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The Sun-Maid, "A Romance, by the author of 'Artist," "Victor Lescar," &c., &c. "(Maria M. Grant) is a 140 page novel first published in 1876 in London, set mostly in Pau, the rest in Russia.

The main characters are Mrs. Zophée (the Russian Zophia Petrovna Variazinka), nicknamed the Sun-Maid in reference to an American poem, and Gilbert Stanton Erl, English aristocrat. Regardless of his memories, Mortimer left a note on the back of the cover of this novel: "Roman à clef. Sir Gilbert is an Alston who came to Pau around 1874. Morton is myself. Mrs. Zophée, the Sun-Maid, the old Baron is the Baron de Nervo, the de Veuil are the d'Angosse, other neighbors and foreigners then residing in Pau with names of fantasy, but all very recognizable in their time.
This novel was very successful and has brought a lot of English to Pau.

Mr. L. "This Alston is certainly a son of Crewe, Mary's brother. There are five hundred occurrences of Morton in this novel; he is viscount of St Hilaire and cousin of Sir Gilbert. His mother is Lady Violet, Marquise de St Hilaire and sister of Gilbert's mother, when in reality Mary was the sister of Gilbert's father. Morton went to perfect his English with his cousins. When Gilbert arrives in Pau, his uncle, the Marquis de St Hilaire kisses him, which embarrasses Gilbert, especially as his uncle is bearded.

The Marquis de St Hilaire, Leon, still has beautiful features, he has pleasant manners, a soft voice and he tries to make his entourage happy. His wife regrets that he has become obese, which he himself complies with, and sees little more in him than a good father. I repeated his description in the first part under "Auguste according to the novel The Sun-Maid" . Mary, here Violet, has charm.

Morton is a friendly, playful and energetic boy who enjoys hunting, riding and socializing. In the eyes of his mother, he has all a Bearnais, except for the name and the tailor.
The St Hilaires live in the hillsides, where was Marciron, but Morton has an apartment in town. He is betrothed to Jeanne de Veuil, a name for d'Angosse in the novel, which he does not hide and marry, and whose parents are friends of his family; except that it is not a marriage of convenience, but of love, it does not correspond to the real marriage of Mortimer, that took place anyway ten years later.

I suppose that the description of St Hilaire must reflect a certain reality. Otherwise, it's a pretty boring reading.
Mortimer frequently mentions the Sun-Maid, a neighbor and a very good friend of his mother. In the first part of his memories, he states: "The Villa Monpays was also inhabited by the" Sun-Maid ", the heroine of the roman à clef which was very successful in England, and which amused a lot of English people in Pau.

In the novel, the "Sun-Maid" lived in Lacoudure (?), Marciron's dependency, and not in Monpays where she actually lived. The novel is offered to Princess Amelie of Schleswig-Holstein, who, twenty years later, attended the wedding of Edith de Lassence to Antoine de Palaminy. Was she the Sun-Maid?
Footnotes
https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/roman_a_clef
The real names are Nervo and d'Angosse.
This can be understood only if my related section is available too. I copied it hereunder.
My section "Auguste dans le roman The Sun-Maid" is the following:
Quotation from the novel:
« The Marquis de St. Hilaire [name of Auguste in this novel] had all the remains of the good looks which had captivated Violet Morton [Mary Alston] in those sunny days of thirty years ago. He had the brightest possible twinkle in his eyes, and the softest conceivable tones in his mellow voice. He had good features, a fine presence, a courtliness of manner that was wonderful to behold, and a genuine bonhomie of disposition that made life pleasant to himself and to every body about him. Alas! the symmetry of his handsome features and the grace of his stalwart frame were hidden – encompassed and enveloped by an amount of voluminous obesity that was to himself a source of pretended, and to his fond marquise of most genuine, regret. " Ah! " she often said, " Leon, my darling, you were once beautiful; but now, hélas! You are nothing but a ' bon papa! ' " He was very like a huge, good-natured Plomplon, for his features were of the type Napoleonistic – and so were his sentiments. "The Violet," as he repeated often, held his allegiance alike for his home at St. Hilaire and for the throne of France! »
Further, Morton says « my father plays his favorite game ; you can not think how fond he is of croquet. »
L. A. de Lassence - 2019

RUSSIA, AT HOME AND ABROAD

16. GRANT, Maria M. The Sun-Maid. A Romance … In three Volumes …
London, Richard Bentley and Son, 1876.
3 vols., 8vo., with a half-title in volume I and terminal advertisement leaves in volumes I and III; new endpapers in volume II, else a fine copy in the original publisher's pinkish-grey coth, blocked in black and gilt, with the crown and cypher of Schleswig-Holstein (the work is dedicated to Princess Amelia) and a vignette of the 'sun maid'; bookseller's ticket of R. Grant, Edinburgh. £675

First edition, a stirring romance set mostly in the town of Pau in the Pyrenées, where the young English wanderer Sir Gilbert Erle has come to escape his overbearing mother. His emotions are quickly captured by the titular 'sun maid', an enigmatic Russian émigré, Madame Zophée Variazinka, daughter of a radical poet and a gypsy, who alternates between warm friendship and reserve about her past. When Erle finally admits that he has fallen in love, his declaration is ill-timed – news has just come from Russia that Madame Zophée's husband, a political prisoner (and would-be assassin) missing and presumed dead, has been spotted alive...

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THE SUN-MAID.

A Romance.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "ARTISTE," "VICTOR LESCAR,"
&c., &c.

"Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam,
Im Norden auf kahler Höh'.
Ihn schläfert; mit weisser Decke
Umhüllen ihn Eis und Schnee.

Er träumt von einer Palme,
Die fern im Morgenland
Einsam und schweigend trauert
Auf brennender Felsenwand."—H. Heine.

NEW YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,
FRANKLIN SQUARE.
1877.

(BY PERMISSION.)

I OFFER THIS BOOK TO

HER SERENE HIGHNESS THE PRINCESS AMELIA,

OF SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN,

AND

I Dedicate it

TO THE PLEASANT MEMORY OF

WINTER EVENINGS AT THE MAISON CASENAVE

SOME YEARS AGO.

THE SUN-MAID.

CHAPTER I.

TERRESTRIAL PARADISE.

IN that sunny corner where the waves of the Bay of Biscay wash over a sandy barrier and mingle with the waters of the Bidassoa stream, they tell the ancient story that a favored mortal won from the gods permission to ask three blessings for Spain.

He asked that her daughters might be beautiful, that her sons might be brave, and that her government might be good.

The first two requests were granted—the beauty of a Spanish woman is of world-wide renown; and if the men are rash, passionate, and revengeful, at least they are brave—but the last request was refused.

"Impossible!" was the answer, "impossible! Already she is an earthly paradise, and were this last blessing hers, the very gods themselves would desert Elysium, and go down to dwell in Spain."

This description does not apply to the whole of that country. There are long tracts through which the railroad passes from Pampeluna to Madrid that are very dreary and unbeauteous; and there are dismal old towns to be found, dirty and uninviting, which suggest little of Paradise and much of earth.

If a wandering mythological god, with the tastes which a Sybarite might impute to him, were to come down to seek the Eden of Spain, he would journey far—cross the passes of the Sierra Morena; linger awhile on the genial slopes between the snowy hills and the rushing waters that surround Cordova; wander on to Seville, the centre of soft Andalusia; and there, among the orange groves, inhaling the scented atmosphere, listening to the silvery murmur of the fountains, strolling in the brilliant Calle de la Sierpe, lounging through an evening in the glittering Alcazar, yielding to the soft influence of the scene and its surroundings, he might indeed exclaim that the ancient Eden of the poets was surely the Andalusia of Spain.

So much for an old Sybarite deity and his ideal of an Elysium.

But, to a Northern nature—simple and hardy—such ideas of Paradise are as unsympathetic as the sugar-cakes and orange-water a Spaniard offers by way of ordinary fare. Neither the *dolce far niente* of Seville, nor the Alameda of shadeless Cadiz, nor the scented atmosphere of Cordova, forms, indeed, to our mind, the Paradise of Spain.

There is another range of country—stretching across her northern boundaries, from the stormy Atlantic to the sunny Mediterranean shore—the land of the Basque and the Béarnais, of the hardy mountaineer, of the Spanish remnant of the old Romany tribes.

Here, from La Rhun, in the west, to beyond Le Fort, in the orient, the Pyrenees rear their mighty royal crests, snow-crowned in winter, in summer wrapped in a sunshine radiant and glorious as the gate-way of heaven. Deep valleys, green and fertile, nestle in the mountains; dancing water-falls and sparkling streams rush through their gorges and down their rocky sides.

