hand, "something through which to offer up to God your remorse and your regrets. Do you know the hymn of the Holy Sacrament, 'Adoro te, devote'? No. Yet you are capable of feeling what is contained in these lines. Listen. It is this idea: That on the cross one sees only the man, not the God; that in the host one does not even see the man, and that yet one believes in the real presence.

In cruce latebat sola Deitas.  
At hic latet simul et humanitas.  
Ambo tamen credens atque confitens....

"And now this last verse:

Peto quod petivit latro poenitens!

[I ask that which the penitent thief asked.]

"What a cry! Ah, but it is beautiful! It is beautiful! What words to say in dying! And what did the poor thief ask, that Dixmas of whom the church has made a saint for that one appeal: 'Remember me, Lord, in Thy kingdom!' But we have arrived. Stoop, that you may not spoil your hat. Now, what do you want with me? You know the motto of the Montfanons: 'Excelsior et firmior'--Always higher and always firmer.... One can never

do too many good deeds. If it be possible, 'present', as we said to the rollcall."

A singular mixture of fervor and of good-nature, of enthusiastic eloquence and of political or religious fanaticism, was Montfanon. But the good-nature rapidly vanished from his face, at once so haughty and so simple, in proportion as Dorsenne's story proceeded. The writer, indeed, did not make the error of at once formulating his proposition. He felt that he could not argue with the pontifical zouave of bygone days. Either the latter would look upon it as monstrous and absurd, or he would see in it a charitable duty to be accomplished, and then, whatever annoyance the matter might occasion him, he would accept it, as he would bestow alms. It was that chord of generosity which Julien, diplomatic for once in his life, essayed to touch by his confidence. Gaining authority by their conversation of a few days before, he related all he could of Gorka's visit, concealing the fact of that word of honor so falsely given, which still oppressed him with a mortal weight. He told how he had soothed the madman, how he conducted him to the station, then he described the meeting of the two rivals twenty-four hours later. He dwelt upon Alba's manner that evening and the infamy of the anonymous letters written to Madame Steno's discarded lover and to her daughter. And after he had reported the mysterious quarrel which had suddenly arisen between Gorka and Chapron:

"I, therefore, promised to be his second," he concluded, "because I believe it my absolute duty to do all I can to prevent the duel from taking place. Only think of it. If it should take place, and if one of them is killed or wounded, how can the affair be kept secret in this gossiping city of Rome? And what remarks it will call forth! It is evident that these two boys have quarrelled only on account of the relations between Madame Steno and Maitland. By what strange coincidence? Of that I know nothing.

"But there will not be a doubt in public opinion. And can you not see additional anonymous letters written to Alba, Madame Gorka, Madame Maitland?.... The men I do not care for.... Two out of three merit all that comes to them. But those innocent creatures--is it not frightful?"

"Frightful, indeed," replied Montfanon; "it is that which renders those adulterous adventures so hideous. There are many people who are affected by it besides the guilty ones.... You see that, you who thought that society so pleasant, so refined, so interesting, the day before yesterday? But it does no good to recriminate. I understand. You have come to ask me to advise you in your role of second. My follies of youth will enable me to direct you.... Correctness in the slightest detail and no nerves, when one has to arrange a duel. Oh! You will have trouble. Gorka is mad. I know the Poles. They have great faults, but they are brave. Lord, but they are brave! And little Chapron, I know him, too; he has one of those stubborn natures, which would allow their breasts to be pierced without saying 'Ouf!' And 'amour propre'. He has good soldier's blood in his veins, that child, notwithstanding the mixture. And with that mixture, do you not see what a hero the first of the three Dumas, the mulatto general, has been?.... Yes. You have there a hard

job, my good Dorsenne.... You will need another second to assist you, who will have the same views as you and--pardon me--more experience, perhaps."

"Marquis," replied Julien, whose voice trembled with anxiety, "there is only one person in Rome who would be respected enough, venerated by all, so that his intervention in that delicate and dangerous matter be decisive, one person who could suggest excuses to Chapron, or obtain them from the other.... In short, there is only one person who has the authority of a hero before whom they will remain silent when he speaks of honor, and that person is you."

"I," exclaimed Montfanon, "I, you wish me to be--"

"One of Chapron's seconds," interrupted Dorsenne. "Yes. It is true. I come on his part and for that. Do not tell me what I already know, that your position will not allow of such a step. It is because it is what it is, that I thought of coming to you. Do not tell me that your religious principles are opposed to duels. It is that there may be no duel that I conjure you to accept.... It is essential that it does not take place. I swear to you, that the peace of too many innocent persons is concerned."