The climate is temperate, the soil is rich, the harvest is plentiful, and the peasant is content. His life is easy, and he himself is frugal and industrious; he is large of limb, and strong and gentle, like the mild-eyed oxen who draw his carts, help him to till his maize-fields, and bear his purple vintage home.

And we, who love this land, call *it* a *Paradis terrestre*, because life is fair in its happy sunshine—it is beautiful, it is plentiful, it is at peace.

Yet our Paradise is terrestrial, when all is said; and of this we are sometimes reminded as we realize that it grows fair and green and fertile, even only as other lands, beneath "the gentle rain from heaven," and that if many days of the year it is glad with radiant sunshine, and smiling beneath a cloudless sky, we can not conscientiously assert that it is always so.

Most particularly, it was not so, one evening in the autumn days of a certain year, not long ago, when the express train from Bordeaux traveled slowly along past Puyoo and Orthez, glided below the woody ridge overhanging the river just opposite Jurançon, and stopped at the station of Pau.

It was late, but there was no reason that it should hurry itself just then. There were few passengers, the summer season of the mountain-traveler was over, the winter season had not begun; and when the engine puffed leisurely up to the platform, a few peasants returning from a day's work, a few women laden with market-baskets and snowy piles of new-washed linen, a fusty-looking old personage with a large umbrella and a pair of spectacles (evidently a "notary" who had been making a will or drawing up a marriage contract somewhere down the line), a fat priest, and a single first-class passenger, were the whole freight that, emerging from the carriages, sent the train almost empty on its way.

The peasant-laborers pulled their flat bonnets

close down on their foreheads, shouldered their sticks and bundles, and lounged out of the station, one by one.

The women chattered together in a noisy *patois*, execrated the weather, tucked up their petticoats, hoisted large cotton tents over their heads, slung their big baskets across their arms, and hurried away.

The old *notaire* picked his steps gingerly, and, with much effusion and reverential salutation, offered half the protection of his umbrella to the priest; while the first-class passenger plunged his hands deep into the pockets of a huge overcoat, shivered, shrugged his shoulders, looked disconsolately about him, and then, somebody's remark, or, most probably, that story of the gods, passing at the moment through his mind, he exclaimed, *sotto voce*,

"And this is what they call a *Paradis terrestre!* I would sooner live in the Lincolnshire Fens!"

The remark was not inappropriate, neither was the comparison it implied—a comparison which revealed him at once to be of that remarkable nation who grumble so much at the weather at all seasons, and wherever they go, that you really would imagine they had something better at home—an Englishman.

In fact, he could never have been mistaken for any thing else. The whole make of his figure—tall, straight, firm, expressing ease and strength—was British.

The cut of his coat, which was made of rough frieze, long and loose, reaching to his heels, drawn up close over his ears, was English likewise, and so was the coloring of his brown hair and long mustache—all that could be seen of him between the tweed stalking-cap drawn over his eyes and the high collar of his traveling-coat.

It was not a becoming costume in which to introduce a hero, but even in this attire you could see that he was young and, as to figure, at all events, well-looking; and, if you studied him critically, as one traveler scans another upon a wet day on a wayside platform, you might discern that at this Pau railway station he was not at all at home.

It was raining heavily, a steady, unceasing downpour; the air was soft, but damp and chilly. A curling mist lay thick over the waters of the river just beyond the station; a line of low, undulating hills was barely visible through the vapors on one side, and on the other loomed high above him the sombre ramparts of the old castle, and the long rows of hotels and villas that, with their sloping gardens, front the valley, and form the outer boundary of the town of Pau.

At his feet lay a leathern traveling-bag, very English also. It suggested "Asprey," with the initials G. S. E., in dim gold, on the outer flap. From the side-pocket of his coat protruded the silver top of a hunting-flask; and the fragrant smoke of a very good Manila curled from his lips into the air. He looked about him very disconsolately; the position was unpleasant. He glanced at his bag; he gazed after the train that was gliding slowly away into the mist; he looked up and down the station; he emitted several British growls; and, finally, catching sight of a traveling-case and a portmanteau disappearing through a distant door-way, on the shoulders of a man in blue-cotton trousers and shirt, he darted rapidly down the platform, seized the portmanteau with one hand, and collared the lithe little porter with the other.

A volley of expostulation, indignant and excitable, was the consequence, to which our traveler replied with the word "bāggāge," laying as much emphasis on the last syllable by way of French accent as possible; and, pointing to the exit from the station, where a row of cabs and carriages might be seen standing in the rain, he gave the order, in slow and very careful but fairly grammatical French, that his luggage might be there conveyed.

Impossible! In fiercer excitement than ever, the little blue-shirted man was off again, and far out of reach of apprehension immediately. He was inexorable, and clung to the portmanteau, till finally, in much wrath and indignation, the young Englishman turned from him, walked down the station, and in at the door of the waiting-room, followed by his luggage and its carrier, who vociferated unceasingly unintelligible information about baggage and tickets and offices, reiterating regulations, all of which the traveler, if he had ever known them, had forgotten long ago.

At the door of the waiting-room, the little porter, forbidden by rule to go farther, stood gesticulating still, while a fat official rushed up to our indignant friend, and, exclaiming, "Monsieur, pardon, but"—he pointed to a placard on which was legibly inscribed, "Here one smokes not," and at the same time politely, but firmly, he indicated the cigar.

The young fellow drew himself up, and turned upon the official with some haughtiness, and was just preparing in his mind a fitting answer by which to express his sense of offense and injured dignity, when there ran suddenly into the station-room a small man, hat in hand, neatly attired in a dark livery, out of breath—in fact, positively out of himself with eagerness, fussiness, and consequential haste.

His face beamed with excitement and amiability, as he bowed low again and again, and exclaimed, in what he evidently thought was English,

"Mister Sare Geelbert! a thousand weelkomms! A thousand pardons that I am not here to you receive!"

"Ha, Baptiste, is it really you? How are you?" and the young man turned from the official to hold out his hand cordially to his bowing and excited friend. "Here I am, you see, turned up at last."

"Enchanted, Mister Sare Geelbert! How joyful will Madame la Marquise be, and Monsieur le Vicomte Morton! Ah, I have a note—I must tell you—he is so desolated, desolated, and so is Monsieur le Marquis as well. They could not come to-day to meet you, but I am here to weelkomm you, Sare Geelbert—see—and to-morrow the messieurs will drive you to the château themselves."

"Ah, then I do not go over to St. Hilaire to-night?"

"No, monsieur. You will be fatigued—you must rest—your long journey—the time, the weather, I would say, defends it. You will repose at the town hotel of the marquis this evening, and to-morrow you will go to St. Hilaire."

"Ah, very good! But my luggage—" He paused, removed his cigar, and turned inquiringly to the railway official, who had stood, silent and much astonished, during Baptiste's harangue.

The man bowed now ceremoniously to the traveler, and was about to speak, when the fussy little Béarnais broke in again:

"Ah, your baggage, Sare Geelbert! Be tranquil — I charge myself. Pass, monsieur, pass out. I will be with you this instant. Give me only your tickets, I will arrange all. Monsieur Dalon," he added, in French, turning to the official pompously, "let pass this monsieur, Milor Sare Geelbert Erle, the nephew of Madame la Marquise de St. Hilaire."

The station-master responding, "Ah, perfectly," in the irrelevant manner in which the nation use that word, smiled and bowed benignly again, and "Sare Geelbert," producing his tickets with a hearty laugh at Baptiste's introduction, handed them to the official, put his cigar into his mouth again, and walked out to the station door.

He stood there waiting for the servant, and again he shrugged his shoulders, and mentally confessed the prospect to be dismal in the extreme.

A steep bank rose close in front of him, and on the height above towered some large buildings scarcely to be distinguished in the fog and gloom.

A long terrace of houses, standing apart and independent of each other, stretched on each side: on the one hand ending in the turrets of the castle, standing darkly against the background of a ridge of wood; on the other lost in the wall of dense vapory mist that floated down the valley, and that filled and obscured it.

There was no one to be seen on the steep road that wound up to the terrace, and no one at the station. He seemed the only traveler; all the coaches had departed in despair, and there was no population apparent.

So it seemed to him at first, as he stood there; but suddenly along a road that lay level with the station, close to a narrow water-course, fringed by two rows of trees, there came the tinkling musical echo of a bell, and then emerged just opposite to him an ox-cart, laden with great piles of wood, and drawn slowly along by two strong, gentle-looking, dun-colored creatures with long, branching horns. They were led, apparently (not driven), by a man who walked actively before them, touching their horns lightly with a short wand from time to time. His blue shirt, and a bit of crimson rug flung over his huge beasts, made a bright bit of color in the gloomy scene; and altogether they brought life and action into the prospect as they passed the station, moving leisurely along—a curious, picturesque group.