And he continued, calling into service at that moment all the intelligence and all the eloquence of which he was capable. He could follow on the face of the former duellist, who had become the most ardent of Catholics and the most monomaniacal of old bachelors, twenty diverse expressions. At length Montfanon laid his hand with veritable solemnity on his interlocutor's arm and said to him:

"Listen, Dorsenne, do not tell me any more.... I consent to what you ask of me, but on two conditions. They are these: The first is that Monsieur Chapron will trust absolutely to my judgment, whatsoever it may be; the second is that you will retire with me if these gentlemen persist in their childishness.... I promise to aid you in fulfilling a mission of charity, and not anything else; I repeat, not anything else. Before bringing Monsieur Chapron to me you will repeat to him what I have said, word for word."

"Word for word," replied the other, adding: "He is at home awaiting the result of my undertaking."

"Then," said the Marquis, "I will return to Rome with you at once. He has probably already received Gorka's seconds, and if they really wish to arrange a duel the rule is not to put it off.... I shall not see my procession, but to prevent misfortune is to do a good deed, and it is one way of praying to God."

"Let me press your hand, my noble friend," said Dorsenne; "never have I better understood what a truly brave man is."

When the writer alighted, three-quarters of an hour later, at the house on the Rue Leopardi, after having seen Montfanon home, he felt sustained

by such moral support that was almost joyous. He found Florent in his species of salon-smoking-room, arranging his papers with methodical composure.

"He accepts," were the first words the young men uttered, almost simultaneously, while Dorsenne repeated Montfanon's words.

"I depend absolutely on you two," replied the other. "I have no thirst for Monsieur de Gorka's blood.... But that gentleman must not accuse the grandson of Colonel Chapron of cowardice.... For that I rely upon the relative of General Dorsenne and on the old soldier of Charette."

As he spoke, Florent handed a letter to Julien, who asked: "From whom is this?"

"This," said Florent, "is a letter addressed to you, on this very table half an hour ago by Baron Hafner.... There is some news. I have received my adversary's seconds. The Baron is one, Ardea the other."

"Baron Hafner!" exclaimed Dorsenne. "What a singular choice!" He paused, and he and Florent exchanged glances. They understood one another without speaking. Boleslas could not have found a surer means of informing Madame Steno as to the plan he intended to employ in his vengeance. On the other hand, the known devotion of the Baron for the Countess gave one chance more for a pacific solution, at the same time that the fanaticism of Montfanon would be confronted with Fanny's father, an episode of comedy suddenly cast across Gorka's drama of jealousy.

Julien resumed with a smile: "You must watch Montfanon's face when we inform him of those two witnesses. He is a man of the fifteenth century, you know, a Montluc, a Duc d'Alba, a Philippe II. I do not know which he detests the most, the Freemasons, the Free-thinkers, the Protestants, the Jews, or the Germans. And as this obscure and tortuous Hafner is a little of everything, he has vowed hatred against him!.... Leaving that out of the question, he suspects him of being a secret agent in the service of the Triple Alliance! But let us see the letter."

He opened and glanced through it. "This craftiness serves for something, it is equivalent almost to kindness. He, too, has felt that it is necessary to end our affair, were it only to avoid scandal. He appoints a meeting at his house between six and seven o'clock with me and your second. Come, time is flying. You must come to the Marquis to make your request officially. Begin this way. Obtain his promise before mentioning Hafner's name. I know him. He will not retract his word. But it is just."

The two friends found Montfanon awaiting them in his office, a large room filled with books, from which could be obtained a fine view of the panorama of the Forum, more majestic still on that afternoon when the shadows of the columns and arches grew longer on the sidewalk. The room with its brick floor had no other comfort than a carpet under the large desk littered with papers--no doubt fragments of the famous work on the relations of the French nobility and the Church. A crucifix stood upon

the desk. On the wall were two engravings, that of Monseigneur Pie, the holy Bishop of Poitiers, and that of General de Sonis, on foot, with his wooden leg, and a painting representing St. Francois, the patron of the house. Those were the only artistic decorations of the modest habitation. The nobleman often said: "I have freed myself from the tyranny of objects." But with that marvellous background of grandiose ruins and that sky, the simple spot was an incomparable retreat in which to end in meditation and renouncement a life already shaken by the tempests of the senses and of the world.

The hermit of that Thebaide rose to greet his two visitors, and pointing out to Chapron an open volume on his table, he said to him:

"I was thinking of you. It is Chateauvillars's book on duelling. It contains a code which is not very complete. I recommend it to you, however, if ever you have to fulfil a mission like ours," and he pointed to Dorsenne and himself, with a gesture which constituted the most amicable of acceptations. "It seems you had too hasty a hand.... Ha! ha! Do not defend yourself. Such as you see me, at twenty-one I threw a plate in the face of a gentleman who bantered Comte de Chambord before a number of Jacobins at a table d'hote in the provinces. See," continued he, raising his white moustache and disclosing a scar, "this is the souvenir. The fellow was once a dragoon; he proposed the sabre. I accepted, and this is what I got, while he lost two fingers.... That will not happen to us this time at least.... Dorsenne has told you our conditions."

"And I replied that I was sure I could not intrust my honor to better hands," replied Florent.

"Cease!" replied Montfanon, with a gesture of satisfaction. "No more phrases. It is well. Moreover, I judged you, sir, from the day on which you spoke to me at Saint Louis. You honor your dead. That is why I shall be happy, very happy, to be useful to you."

"Now tell me very clearly the recital you made to Dorsenne."

Then Florent related concisely that which had taken place between him and Gorka--that is to say, their argument and his passion, carefully omitting the details in which the name of his brother-in-law would be mixed.

"The deuce!" said Montfanon, familiarly, "the affair looks bad, very bad.... You see, a second is a confessor. You have had a discussion in the street with Monsieur Gorka, but about what? You can not reply? What did he say to you to provoke you to the point of wishing to strike him? That is the first key to the position."

"I can not reply," said Florent.

"Then," resumed the Marquis, after a silence, "there only remains to assert that the gesture on your part was--how shall I say? Unmeditated and unfinished. That is the second key to the position.... You have no special grudge against Monsieur Gorka?"

"None."

"Nor he against you?"

"None."

"The affair looks better," said Montfanon, who was silent for a time, to resume, in the voice of a man who is talking to himself, "Count Gorka considers himself offended? But is there any offence? It is that which we should discuss.... An assault or the threat of an assault would afford occasion for an arrangement.... But a gesture restrained, since it was not carried into effect.... Do not interrupt me," he continued.

"I am trying to understand it clearly.... We must arrive at a solution. We shall have to express our regret, leaving the field open to another reparation, if Gorka requires it.... And he will not require it. The entire problem now rests on the choice of his seconds.... Whom will he select?"

"I have already received visits from them," said Florent. "Half an hour ago. One is Prince d'Ardea."

"He is a gentleman," replied Montfanon. "I shall not be sorry to see him to tell him my feelings with regard to the public sale of his palace, to which he should never have allowed himself to be driven.... And the other?"

"The other?" interrupted Dorsenne. "Prepare yourself for a blow.... I swear to you I did not know his name when I went in search of you at the catacomb. It is--in short--it is Baron Hafner."

"Baron Hafner!" exclaimed Montfanon. "Boleslas Gorka, the descendant of the Gorkas, of that grand Luc Gorka who was Palatine of Posen and Bishop of Cujavie, has chosen for his second Monsieur Justus Hafner, the thief, the scoundrel, who had the disgraceful suit!.... No, Dorsenne, do not tell me that; it is not possible." Then, with the air of a combatant: "We will challenge him; that is all, for his lack of honor. I take it upon myself, as well as to tell of his deeds to Boleslas. We will spend an enjoyable quarter of an hour there, I promise you."

"You will not do that," said Dorsenne, quickly. "First, with regard to official honor, there is only one law, is there not? Hafner was acquitted and his adversaries condemned. You told me so the other day.... And then, you forget the conversation we just had."

"Pardon," interrupted Florent, in his turn. "Monsieur de Montfanon, in promising to assist me, has done me a great honor, which I shall never forget. If there should result from it any annoyance to him I should be deeply grieved, and I am ready to release him from his promise."

"No," said the Marquis, after another silence. "I will not take it back.".... He was so magnanimous when his two or three hobbies were not



involved that the slightest delicacy awoke an echo in him. He again extended his hand to Chapron and continued, but with an accent which betrayed suppressed irritation: "After all, it does not concern us if Monsieur Gorka has chosen to be represented in an affair of honor by one whom he should not even salute.... You will, then, give our two names to those two gentlemen.... and Dorsenne and I will await them, as is the rule.... It is their place to come, since they are the proxies of the person insulted."