They amused Sir Gilbert till Baptiste came rushing out, laden with the traveling-bag and wrappers, and with a countenance radiant with complacency and importance.

"Now," he exclaimed, "will monsieur walk? It is but a step; but perhaps—ah, it rains terribly!—Sare Geelbert will have a coach."

"No, nonsense! I will walk, Baptiste. Never mind the rain—how do we go? Lead the way."

"Ah, well—this is the road. François has the baggage, he will bring it safe. Now, if you will permit, monsieur;" and with a stiff little bow he walked on a few steps before, while Sir Gilbert, with long, easy strides, followed leisurely behind him.

Baptiste was a short, slight man, but he augmented his stature as much as possible by carrying his head (as became the confidential servant of Monsieur le Marquis de St. Hilaire) very erect indeed, with his nose poised high in the air. He wore a long frock-coat slightly trimmed, just sufficiently to indicate the family livery and colors. He had a high stiff neckcloth and collar, with sharp-pointed gills that stuck up far above his ears. He had black hair, and dark, heavy eyebrows. His deep-set eyes had an honest look in them, and an immense variety of expression besides—ready to flash with excitement and anger, or to sparkle with fun. He had a queer little mouth, which he was fond of shutting up with an odd air of mystery and importance if you asked him a simple question, and happened to be in a hurry for the reply; and the expression meant that you would have to wait for it. He was a true Béarnais in features; and his complexion was of that curious gray shady color peculiar to the men of his race.

He stepped out in front of Sir Gilbert with much precision, with lips pursed up and nose in air, as if deeply impressed with the importance of his post and of the occasion; and as they wound up the hill he announced each object they encountered, each house they reached, with all the ceremony of an introduction, and with the dignity of a chamberlain.

"The Establishment of the Baths," he said, as they paused a moment at the first stage of the steep incline. "And that is the beautiful new Hôtel de France above, monsieur, here to the right hand. And that is the top of the Hôtel Gassion on the left side, and farther is the château; and that is Jurançon away across the Gave, and these are the Côteaux—the low hills, I mean. Oh, I do deplore the time that Sare Geelbert can not see the prospect, and the mountains and the towers of St. Hilaire. But courage! It will pass, I assure you. Be not despairing, monsieur—it will not endure."

"Then it does not rain here always—not quite always—does it, Baptiste?"

"But, monsieur! Sare Geelbert! God forbid! no. Be tranquil; you will see. Are you reposed? You will be injured. It does fall most terribly. Will you continue? Still a little mount."

"I am ready. And they are all well, Baptiste, at St. Hilaire? My uncle and aunt, and the vicomte and madame my cousin, they are all well?"

"All perfectly," said Baptiste, still airing his English in persistent repression of Gilbert's French. "Madame la Marquise and Monsieur le Marquis are of most perfectly good health, and Monsieur le Vicomte Morton is so also, and likewise as well is Mademoiselle Jeanne de Veuil, the most charming fiancée of Monsieur le Vicomte Morton; and Madame de la Garonne is with monsieur her husband at the Château de Val d'Oste; but she comes, with her little ones, soon, very soon, to see Sare Geelbert. Ah, monsieur, they are all joyful to receive you. But you are changed, indeed, since I saw you ten years

ago. You remember, monsieur, when I took in charge the young vicomte to Erle's Lynn?"

"I remember. Ten years ago. Is it really so much? You wear well, Baptiste: you look as young as ever."

"Ah, Sare Geelbert is amiable!" said Baptiste, complacently. "And," he continued, lowering his voice as he turned round with an odd expression of awe and increased deference, "and miladi, the noble mother of Sare Geelbert, the Lady Anna, is she well?"

"Quite well, Baptiste. I hope to find some letters from her: I missed them somehow in Paris."

"There are letters," answered Baptiste, "in the apartments of Sare Geelbert."

"Ah, that is right! Then we will go on."

They wound up the steep hill a little farther, and a few paces more brought them to the Place Royale, a broad, open space that stretched back from the edge of the terrace, and was crossed at the farther end by the Rue de Lycée, just where the narrow Rue St. Louis turned up below the plate-glass windows of La Fontaine's shop.

It formed part of the outer edge of the boulevard, that stretched far along below and beyond the château to the entrance of the old park. Baptiste paused again at this point, partly to gain breath after his hasty climb, chiefly to exclaim, "There, monsieur!" while with much pride and pomposity he pointed across the foggy valley, then from side to side toward the Café Béarnais and the huge hotel, and finally to the statue of Henri IV. which adorned the Place in the centre, and stood out with much dignity and effect between a double boulevard of autumnal-tinted trees.

Sir Gilbert sauntered up to the foot of the statue, and looked up with some interest at the handsome, rugged face; then the ring of Macaulay's ballad came back to his mind, and he was just murmuring to himself some old favorite stirring lines of "Young Henry of Navarre," and enjoying the reminiscence, when Baptiste touched him on the arm, and pointed with sudden and eager excitement toward two figures—the only personages who on this rainy evening shared the Place Royale with Henri IV. and themselves.

These figures were tall and slight, and—they were feminine; they were clad in gray waterproof, reaching to their heels; they wore small round hats; they carried umbrellas; and on the other side of the Place, between two rows of trees, they were engaged in energetic and evidently constitutional exercise.

"Ah!" whispered Baptiste. "Two *Mees*—English—they do promenade themselves. Extraordinary! is it not, ah? not to comprehend!"

"Taking a constitutional, and not a very pleasant one, I should think," said Sir Gilbert.

"So, yes! English—ah! but there are not many now, only two or three. But wait, you will see—the beautiful families—who will arrive—when winter is come. But, Sare Geelbert, you will cold yourself, and you have not an umbrella like the English Mees; come, monsieur, let us proceed;" and on they walked, leaving the "Mees" to pound up and down with the national and characteristic energy which distinguished them.

Turning the corner into the Rue du Lycée, they followed the narrow pavement until a few yards brought them to a handsome archway, to a large gate closed and barred, and to a low postern door, at which Baptiste rang a huge bell with much noisiness and authority. It flew open, and they entered a wide, paved court-yard flanked by coach-house and stables on one side, and by servants' dwellings on the other.

A queer, old-fashioned French hotel, such as Gilbert had never entered before.

It was a square stone house, decorated at the top by a handsome balustrade; it had broad windows, and wide marble steps leading up to a high door-way, through which they passed into a tesselated hall. A matted staircase led to the floor above, and up this Baptiste conducted Gilbert with much ceremony, explaining as he went that the first flat of rooms, or the "rez de chaussée," as he called them, were not inhabited by the marquis, but let in the winter season to "a beautiful English family," when he could catch one.

At the first landing they reached another closed door, and a red bell-rope, at which Baptiste vigorously pulled again and again during the two minutes that passed before the door opened; and then, ushering Sir Gilbert, he trotted in. In the corridor, holding the door open for them, they found a pretty, dark-eyed girl, with a bright-red handkerchief tied round her head. She smiled and courtesied with enthusiasm as Baptiste indicated "Monsieur the Nephew!" and marched past her with dignity into the house.

They entered now a wide corridor, carpeted with warm crimson drugget, and lighted by a large window looking into the court. From this they passed into an octagon anteroom lighted from the top, with a round centre-table and a few high-backed carved oak chairs. A door opened on each of its eight symmetrical sides.

Here Baptiste paused again to introduce and indicate "The drawing-room of Madame la Marquise; the dining-saloon; the library of Monsieur le Marquis; the boudoir of madame; and here," he continued, advancing at last toward a fifth door, and proceeding to open it, "is the apartment of Monsieur le Vicomte Morton de St. Hilaire, which is prepared, Sare Geelbert, to receive you."

The bright, ruddy glow of a wood fire met them as the door opened, and Gilbert, entering the room after his chilly journey and his damp walk, felt instantly less gloomy and disconsolate, and more at home.

It was exactly like the smoking, writing, or reading room of any young Englishman addicted in a moderate degree to these three occupations, and also to the ordinary list of English amusements and sports. It had a large window opening down the centre on to a balcony that hung over the sloping garden, the foggy valley, and the hidden view. The floor was *parquet*, but comfortably covered in the centre and at the writing-table and fire-place by a thick Persian carpet of rich and beautiful hues. A pair of huge arm-chairs flanked the fire-place; several cases, tall and richly carved, held a supply of books. A set of hunting prints, which Gilbert recognized as presents from himself to the vicomte, hung round the walls. There was a rack for sticks and driving and riding whips; there were endless devices for holding pipes of every

variety and size, and for displaying them to advantage; and, lastly, there was a bright, warm glow from huge logs burning in an open fireplace, where shining encaustic tiles and big brass dogs took the place of an English grate and hearth-stone.