"They have already arranged a meeting for this evening," replied Chapron.

"What's arranged? With whom? For whom?" exclaimed Montfanon, a prey to a fresh access of choler. "With you?.... For us?.... Ah, I do not like such conduct where such grave matters are concerned.... The code is absolute on that subject.... Their challenge once made, to which you, Monsieur Chapron, have to reply by yes or no, these gentlemen should withdraw immediately.... It is not your fault, it is Ardea's, who has allowed that dabbler in spurious dividends to perform his part of intriguer.... But we will rectify all in the right way, which is the French.... And where is the rendezvous?"

"I will read to you the letter which the Baron left for me with Florent," said Dorsenne, who indeed read the very courteous note Hafner had written to him, in which he excused himself for choosing his own house as a rendezvous for the four witnesses. "One can not ignore so polite a note."

"There are too many dear sirs, and too many compliments," said Montfanon, brusquely. "Sit here," he continued, relinquishing his armchair to Florent, "and inform the two men of our names and address, adding that we are at their service and ignoring the first inaccuracy on their part. Let them return!.... And you, Dorsenne, since you are afraid of wounding that gentleman, I will not prevent you from going to his house--personally, do you hear--to warn him that Monsieur Chapron, here present, has chosen for his first second a disagreeable person, an old duellist, anything you like, but who desires strict form, and, first of all, a correct call made upon us by them, in order to settle officially upon a rendezvous."

"What did I tell you?" asked Dorsenne, when he with Florent descended Montfanon's staircase. "He is a different man since you mentioned the Baron to him. The discussion between them will be a hot one. I hope he will not spoil all by his folly. On my honor, if I had guessed whom Gorka would choose I should not have suggested to you the old leaguer, as I call him."

"And I, if Monsieur de Montfanon should make me fight at five paces," replied Chapron, with a laugh, "would be grateful to you for having brought me into relations with him. He is a whole-souled man, as was my poor father, as is Maitland. I adore such people."

"Is there no means of having at once heart and head?" said Julien to

himself, on reaching the Palais Savorelli, where Hafner lived, and recalling the Marquis's choler on the one hand, and on the other the egotism of Maitland, of which Florent's last words reminded him. His apprehension of the afternoon returned in a greater degree, for he knew Montfanon to be very sensitive on certain points, and it was one of those points which would be wounded to the quick by the forced relations with Gorka's witnesses. "I do not trust Hafner," thought he; "if the cunning fellow has accepted the mission utterly contrary to his tastes, his habits, almost to his age, it must be to connive with his future son-in-law and to conciliate all. Perhaps even the marriage had been already settled? I hope not. The Marquis would be so furious he would require the duel to a letter."

The young man had guessed aright. Chance, which often brings one event upon another, decreed that Ardea, at the very moment that he was deliberating with Gorka as to the choice of another second, received a note from Madame Steno containing simply these words: "Your proposal has been made, and the answer is yes. May I be the first to embrace you, Simpaticone?"

An ingenious idea occurred to him; to have arranged by his future father-in-law the quarrel which he considered at once absurd, useless, and dangerous. The eagerness with which Gorka had accepted Hafner's name, proved, as Dorsenne and Florent had divined, his desire that his perfidious mistress should be informed of his doings. As for the Baron, he consented--oh, irony of coincidences!--by saying to Peppino Ardea words almost identical with those which Montfanon had uttered to Dorsenne:

"We will draw up, in advance, an official plan of conciliation, and, if the matter can not be arranged, we will withdraw."

It was in such terms that the memorable conversation was concluded, a conversation truly worthy of the combinazione which poor Fanny's marriage represented. There had been less question of the marriage itself than that of the services to be rendered to the infidelity of the woman who presided over the sorry traffic! Is it necessary to add that neither Ardea nor his future father-in-law had made the shadow of an allusion to the true side of the affair? Perhaps at any other time the excessive prudence innate to the Baron and his care never to compromise himself would have deterred him from the possible annoyances which might arise from an interference in the adventure of an exasperated and discarded lover. But his joy at the thought that his daughter was to become a Roman princess--and with what a name!--had really turned his brain.

He had, however, the good sense to say to the stunned Ardea: "Madame Steno must know nothing of it, at least beforehand. She would not fail to inform Madame Gorka, and God knows of what the latter would be capable."

In reality, the two men were convinced that it was essential, directly or indirectly, to beware of warning Maitland. They employed the remainder of the afternoon in paying their visit to Florent, then in sending

telegram after telegram to announce the betrothal, with which charming Fanny seemed more satisfied since Cardinal Guerillot had consented, at simply a word from her, to preside at her baptism. The Baron, in the face of that consent, could not restrain his joy. He loved his daughter, strange man, somewhat in the manner in which a breeder loves a favorite horse which has won the Grand Prix for him. When Dorsenne arrived, bearing Chapron's note and Montfanon's message, he was received with a cordiality and a complaisance which at once enlightened him upon the result of the matrimonial intrigue of which Alba had spoken to him.

"Anything that your friend wishes, my dear sir.... Is it not so, Peppino?" said the Baron, seating himself at his table. "Will you dictate the letter yourself, Dorsenne?.... See, is this all right? You will understand with what sentiments we have accepted this mission when you learn that Fanny is betrothed to Prince Ardea, here present. The news dates from three o'clock. So you are the first to know it, is he not, Peppino?" He had drawn up not less than two hundred despatches. "Return whenever you like with the Marquis.... I simply ask, under the circumstances, that the interview take place, if it be possible, between six and seven, or between nine and ten, in order not to interfere with our little family dinner."

"Let us say nine o'clock," said Dorsenne. "Monsieur de Montfanon is somewhat formal. He would like to have your reply by letter."

"Prince Ardea to marry Mademoiselle Hafner!" That cry which the news brought by Julien wrested from Montfanon was so dolorous that the young man did not think of laughing. He had thought it wiser to prepare his irascible friend, lest the Baron might make some allusion to the grand event during the course of the conversation, and that the other might not make some impulsive remark.

"Did I not tell you that the girl's Catholicism was a farce? Did I not tell Monseigneur Guerillot? This was what she aimed at all those years, with such perfect hypocrisy? It was the Palais Castagna. And she will enter there as mistress!.... She will bring there the dishonor of that pirated gold on which there are stains of blood! Warn them, that they do not speak to me of it, or I will not answer for myself.... The second of a Gorka, the father-in-law of an Ardea, he triumphs, the thief who should by rights be a convict!.... But we shall see. Will not all the other Roman princes who have no blots upon their escutcheons, the Orsinis, the Colonnas, the Odeschalchis, the Borgheses, the Rospigliosis, not combine to prevent this monstrosity? Nobility is like love, those who buy those sacred things degrade them in paying for them, and those to whom they are given are no better than mire.... Princess d'Ardea! That creature! Ah, what a disgrace!.... But we must remember our engagement relative to that brave young Chapron. The boy pleases me; first, because very probably he is going to fight for some one else and out of a devotion which I can not very well understand! It is devotion all the same, and it is chivalry!.... He desires to prevent that miserable Gorka from calling forth a scandal which would have warned his sister.... And then, as I told him, he respects the dead.... Let us.... I have my wits no longer about me, that intelligence has so greatly disturbed me....

Princess d'Ardea!.... Well, write that we will be at Monsieur Hafner's at nine o'clock.... I do not want any of those people at my house.... At yours it would not be proper; you are too young. And I prefer going to the father-in-law's rather than to the son-in-law's. The rascal has made a good bargain in buying what he has bought with his stolen millions. But the other.... And his great-great-uncle might have been Jules Second, Pie Fifth, Hildebrand; he would have sold all just the same!.... He can not deceive himself! He has heard the suit against that man spoken of! He knows whence come those millions! He has heard their family, their lives spoken of! And he has not been inspired with too great a horror to accept the gold of that adventurer. Does he not know what a name is? Our name! It is ourselves, our honor, in the mouths, in the thoughts, of others! How happy I am, Dorsenne, to have been fifty-two years of age last month. I shall be gone before having seen what you will see, the agony of all the aristocrats and royalties. It was only in blood that they fell! But they do not fall. Alas! They fix themselves upon the ground, which is the saddest of all. Still, what matters it? The monarchy, the nobility, and the Church are everlasting. The people who disregard them will die, that is all. Come, write your letter, which I will sign. Send it away, and you will dine with me. We must go into the den provided with an argument which will prevent this duel, and sustaining our part toward our client. There must be an arrangement which I would accept myself. I like him, I repeat."