"A capital room"—and so Gilbert pronounced it as he stood on the rug, and Baptiste divested him of his long overcoat and wet traveling-cap; and then he rubbed his hands with satisfaction before the glowing fire, pushed back the damp hair from his forehead, shook himself vigorously together to dissipate the sensation of chill, and finally flung himself into a deep leather chair on one side the fire-place, and resigned himself to repose.

Meanwhile Baptiste—with many and verbose apologies for the absence of the household and proper staff of attendants for the occasion—proceeded with great ceremony to prepare for Gilbert's dinner. He placed a cozy little round table close to the fire, and by the time his young guest was thoroughly warmed, had glanced over his mother's letters, and had discovered that he was hungry, there was a delicate little repast quite ready for him, and Baptiste was announcing solemnly that monsieur was served.

And served he was, with wonderful pomp and ceremony, Baptiste conducting him through many courses, each of which he announced in loud tones as he placed them on the table: "Potage," "filets de soles," "côtelettes à la soubise," "fricandeau de veau," and finally, much to Gilbert's consolation, real "bifstek à l'Anglaise," specially prepared, and particularly suitable for the occasion and for the hungry guest.

Having dined comfortably, Gilbert felt at length able to dismiss Baptiste, and to see him, as he hoped, disappear for the last time into the corridor, bearing the relics of his dessert. But no, he returned again. He had still to fidget about, to place coffee, with a case of the vicomte's cigars, at Gilbert's side, to pile fresh wood on the fire, to draw the window-curtains, to bring a reading-lamp, and specially to talk the whole time in ceaseless explanation and apology, and in repeated expressions of his ardent hope that he and the "girl of the country, Madeleine" (as he called her of the bright handkerchief and the dark smiling eyes), might succeed in making Monsieur Sare Geelbert comfortable for just this night.

Gilbert had no doubt of it; in fact, he felt every thing that was *most* pleasantly comfortable at that moment—a little sleepy, a little tired, rather desirous to read his home budget, and extremely anxious to get rid of Baptiste. Finally, the door closed behind him, and Sir Gilbert leaned back in his chair with an exclamation of relief.

And now his letters might be perused in tranquillity. They lay beside him in a tempting pile; the lamp burned softly; the fire flamed up with cheery, crackling sounds, and suffused a warm, delicious glow over the room, while he, gazing into it with a soft, shady look in his eyes, sunk into a half-drowsy reverie as a feeling of pleasant repose crept over him, and his thoughts wandered dreamily back along the track of his journey till they reached his own fireside, in his own English home, and there they lingered.

That home was very dear to him, and, indeed, odd as it may seem in this nineteenth century, he now left it almost for the first time—at least, for any length of absence.

An autumn in Scotland, a few weeks in London, a month in Norway, he had occasionally achieved before; but now he had broken through a routine that had hitherto ruled his life, and he had come away, leaving his covers and his hunting, his kennel and his stud, for how long he knew not.

Some undefined influence had come across him, given this new turn to his life, and inspired the idea in his mind that he would travel; and there were family circumstances which naturally inclined him toward the valleys of the Pyrenees at the very outset of his travels; that accounted, indeed, for his being here, in Morton de St. Hilaire's smoking-room on this autumn evening, and for the starting-point of all his intended journeyings being the town of Pau.

"Sare Geelbert Airrl"—as Baptiste called him—properly Gilbert Stanton Erle, tenth baronet of Erle's Lynn and Terwarden, Sussex—had come very early to his title and estates.

His father had been the ninth baronet, his mother had been a sister of the old Earl of Denningham, and Madame la Marquise de St. Hilaire was his aunt on his mother's side.

It was one of the odd results of certain peculiarities in his family characteristics that he had never been to visit her before; and, if merely to understand this, we will follow for a moment the course of his thoughts as they wander back to his home in Sussex, and linger with them as they centre round the memory of the elderly lady who occupies this autumn evening the large room of Erle's Lynn, alone.

A stately personage, tall, handsome, and imposing, Gilbert could see her distinctly in his mind's eye, sitting solitary and silent, with a large pile of wool-work by her side, a round table quite near her, on which lay neat little books, dim in covering, serious in contents. The vast room he knew was solitary from his absence, and the large house silent because his voice was gone.

Such was his home; such was its only inmate, his mother, who lived there, with him and for him only, to direct his concerns, to rule his servants, to care for his tenantry in both spiritual and bodily estate, and, hitherto, to possess him, her only child, in complete and exclusive devotion of affection, energy, and will.

Gilbert's father, Sir Stanton Erle, had married Lady Anna Morton somewhat late in life, and in so doing (her parents being dead) he had given home and protection to a younger sister, the Lady Violet, a gay little personage, who, during her short residence in Sir Stanton's house, had given him infinite trouble and continual cause of offense.

Sir Stanton was of the pompous and narrow-minded type of rustic Englishmen—a king in his own estate, an autocrat, and a bigot; the sort of man who loves to crush a new idea in its very bud, to stamp out reform, to enforce game-laws, to support magisterial power with unflinching severity and rigor. He said his prayers very loudly in church, and would doubtless, if possible, have imitated the sovereign of his early youth, and ejaculated "Very proper!" when petitions for those high in authority, and for the noble

house of Erle of Erle's Lynn in particular, came in as a special clause in the parish prayers.

He chose Lady Anna as a fitting spouse because he liked her rank; he admired her stately presence; he thought her dignity became a lady of Erle's Lynn, and her cold manner suited his ideas of aristocratic composure.

He accepted Lady Violet as "a cross;" and when, six months after his marriage, she eloped with his special abhorrence—a Frenchman—he looked upon the event as a true deliverance, and, much as he pretended displeasure, felt in reality delight. He determined to cut the connection completely, and circumstances assisted him to carry out his resolve.

Lady Violet went south with her reprehensible young husband, who, by-and-by, palliated his iniquity to some extent by succeeding unexpectedly to the honors of St. Hilaire. Sir Stanton died and was buried, and a grand mausoleum was erected in his memory, as became the ninth baronet of the house of Erle.

Lady Anna took to piety at this time of a very extreme type, very low, very narrow, very strait indeed; and, by dint of much devotion and obedience therein, she made her life as colorless and uneventful at Erle's Lynn as it could possibly be with the presence of a healthy, loud-voiced, merry-faced boy growing up in the midst of it. He warmed her heart in spite of herself. He thawed much in her nature that constitution and her husband's principles had combined to render icy and cold; and he molded his own existence, developed his own powers, and lived out his own free simple life with an independence that gave early evidence in his character of considerable energy and force.

Lady Anna could never make quite what she wished of Gilbert. She could not tame the high spirits, or dull the bright, defiant eyes, or hush the loud, merry laugh that rang through the halls and corridors; and, indeed, much anxiety and concern did she suffer in her narrow, well-meaning, mistaken mind as she realized her failures in this respect. She found the boy grown up free, active, full of wild buoyant spirits, in spite of her; and it must be confessed that, while the standard of her creed discountenanced and mourned him, in her woman's heart, full of motherly pride and delight, she adored him utterly, and thought him first of all created beings.

He was a good son to her, indeed, and very devoted on his side; and if she could not make all of his character and habits that she might have wished, still during his early years she could exercise much external control. She was guardian and executrix exclusively at Erle's Lynn, and she could ordain in his boyhood the chief circumstances of his life. So she hemmed him in, and shut the world out, and kept him always at home with herself, and with tutors chosen by her; thus bringing him up in a tropical atmosphere shut carefully in from that wicked world where, as she really believed and asserted, fierce, fiery lions went ravening to and fro.

Worse than all the lions, however, to the mind of Lady Anna, was the Red Woman—Babylon—the City on the Seven Hills, even the Romish Church, into whose bosom Lady Violet had entered when other homes and churches had cast her quite away; and bitter to Lady Anna's heart and fearful to her soul was a day some ten years ago, while Gilbert was still a little boy in jackets, youthful and impressionable, when Lady Violet, now Marquise de St. Hilaire, wrote to her sister in tender terms of reconciliation, announcing that her only boy, who bore her own old family name, and was called Morton Vicomte de St. Hilaire, was on his way to school in Surrey under the charge of a faithful servant, and that she first proposed to send him to Erle's Lynn to make acquaintance with his English cousin and aunt.

So he came—there was no help for it, notwithstanding the Lady in Red; and, as might have been expected, the boys took to each other with quick interest and devotion. Morton soon perfected his English, and Gilbert from that visit began to study French.

But Morton went home again, and at Erle's Lynn his cousin grew up in his routine life, and for long it satisfied him.

It was such a continual round; something for every month, something to make it impossible to go far from home.

Hunting in winter, fishing in spring, a bit of London in summer, then grouse in the autumn, and covers till the cub-hunting began again. And the interests of a landlord always, a love of his home, and a tenderness for his mother, all kept him tied to his own fireside, as year after year slipped away, and the long-promised visit to St. Hilaire and Morton remained unpaid.

At length, however, the fancy had seized him, and, in simple obedience to this fancy, here he was.

A tall fellow, now of five-and-twenty, with the sort of appearance people call "nice-looking;" with auburn brown hair and mustache, and with well-marked brows and eyelashes many shades darker than the hair.

In features and build of figure he had taken after his mother's family, and was not at all like Sir Stanton, who had been a portly and a pompous old man.

The Deningham cast of face had been called "aristocratic," and Gilbert and his mother possessed it, fully developed in outline of feature, and especially in the brilliant smile that had lighted up the cold countenances of generations of Deninghams like the chill shining of the sun upon ice.

The stately old lady at Erle's Lynn was distinguished for this family smile: it would flit suddenly across her face again and again in moods of peculiar amiability or graciousness, but it touched only the lips, and never warmed or softened the cold, hard eyes—and Gilbert possessed the same smile—quick, brilliant, and flashing; but with him the dark-blue eyes glistened also when he was pleased or happy, and a soft, caressing expression came into them that was very sweet, and might certainly be very dangerous.

As he sat now musing over his mother's letters, dreaming over his journey, enjoying the pleasant sense of repose, and glancing from time to time round the apartment in contemplation of his novel surroundings, and probably also in mental contemplation of the new experiences opening up before him, his face gained more and more an expression of contented satisfaction, and altogether you would have described him just then as a bright-hearted-looking fellow, cheerful, simple-minded, and full of confidence

in life. And this was indeed hitherto about the beginning and end of him. His character was undeveloped, and his experience as limited as his range of thought.

At present, finding little to arrest his meditations in the retrospect of his rapid journey, in the gloomy impressions of the afternoon, or in the moderate excitement of curiosity with which he looked forward to seeing his relatives on the Pyrenees, they soon gravitated to their familiar home-centre again, and he turned to the last dated of his mother's letters.

It was a characteristic epistle. After many pages, written in a stiff, lady-like hand, filled with very primitive details of sundry household events — telling of the excellence of the apple crop, of the fading of the garden flowers, and of the quick approach of autumn on the foliage in the park; after reporting the regularity with which his phaeton horses and the hunters passed her window for their exercise at break of day, and describing in the same parenthesis old Betty Tredgett's gratitude for the last gift of her ladyship's handiwork in Berlin wool, she passed on (and Gilbert's eyes twinkled as he read) to the excellency of the vicar's discourse on last Sunday morning, when he had attacked, as she reported, Ritualists, Romanists, and Broad-churchmen alike—a discourse which he had talked over most fully and agreeably with her in the evening.

And, "My dear Gilbert," she wrote, in conclusion, "you may be sure that my thoughts were with you during these hours. For the recollection came bitterly to me afresh that *you* are now rushing into the jaws of the very perils which Mr. Raybroke painted with such eloquence and force — the perils of associations foreign to the whole spirit of the teachings of your youth. You know with what deep anxiety I shall follow your movements in the course of these journeyings, from which no entreaties of mine have been able to deter you. My heart aches as I realize that you are plunging into that world of Continental life so unknown to me, where, as I have been led to believe, dangers and temptations will beset your path, as regards which I have been able to thank God hitherto you have been kept a stranger. I do not know whether, as the picture crosses my mind of your probable associates, I tremble most at your peril from the influences and attractions of outlandish women, from the toils of a crafty priesthood, or from the many pernicious examples you must encounter in a lawless nation of Papists and unbelievers. I have been told that the *charms* of a foreign life are its chief peril, and that the beauty of nature and climate combine to ensnare young persons until they are at last actually tempted to forget what is due to their position, their personal dignity, their religious principles, and, in fact, to themselves. These remarks have a point and force which I shrink at present from indicating more clearly to you. I reserve further enlargement of my views until I think the fitting moment has arrived. My prayers and constant thoughts are with you, my dear Gilbert, and I remain, your affectionate mother,

"A. Erle."

"What can the old lady be driving at?" soliloquized Gilbert, as he finished this letter. "She seems to have worked herself up about something that I do not see through. I wonder whether I could send her a few lines to-night. I am very sleepy, but I dare say there would still be time."

He sat up and looked round the room as he thought thus, wondering whether there were table and writing materials to be had of which he might avail himself without summoning Baptiste. Soon, in a corner, he espied the vicomte's trim little appointment — a leather-covered writing-table fully fitted with every requirement, and evincing in the details a curious combination of English and Parisian taste. He rose immediately, carried his lamp into the corner, opened and arranged the writing-book, came back to the fireplace to stir up the wood and to light one of his cousin's cigars at the ruddy blaze, and at last, puffing comfortably the while, he returned to the table and began to write. His pen ran very fast and vehemently.

"My dear Mother,—I have just received your letters, and read them comfortably ensconced at the end of my journey in Morton's snug smoking-room in the Rue du Lycée, Pau; and I think the best thing I can do is to answer them at once, though I am very tired and drowsy, and I see the door standing open into Morton's snug bedroom, where I am to put up for the night. But you have written so much about foreign attractions and charms and beauties and so forth, that I think I may as well relieve your mind at once by telling you that I don't like the looks of things here at all. I have seen nothing satisfactory yet in my travels. I do not think the kind of amusement suits me in any way, and I should not wonder if before many weeks you see me back again.

"I did not stay in Paris, only drove from one station to the other; so I can't say any thing good or bad for that city. Having a journey to accomplish, I pushed on as fast as possible to the end of it, as you know I generally like to do with any thing I undertake. It was very dark as I drove through Paris, and foggy, with pouring rain; the lamps burned dimly in the streets, in consequence; so I thought it, on the whole, rather dingy-looking.

"As to Pau—this terrestrial Paradise of Morton's—I do not like it a bit. I can not think how they can live here. I walked up from the station and had a good view of the town, and it struck me as a regularly ugly place: a row of big, square, and very dull-looking houses standing on a sort of terrace which overhangs a long damp valley quite covered with fog.

"Their mountains are about as high as the so-called 'mountains' of people who have never been to Scotland, and they simply teach *me* how the geography books of our school-room days can lie. A long low range of insignificant-looking hills was all I could distinguish; and Morton always said the finest view of the Pyrenees at Pau was from his smoking-room window.

"I saw an old priest at the station, by-the-bye, and thought of the Vatican and — you. But I fancy a very prolonged exposure to *his* influence would be needed to shake my fidelity to our mother Church. And as to the fair sex, to whom you allude so pointedly, I beheld two compatriots in water-proof promenading the place, but did not think *they* looked attractive. I must confess, however, and give the Béarnais maidens

their due, that they are very pretty. I like the way they tie up their heads in gay-colored handkerchiefs, and they certainly have darker eyes and brighter smiles than any thing I have ever seen among the rustics of our Lynn. But still, I do not think you need agitate yourself with the fear that I shall present you with a daughter-in-law whose capacity in conversation is limited to *patois*.

"In fact, dear mother, I think you will soon have me home again—much as I came away; perhaps a trifle more insular in my prejudices, and echoing that cynical old Montaigne in his opinion, 'Qu'on voyage moins pour s'instruire que pour se désillusionner.'" Etc., etc., etc.

As he drew his pen across the paper in a firm, rapid line beneath his signature, a knock at the door made him look up, and Baptiste entered.

"Ah, the very man I wanted!" said Gilbert, as he folded and closed his letter.

"Sare Geelbert would send a letter to the post?"

"Yes; is there still time?"

"Perfectly; and it will catch the early mail to-morrow. I will take it myself."

"Ah, that is all right! Is it far to the post-office?"

"No, that is nothing; besides, I came in just to see if you are comfortable, monsieur, and to say that the time has re-made itself."

"The what? the time?" said Gilbert. "It is about ten o'clock."

"Ah, but I would say the rain; it tumbles not more," said Baptiste. "The sky has raised itself—the mountains have been discovered—it makes a beautiful time."

"What! it has cleared up? I am so glad! I thought it would rain forever, Baptiste. I have not had a fine moment since I crossed the Channel."