The excitement which began to startle Dorsenne was only augmented during dinner, so much the more so as, on discussing the conditions of that arrangement he hoped to bring about, the recollection of his terrible youth filled the thoughts and the discourse of the former duellist. Was it, indeed, the same personage who recited the verses of a hymn in the catacombs a few hours before? It only required the feudal in him to be reawakened to transform him. The fire in his eyes and the color in his face betrayed that the duel in which he had thought best to engage, out of charity, intoxicated him on his own statement. It was the old amateur, the epicure of the sword, very ungovernable, which stirred within that man of faith, in whom passion had burned and who had loved all excitement, including that of danger, as to-day he loved his ideas, as he loved his flagi mmoderately. He no longer thought of the three women to be spared suspicion, nor of the good deed to be accomplished. He saw all his old friends and their talent for fighting, the thrusts of this one, the way another had of striking, the composure of a third, and then this refrain interrupted constantly his warlike anecdotes: "But why the deuce has Gorka chosen that Hafner for his second?.... It is incomprehensible.".... On entering the carriage which was to bear them to their interview, he heard Dorsenne say to the coachman: "Palais Savorelli."

"That is the final blow," said he, raising his arm and clenching his fist. "The adventurer occupies the Pretender's house, the house of the Stuarts.".... He repeated: "The house of the Stuarts!" and then lapsed into a silence which the writer felt to be laden with more storminess than his last denunciation. He did not emerge from his meditations until ushered into the salon of the ci-devant jeweller, now a grand seigneur-- into one of the salons, rather, for there were five. There Montfanon

began to examine everything around him, with an air of such contempt and pride that, notwithstanding his anxiety, Dorsenne could not resist laughing and teasing him by saying:

"You will not pretend to say that there are no pretty things here? These two paintings by Moroni, for example?"

"Nothing that is appropriate," replied Montfanon. "Yes, they are two magnificent portraits of ancestors, and this man has no ancestors!... There are some weapons in that cupboard, and he has never touched a sword! And there is a piece of tapestry representing the miracles of the loaves, which is a piece of audacity! You may not believe me, Dorsenne, but it is making me ill to be here.... I am reminded of the human toil, of the human soul in all these objects, and to end here, paid for how? Owned by whom? Close your eyes and think of Schroeder and of the others whom you do not know. Look into the hovels where there is neither furniture, fire, nor bread. Then, open your eyes and look at this."

"And you, my dear friend," replied the novelist, "I conjure you to think of our conversation in the catacombs, to think of the three ladies in whose names I besought you to aid Florent."

"Thank you," said Montfanon, passing his hand over his brow, "I promise you to be calm."

He had scarcely uttered those words when the door opened, disclosing to view another room, lighted also, and which, to judge by the sound of voices, contained several persons. No doubt Madame Steno and Alba, thought Julien; and the Baron entered, accompanied by Peppino Ardea. While going through the introductions, the writer was struck by the contrast offered between his three companions. Hafner and Ardea in evening dress, with buttonhole bouquets, had the open and happy faces of two citizens who had clear consciences. The usually sallow complexion of the business man was tinged with excitement, his eyes, as a rule so hard, were gentler. As for the Prince, the same childish carelessness lighted up his jovial face, while the hero of Patay, with his coarse boots, his immense form enveloped in a somewhat shabby redingote, exhibited a face so contracted that one would have thought him devoured by remorse. A dishonest intendant, forced to expose his accounts to generous and confiding masters, could not have had a face more gloomy or more anxious. He had, moreover, put his one arm behind his back in a manner so formal that neither of the two men who entered offered him their hands. That appearance was without doubt little in keeping with what the father and the fiance of Fanny had expected; for there was, when the four men were seated, a pause which the Baron was the first to break. He began in his measured tones, in a voice which handles words as the weight of a usurer weighs gold pieces to the milligramme:

"Gentlemen, I believe I shall express our common sentiment in first of all establishing a point which shall govern our meeting.... We are here, it is understood, to bring about the work of reconciliation between two men, two gentlemen whom we know, whom we esteem--I might better say, whom we all love.".... He turned, in pronouncing those words, successively to

each of his three listeners, who all bowed, with the exception of the Marquis. Hafner examined the nobleman, with his glance accustomed to read the depths of the mind in order to divine the intentions. He saw that Chapron's first witness was a troublesome customer, and he continued: "That done, I beg to read to you this little paper." He drew from his pocket a sheet of folded paper and placed upon the end of his nose his famous gold 'lorgnon': "It is very trifling, one of those directives, as Monsieur de Moltke says, which serve to guide operations, a plan of action which we will modify after discussion. In short, it is a landmark that we may not launch into space."

"Pardon, sir," interrupted Montfanon, whose brows contracted still more at the mention of the celebrated field-marshal, and, stopping by a gesture the reader, who, in his surprise, dropped his lorgnon upon the table on which his elbow rested. "I regret very much," he continued, "to be obliged to tell you that Monsieur Dorsenne and I"--here he turned to Dorsenne, who made an equivocal gesture of vexation"--can not admit the point of view in which you place yourself.... You claim that we are here to arrange a reconciliation. That is possible.... I concede that it is desirable.... But I know nothing of it and, permit me to say, you do not know any more. I am here--we are here, Monsieur Dorsenne and I, to listen to the complaints which Count Gorka has commissioned you to formulate to Monsieur Florent Chapron's proxies. Formulate those complaints, and we will discuss them. Formulate the reparation you claim in the name of your client and we will discuss it. The papers will follow, if they follow at all, and, once more, neither you nor we know what will be the issue of this conversation, nor should we know it, before establishing the facts."

"There is some misunderstanding, sir," said Ardea, whom Montfanon's words had irritated somewhat. He could not, any more than Hafner, understand the very simple, but very singular, character of the Marquis, and he added: "I have been concerned in several 'rencontres'--four times as second, and once as principal--and I have seen employed without discussion the proceeding which Baron Hafner has just proposed to you, and which of itself is, perhaps, only a more expeditious means of arriving at what you very properly call the establishment of facts."

"I was not aware of the number of your affairs, sir," replied Montfanon, still more nervous since Hafner's future son-in-law joined in the conversation; "but since it has pleased you to tell us I will take the liberty of saying to you that I have fought seven times, and that I have been a second fourteen.... It is true that it was at an epoch when the head of your house was your father, if I remember right, the deceased Prince Urban, whom I had the honor of knowing when I served in the zouaves. He was a fine Roman nobleman, and did honor to his name. What I have told you is proof that I have some competence in the matter of a duel.... Well, we have always held that seconds were constituted to arrange affairs that could be arranged, but also to settle affairs, as well as they can, that seem incapable of being arranged. Let us now inquire into the matter; we are here for that, and for nothing else."

"Are these gentlemen of that opinion?" asked Hafner in a conciliatory

voice, turning first to Dorsenne, then to Ardea: "I do not adhere to my method," he continued, again folding his paper. He slipped it into his vest-pocket and continued: "Let us establish the facts, as you say. Count Gorka, our friend, considers himself seriously, very seriously, offended by Monsieur Florent Chapron in the course of the discussion in a public street. Monsieur Chapron was carried away, as you know, sirs, almost to--what shall I say?--hastiness, which, however, was not followed by consequences, thanks to the presence of mind of Monsieur Gorka.... But, accomplished or not, the act remains. Monsieur Gorka was insulted, and he requires satisfaction.... I do not believe there is any doubt upon that point which is the cause of the affair, or, rather, the whole affair."

"I again ask your pardon, sir," said Montfanon, dryly, who no longer took pains to conceal his anger, "Monsieur Dorsenne and I can not accept your manner of putting the question.... You say that Monsieur Chapron's hastiness was not followed by consequences by reason of Monsieur Gorka's presence of mind. We claim that there was only on the part of Monsieur Chapron a scarcely indicated gesture, which he himself restrained. In consequence you attribute to Monsieur Gorka the quality of the insulted party; you are over-hasty. He is merely the plaintiff, up to this time. It is very different."

"But by rights he is the insulted party," interrupted Ardea. "Restrained or not, it constitutes a threat of assault. I did not wish to claim to be a duellist by telling you of my engagements. But this is the A B C of the 'codice cavalleresco', if the insult be followed by an assault, he who receives the blow is the offended party, and the threat of an assault is equivalent to an actual assault. The offended party has the choice of a duel, weapons and conditions. Consult your authors and ours: Chateauevillars, Du Verger, Angelini and Gelli, all agree."

"I am sorry for their sakes," said Montfanon, and he looked at the Prince with a contraction of the brows almost menacing, "but it is an opinion which does not hold good generally, nor in this particular case. The proof is that a duellist, as you have just said," his voice trembled as he emphasized the insolence offered by the other, "a bravo, to use the expression of your country, would only have to commit a justifiable murder by first insulting him at whom he aims with rude words. The insulted person replies by a voluntary gesture, on the signification of which one may be mistaken, and you will admit that the bravo is the offended party, and that he has the choice of weapons."

"But, Marquis," resumed Hafner, with evident disgust, so greatly did the cavilling and the ill-will of the nobleman irritate him, "where are you wandering to? What do you mean by bringing up chicanery of this sort?"