"Ah! but it is quick here—it is gone now—it is disappeared; will Sare Geelbert see? The night is warm, beautiful; will Sare Geelbert finish his cigar on the vicomte's balcon?"

"Rather a chilly smoking-room, eh?"

"No, monsieur; there is cover, and carpet, and seat. Shall I push the curtain? Look, Sare Geelbert! It is past; the storm is gone far away."

He pushed back the hangings as he continued speaking, he opened the window, and Gilbert, who had moved to the fire, turned just at the moment in time to meet the breath of air, sweet and cool and scented, that came flowing into the hot room. It was delicious, touching his brow with the softness of rose petals, and drawing him instantly and irresistibly to the window, out on to the balcony, and into the stilly night.

"There!" exclaimed Baptiste, in his favorite expression of triumph. "I told you—and now you see!" and then he stepped back and let fall the curtain, picking up the letter and preparing to depart with it, for no answer had come from Gilbert, who stood there, silenced as by enchanter's spell, gazing with beating heart and glistening eyes on the prospect.

What had he felt? What had he said? What had he written? Words contemptuous and incredulous of the Pyrenees! and there now they lay before him.

The rain had ceased, the mists had cleared away, the moon had risen, the sky was cloudless, and stretched, a vast and wondrous curtain, deep-blue and star-spangled, high above his head; the low hills lay in the foreground, delicate and shadowy in outline, melting away into the distance, and sloping softly to the river-side. The Gave, that had rushed so murkily under its foggy covering in the afternoon, lay now as a glittering thread of light, winding through the valley's depths; cottage windows twinkled cheerily here and there upon the hill-sides, and lights gleamed among the woods that fringed the edges of the stream. Over all there seemed to hang a silvery veil that was at once mist and transparency, both shadow and light; and beyond this, and through this, as in a far-distant and celestial dream-land, rose the mountains. In that silent wondrous majesty that speaks a language to the soul, the summit of the Midi d'Ossau towered in the archway of heaven; away in the shadowy distance rose the mighty Pic de Bigorre, and between and beyond these, range upon range, *pic* above *pic*, stretched far across the western and the eastern sky.

It was a sight such as stirs the heart and unseals it, makes the cheek flush, the eyes fill, and the head bend with reverence and awe; and Gilbert laid his cigar down on the balustrade, threw his head up with intense enjoyment to breathe the sweet, free mountain air; bent it again as the majesty of the scene overcame him, and words of wonder and exultation burst unbidden from his lips. Then he sunk on to Morton's smoking-chair, and leaned his cheek against the stone-work, and gazed and gazed, while time passed on unheeded. His heart seemed full and laden with a wonderful sense of happiness, intoxicating and intense, and old memories and quaint old thoughts, and fair, fanciful dreams of his forgotten boyhood came gradually breaking over him, with strange movings of a new nature and of awakening sensibilities springing up unconsciously within him, born of the power and the inspiration and the glory of that wondrous scene.

CHAPTER II.

DAYLIGHT.

Baptiste had been the confidential servant who had conveyed the young Vicomte de St. Hilaire to Erle's Lynn ten years ago, and during this visit he had perfected, as he imagined, his knowledge of the English language, and acquired a familiarity with English habits that was ever afterward his boast and pride.

Ten years, however, was long enough to obliterate more recollections than Baptiste would have liked to acknowledge, and this fact was evidenced on the following morning by his appearance in Gilbert's bedroom five minutes after that drowsy young person had waked up, and had vigorously pulled his bell-rope, laden with an immense tray covered with a tempting-looking breakfast of hot coffee, fresh rolls, toast and butter, beefsteaks, a large pot of jam, and a quantity of potatoes—a comical combination of national tastes which Baptiste had flattered himself was every thing that was most British.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Gilbert, "what

have you got there? Food! why, I have only this moment waked up!"

"Sare, brekfast!" replied Baptiste, with energy.

"But I do not want it here, my friend. Why, I do not think I have breakfasted in bed since I had the measles!"

"But Sare Geelbert is fatigued; you will repose yourself; and while I open the curtains you will take a little refreshment."

"Nonsense, Baptiste! quite impossible! Please take it away, and bring me a lot of cold water."

"Monsieur will not eat. Ah, what a pity! I have had it hot and ready for him for an hour."

"Well, I won't be ten minutes, if you will only put it on the table in the next room—it will not get cold—only bring me water, Baptiste, a—quantity—and something big to put it into, too."

"Ah!" responded Baptiste, in a tone of perfect comprehension, as he wheeled round slowly and unwillingly, carrying his sumptuous breakfast into the sitting-room. "I am there—I know. I forgot Sare Geelbert will have like Madame la Marquise and the vicomte—hold—yes, that is it—monsieur shall have his will—it is possible;" which Gilbert was exceedingly glad to hear—both the permission and the possibility—for he had been looking rather ruefully all this time at the diminutive apparatus for achievements of the toilet, of which the gilded mirror was much the largest and most important item.

It was a pretty little bedroom, a trifle too luxurious and effeminate for his taste. The curtains had been closed carefully by Baptiste the night before, but between them came a ray of sunshine shooting in a straight line across the room like a silver-tipped arrow of light; and it made Gilbert impatient to be up, to throw open the window, and to enjoy once more the glorious prospect that had bewitched him the night before.

Much to his satisfaction, Baptiste returned presently from the sitting-room, slid back a narrow paneled door in the chintz-lined wall of the bedroom, and displayed to Gilbert's sight a most compact little dressing-room, with cool, tempting-looking marble bath, and all those appliances for refreshment which he desired.

Half an hour more, and he was in the smoking-room, thoroughly rested from his long journey, trim, brushed, and polished, and—as he himself would have expressed it—"as fresh as paint;" and then at last he satisfied Baptiste by doing ample justice to his excellent fare, enjoying at the same time his breakfast, the mountain view by daylight, and the delicious air floating in at the open window by which his table was placed. All this he accomplished in much cheerfulness of spirit, and in utter oblivion of the disconsolate letter he had sent to Erle's Lynn the evening before.

Baptiste conversed as usual through the whole repast, uninvited and unceasingly, telling him, among other things, that the vicomte was sure to arrive at an early hour, as he was exceedingly anxious to receive his cousin, and would wish either to be his companion this morning as he explored the beauties of the town, or to conduct him at once to St. Hilaire, before luncheon, to embrace his aunt.

Meanwhile, when Gilbert had finished, Baptiste left the clearing of the breakfast-table to Madeleine, and proceeded to do the honors of the house by conducting the young guest, for his amusement, from room to room.

There was, first, the drawing-room of the marquise to be explored—a beautiful reception saloon with Aubusson carpet, and panels of Gobelin tapestry, and turquois hangings, and Venetian chandeliers, which, as Baptiste boasted, held on many festive occasions during the winter innumerable wax-lights, and glittered like the sun.

There was the marquis's business-room, comfortable and unpretentious, to be seen; there was the dining-hall, with polished floor and high, open fire-place, lighted on great occasions by huge lamps held aloft by black figures in the corners; there was the little round room, where the sun poured in, bright and cheery, furnished with simplicity and in English style, which the family used daily as a dining-room; and, lastly, there was an exquisite little chamber, into which they entered through an arched door-way with a beautiful carved scroll running around it, on which was woven a wreath of violets picked out in colors delicate and bright.

"This," cried Baptiste, triumphantly, "is the violet room, the boudoir of Madame la Marquise."

Gilbert exclaimed in admiration as he entered, and smiled also with much amusement to himself as he thought that a sister of his mother actually occupied such a room.

It was violet everywhere. The walls were paneled with silk of a delicate shade, on which the cipher and coronet of the marquise were worked in silver, with the leaves and flowers twining round the letters of her name; soft and cloudy curtains of lace, lined also with violet, hung over the windows, and toned and harmonized the whole coloring of the room.

The furnishings were small and dainty; and on every part of them, with a taste that was decidedly French—on carpet, table-cover, cabinets, and chairs—were embroidered or inlaid the monogram, coronet, and woven wreath, proclaiming them, with all their costly beauty, to have been made and destined specially for the place they occupied, and for the owner of the room.

"The violet boudoir," as Baptiste repeated. "Prepared for Madame la Marquise by monsieur himself when he came here, as a surprise, upon her day of fête. There is one just like it at the château on the hill. A pretty tribute, is it not, to madame and her name, Sare Geelbert? Ah, I assure you, you will see of all the flowers at St. Hilaire the Violette is always the queen."

Gilbert laughed merrily as he applauded the graceful turning of Baptiste's compliment, and thought to himself what an oddity an English valet would be who discoursed in such flowery style; and then, having amply admired the beautiful little apartment, they returned to the smoking-room, and Gilbert lighted his morning cigar.

Baptiste wisely took this as a hint for his dismissal, and he departed, after fidgeting about for several extra and unnecessary minutes to assure himself that monsieur was provided in all his requirements, and that Madeleine had left no part of her dusting and sweeping undone; and then Gilbert conveyed himself and his cigar to the window.

He felt in most gleeful spirits; his mood of the night before had quite evaporated; he was

full of anticipation of enjoyment; and all these pleasant sensations seemed somehow to come over him irresistibly, simply from the influence of things external as they surrounded him in this morning light.

The mountain view, as he leaned now from Morton's balcony, was far less mystic and soul-stirring than it had seemed to him wrapped in the silvery moonlight the night before, but there was a wonderful gladness in the prospect: it was essentially what the French call *riant*.

The foreground of the sloping côteaux seemed positively to smile, the sunlight touching here and there a sweep of brilliant verdure, or, again, a bank of wood, all golden and amber with the early autumn tints. Soft rising columns of blue smoke curled into the still air from châteaux, villas, and peaceful peasant homes, of which many stood on the green slopes, and nestled in the sheltering woods of those rich and beautiful hills.

In the near foreground lay the river, the Gave, and the village Jurançon, the sun's rays tipping the roofs and churches, and drawing them out into strong relief against the green or russet setting that sloped behind. From the church tower of Gelos rang out the midday chimes, sweeping down the valley with soft, musical echo, and reaching Gilbert mellowed by the distance, floating toward him on the sweet breezes of the mountain air.

The heavy rain of the day before had fallen, as he now saw, in the first coating of snow upon the highest mountains, and the Pic du Midi d'Ossau reared its proud crest, white and silvery and wonderful in brightness, against the deep-blue sky. Over the soft gray hues of the lower mountains, across their summits, and along their precipitous sides, darkness and sunshine seemed to chase each other, with the wonderful effect which forms the chief fascination of that bewitching view; for, on such a morning, light and shade, sunshine and shadow, with ceaseless and fantastic change, play and dance continually there, over mountains and valley, over distance and foreground, over verdure and snow.

Long before Gilbert had thought of wearying of it at all, or felt that he had half exhausted the enjoyment of the mountain view, while the mysterious longing was still strong upon him to *go* there, to cross the valley, to skim the lower summits, and to reach somehow, *anyhow*, the snowy shaft that seemed piercing the highest sky, a sudden noise reached his ears. First the pealing of the huge gate-bell, then the clatter of horses' hoofs, and the roll of a carriage in the court-yard below; the hasty banging of doors, the tread of rapid footsteps springing up the outer stairs; then voices, loud and cheery, mingling young and old; and finally, before he had time to fling away his cigar and turn from the window, the door opened, and cousin and uncle simultaneously burst into the room.

Morton—an altered Morton from what he remembered at Erle's Lynn—sprung toward him with a cry of welcome, with a smiling countenance and outstretched hands; and before Gilbert had nearly finished wringing them in a warm and eager grasp, the old marquis had caught him up, enveloped him in an enormous fat, soft embrace, that suggested suffocation in a feather-bed, and, much to Gilbert's discomfiture, had kissed him loudly upon each cheek. He was very much put out, but managed to right himself, gaining his equilibrium, and disengaging himself from his uncle's embrace, while Morton clasped his hand again, and continued the reiteration of his welcome and delight.

"Dear fellow! I am so glad to see you at last! Ah, you faithless Gilbert! how many years is it—ten—since you were to come to St. Hilaire the very next spring?"

"Never mind," exclaimed the marquis, in very broken English, differing widely from his son's, which was perfectly correct and pure. "Never mind, he has come now; so we will only welcome him, and not upbraid him with the past."

"I am very glad to come, at all events," began Gilbert.

"Ah, that is right," broke in the marquis; "and you will be glad to stay, I hope, and sorry, very sorry, to go, when, some day, a long time hence, we consent to part with you!"

"Thank you! thank you!" cried Gilbert, warmly, "thank you for your welcome indeed!"

"Welcome! Of course we welcome you, a thousand times, my dear boy! my nice, handsome, fine young fellow! nephew of my Violette! I am ten times delighted to welcome you to St. Hilaire!"

"Thanks, thanks," repeated Gilbert; and then he edged a few steps away, for the marquis's eyes were glistening with effusive affection, and he looked a little bit as if he would fain, in his cordiality, re-envelop his nephew, and embrace him again, and Gilbert did not like it. He edged away a little, and contemplated his uncle with no small curiosity and amusement, as the marquis sunk into a chair, fanned himself with a large pocket-handkerchief, and regained slowly his coolness and composure.

The Marquis de St. Hilaire had all the remains of the good looks which had captivated Violet Morton in those sunny days of thirty years ago. He had the brightest possible twinkle in his eyes, and the softest conceivable tones in his mellow voice. He had good features, a fine presence, a courtliness of manner that was wonderful to behold, and a genuine *bonhomie* of disposition that made life pleasant to himself and to every body about him. Alas! the symmetry of his handsome features and the grace of his stalwart frame were hidden — encompassed and enveloped by an amount of voluminous obesity that was to himself a source of pretended, and to his fond marquise of most genuine, regret.

"Ah!" she often said, "Léon, my darling, you were once beautiful; but now, hélas! you are nothing but a 'bon papa!'"

He was very like a huge, good-natured Plomplon, for his features were of the type Napoleonistic—and so were his sentiments. "The Violet," as he repeated often, held his allegiance alike for his home at St. Hilaire and for the throne of France!

Morton, Vicomte de St. Hilaire (or "Morrton-g," as his French friends called him, with that energy of the *r* and faint echo of the *g* which it is impossible to transcribe into English), was as pleasant a young cousin, in appearance, character, and manner, as any one who had traveled, like Gilbert, some distance to seek him could wish to find. Slight, straight, energetic, and about the medium height, shorter by some inches

than Gilbert, he was many shades darker in complexion and coloring. His eyes and hair and his pointed mustache were all nut-brown, the eyes clear, bright, and cordial, and the smile frequent and sweet.

He had few national characteristics of any kind, either English or French. He inclined toward the former in taste, toward the latter in disposition. He had long employed Gilbert's tailor, ridden English horses, boasted an English groom, and gloried in broad-toed boots; but, on the other side, to outbalance these Britannic tendencies, he had a passionate love of his home and his mountains that was Béarnais, with a sensibility to, and enjoyment of, all the external softness and graces of life that proclaimed him Southern and French.

He was *fiancé*, as we have gathered already from Baptiste's reference, as he and Gilbert had walked up the hill together from the station; and his was not to be merely a French marriage of convenience, but a genuine love affair, of which Gilbert was destined to hear much, and in which his interests would be often and genuinely concerned before his visit to the Pyrenees was over.

All this *we* may know; but Gilbert had not time either to observe or to discover much personally about his cousin before the marquis and Baptiste combined to hurry their departure for St. Hilaire.

"We will not stop to explore the town today, I think," said Morton; "shall we, Gilbert? You will have many opportunities of doing it all again."

"Certainly not!" exclaimed the marquis. "Your aunt does languish to behold you, my nephew. She pines to embrace you; she is impatient to receive you at last at her home. Come, let us go at once, Morton. We will reach St. Hilaire for the English lunch, and Gilbert can see the Pau celebrities another day."

"I am dying to be off," said Gilbert. "I have been looking at these mountains all the morning, and wishing for a patent flying-machine or a serviceable balloon. I am longing to get to the other side of the valley, and I can not say that I saw much that was attractive over here."

"Well, let us start, then, at once," said Morton. "Come along!" And down-stairs they went without further delay.

In the court-yard was the marquis's phaeton—a neat little London-built stanhope, with a handsome pair of chestnuts champing their bits with impatience to be off. Behind it stood a tax-cart, drawn by a huge mule, and driven by a peasant in the orthodox blouse and *beret*.

Gilbert's luggage was hoisted on to this, and Baptiste, scrambling up behind, sat down backward with much solemnity on the highest portmanteau, and folded his arms with an air as if no dignity could be wanting to this or any position while *he* was there to impart it.

The marquis with wonderful agility sprung to his driving-box; Gilbert, as invited, took the seat beside him; Morton jumped up with the smart groom behind; and off they went out of the court-yard, along the Rue du Lycée, bowling through the Place Gramont, down the hill, across the bridge, and away over the sunny road toward the sloping hills.