"Chicanery!" exclaimed Montfanon, half rising.

"Montfanon!" besought Dorsenne, rising in his turn and forcing the terrible man to be seated.

"I retract the word," said the Baron, "if it has insulted you. Nothing

was farther from my thoughts.... I repeat that I apologize, Marquis....  
But, come, tell us what you want for your client, that is very simple....  
And then we will do all we can to make your demands agree with those of  
our client.... It is a trifling matter to be adjusted."

"No, sir," said Montfanon, with insolent severity, "it is justice to be  
rendered, which is very different. What we, Monsieur Dorsenne and I,  
desire," he continued in a severe voice, "is this: Count Gorka has  
gravely insulted Monsieur Chapron. Let me finish," he added upon a  
simultaneous gesture on the part of Ardea and of Hafner. "Yes, sirs,  
Monsieur Chapron, known to us all for his perfect courtesy, must have  
been very gravely insulted, even to make the improper gesture of which  
you just spoke. But it was agreed upon between these two gentlemen, for  
reasons of delicacy which we had to accept--it was agreed, I say, that  
the nature of the insult offered by Monsieur Gorka to Monsieur Chapron  
should not be divulged.... We have the right, however, and I may add the  
duty devolves upon us, to measure the gravity of that insult by the  
excess of anger aroused in Monsieur Chapron.... I conclude from it that,  
to be just, the plan of reconciliation, if we draw it up, should contain  
reciprocal concessions. Count Gorka will retract his words and Monsieur  
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"It is impossible," exclaimed the Prince; "Gorka will never accept that."

"You, then, wish to have them fight the duel?" groaned Hafner.

"And why not?" said Montfanon, exasperated. "It would be better than  
for the one to nurse his insults and the other his blow."

"Well, sirs," replied the Baron, rising after the silence which followed  
that imprudent whim of a man beside himself, "we will confer again with  
our client. If you wish, we will resume this conversation tomorrow at  
ten o'clock, say here or in any place convenient to you.... You will  
excuse me, Marquis. Dorsenne has no doubt told you under what  
circumstances--"

"Yes, he has told me," interrupted Montfanon, who again glanced at the  
Prince, and in a manner so mournful that the latter felt himself blush  
beneath the strange glance, at which, however, it was impossible to feel  
angry. Dorsenne had only time to cut short all other explanations by  
replying to Justus Hafner himself.

"Would you like the meeting at my house? We shall have more chance to  
escape remarks."

"You have done well to change the place," said Montfanon, five minutes  
later, on entering the carriage with his young friend.

They had descended the staircase without speaking, for the brave and  
unreasonable Marquis regretted his strangely provoking attitude of the  
moment before.

"What would you have?" he added. "The profaned palace, the insolent



luxury of that thief, the Prince who has sold his family, the Baron whose part is so sinister. I could no longer contain myself! That Baron, above all, with his directives! Words to repeat when one is German, to a French soldier who fought in 1870, like those words of Monsieur de Moltke! His terms, too, applied to honor and that abominable politeness in which there is servility and insolence!.... Still, I am not satisfied with myself. I am not at all satisfied."

There was in his voice so much good-nature, such evident remorse at not having controlled himself in so grave a situation, that Dorsenne pressed his hand instead of reproaching him, as he said:

"It will do to-morrow.... We will arrange all; it has only been postponed."

"You say that to console me," said the Marquis, "but I know it was very badly managed. And it is my fault! Perhaps we shall have no other service to render our brave Chapron than to arrange a duel for him under the most dangerous conditions. Ah, but I became inopportunately angry!.... But why the deuce did Gorka select such a second? It is incomprehensible!.... Did you see what the cabalistic word gentleman means to those rascals: Steal, cheat, assassinate, but have carriages perfectly appointed, a magnificent mansion, well-served dinners, and fine clothes!.... No, I have suffered too much! Ah, it is not right; and on what a day, too? God! That the old man might die!".... he added, in a voice so low that his companion did not hear his words.

#### ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Conditions of blindness so voluntary that they become complicity  
Despotism natural to puissant personalities  
Egyptian tobacco, mixed with opium and saltpetre  
Have never known in the morning what I would do in the evening  
I no longer love you  
Imagine what it would be never to have been born  
Melancholy problem of the birth and death of love  
Only one thing infamous in love, and that is a falsehood  
Words are nothing; it is the tone in which they are uttered

End of this Project Gutenberg Etext of Cosmopolis, v2  
by Paul Bourget

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