It was a charming drive, for the mountain air, cool and autumnal, tempered the fervor of the sun. The way lay through rich glades of wood and vineyard and pastures, all green, soft, meadowy, and luxuriant as the valleys of Devon, and surpassing in beauty that richest corner of England, because the *pics* and snowy shoulders of the mountains rose ever in the dreamy distance beyond.

It was an amusing drive too, for it was market-day across the Gave at Pau, and the road was covered with an endless train of laden ox-carts, with mules and donkeys gayly decked in Spanish harness, ridden by men and women indiscriminately, and by old and young.

An extraordinary confusion of sounds rose from the tinkling of the ox-bells and the loud, jabbering voices of the drivers, squabbling together in noisy Béarnaise, or exhorting their oxen in caressing and beseeching tones; and as the oxen often turned obstinate and stood still, it was curious to see their drivers seize them forcibly by the horns and drag them from the middle of the crowded road into a place of safety on the sideway. Indeed, the medley of men, donkeys, old women, and vehicles, straggling along the road, and more often *across* it, was a spectacle full of characteristics, both rustic and local.

The marquis drove at full speed, holding the reins tightly in both hands; and most dexterously did he dodge in and out, round the ox-carts and across from side to side of the road, narrowly escaping at one point an old woman and her donkey; scattering a herd of goats in fifty directions at another; seeming to threaten men and animals with instant destruction, and seeming always to peril his carriage and horses, to say nothing of his own neck and those of his friends.

Nothing happened, however; the carriage went smoothly on. He was accustomed to all of them—peasants and cattle and donkeys—and they to him. He shouted, harangued, and scolded, always with extraordinary effect; and when his voice died away in the distance as his phaeton bowled on, Baptiste, in the mule-cart, took up the thread where his master left it; and, having the advantage of sitting backward, he could execrate men and oxen and old women quite to his satisfaction as they stretched far behind him along the road.

About five miles they drove on in this way, sometimes on the level, following the rippling courses of the stream; now breasting at full trot a sudden rise over a sloping côteau; again dipping into the valley beyond, until at length, crossing the steep shoulder of one vine-covered hill, they seemed to leave Pau and the rushing Gave, and the lower summits of the côteaux suddenly behind them, and they came upon a grand new opening view reaching far into the Pyrenees. The Château de St. Hilaire lay among clustering woods, surrounded by soft, undulating sward, just in the foreground below them.

The lofty turrets and the highest windows of St. Hilaire might catch the prospect on the Pau side, and reach to the plains that lay flat and far beyond; but the frontage of the château looked southward, commanding the *pics* and ranges of the mountains, and facing the full glory and radiance of the Spanish sun.

Beneath groups of fine old oak-trees they bowled up the avenue, dipping and rising a dozen times as they traversed narrow ravines, and crossed the rustic bridges that spanned the

stream. They drove through a shady beech-wood, and rolled softly over the golden carpet of fallen leaves which autumn and the mountain breezes had strewed richly at their feet, and finally they shot round a sharp corner, in at the private entrance, and up a gentle slope between brilliant parterres of flowers, clusters of rose-bushes, and banks of velvet sward. The marquis brought them swinging up to the door at a fine pace with immense flourish and a great deal of air. A cleverly performed piece of driving it had certainly been, for which he was immensely well pleased with himself.

"There, now!" he exclaimed, as he scrambled down with assistance after Gilbert had alighted. "There, five miles! hill and dale, and done sharply in the fifty minutes, oxen and old women and all! What you say? I can drive? like an Englishman? Yes, just so! Capital! Come in, my dear boy, come in."

Gilbert was lingering a moment, and looking about him with admiration and enjoyment; but when Morton had sprung from his back seat in the phaeton, the marquis bustled enormously and hurried them both in. Gilbert must be presented to madame without any delay.

They passed now through an antique porch, through a mighty door into a large hall, handsome, beautifully proportioned, vaulted, and richly carved; and here they encountered a group of servants in picturesque liveries. Lackeys they were of the French rococo school—no one would have dreamed of calling them "footmen," so little had they an air of John Thomas, and so much of Ruy Blas. They were hastening to the entrance at the sound of Monsieur le Marquis's approach. But he was too quick for them. They were only in time to stand back in order, and bow with ceremony as he trotted heavily past them in much hurry and excitement, and crossed the hall.

One man threw open a door; a second in the plain dress of a chamberlain pronounced the marquis's and Gilbert's name; and in ran the old gentleman, followed by his son and nephew, through a large anteroom, under a thick festooned curtain, and into the drawing-room, where, in the recess of a window, bending over her broidery-frame, his "Violette," the marquise, sat alone.

"Here he is! at last we have caught him!" shouted the marquis in French; and then he laughed immoderately, and shook his huge sides with delight, while Gilbert came forward, and his aunt rose, pushed her frame away, came quickly to meet him, and with an exclamation of pleasure put up her hands upon his shoulders, and close round his neck. "Dear child! dear child!" she murmured, "thrice welcome!" and she kissed him softly on forehead and cheek.

It was impossible to realize for a moment—as she stood back from him to look up into his face, and as he could then survey her from head to foot—impossible to realize that this was his mother's sister. The recollection of his mother shot across him for a moment—chill, stern, and even to him so undemonstrative: the recollection of her tall, unbending figure; of her iron-gray braided hair; of the lines of age in her grave countenance; and of the rigorous simplicity in the style and materials of her dress. And here was her only sister—that renegade of thirty years ago—very little her junior, and as unlike her as two extremes could be.

The marquise was even taller than his mother, but in her graceful figure there was no approach to any thing austere or grim. Her cheek was pale, but smooth and downy—the lines somehow softened away; her hair clustered thickly over her forehead, frizzed and feathery, fine as spun silk and white as driven snow. Her eyes were sparkling, and her radiant smile was full of happiness and fun. Her dress was of some dark shade, trimmed richly, and hung to perfection; across her shoulders she wore a fichu of fine lace, and a Marie Antoinette cap crowned the wonderful arrangement of her snowy hair. There was no attempt at youth in any way, but certainly there was the substitute of most artistic perfection in all the harmonies of confessed age. People were fond of comparing her to "an old picture," not knowing very clearly what they meant, but somehow because the idea does float vaguely abroad that old masters admired exquisite laces, soft harmony of color, graceful lines in the draping of a costume, in the folds of a fichu, in the setting of a head-dress; and if this was indeed the case, then Madame la Marquise de St. Hilaire was certainly "like an old picture," for she shared all these tastes with them.

"Dear child!" she murmured again to Gilbert, in answer to his, "How are you, aunt?" "I am very glad to see you at last."

"Poor Anna's boy!" she continued; "poor Anna! And so you have come at last! Well, I am glad to see you, dear; yes, very glad!"

"And I am delighted to be here."

"Sit down, dear child, sit down here by me. Go away, Lu; go away, Fanfan; make room for our guest, my jewels—and, oh! Morton *cher*, lift up this mountain of work."

A white Maltese and a tiny English terrier woke up with indignation as she spoke, and crept off the sofa disconsolate and very unwilling as she swept them gently away, while Morton laughed and came forward to do her bidding, and to carry off an armful of soft, bright-colored wools that had been piled in confusion by her side. Then she sat down and drew Gilbert on to the sofa. She took his hand and patted it gently with her own, which were white and small and well-shapen, and sparkling with a lavish and costly profusion of brilliant rings; and he looked at her still in unutterable amazement, thinking first that "surely no fellow ever had such an aunt!" and, conclusively, that (though an old woman without doubt) she was—young, old, or middle-aged—almost the loveliest woman he had ever seen.

The marquis had thought so for many a day, and he liked a great deal of her attention for his fascinating and most amiable self; even a handsome young nephew, though newly acquired, must not absorb her for more than a very few minutes at a time; so he struck in with,

"Well, Violette, and so we have got him; and what do you think of him now he is here, eh? Ha—ha!" And then he rubbed his fat hands together, and laughed again with that good-humored and quite purposeless laugh of his which he found suitable to almost any occasion. Then he had much to tell—of his feat of driving, of Gilbert's admiration of his power as a "Jehu," of the time they had taken to bowl over to the

Rue du Lycée, and the proportionate rapidity with which they had come back; and his wife answered him with sunny smiles and sympathetic glances, until at length he departed, happy in considering himself equal to the best whip in the Four-in-hand Club, and possessed of the loveliest wife in the province of Berne.

Then the remaining three sat talking.

"Dear child," as the marquise continued to call Gilbert, "so you made a nice journey, and you like the country, and you are pleased to be with us all here?"

"I am delighted to be with you," said Gilbert; "but I hated the journey, and yesterday I did not at all like the place."

"Ah, that was because it rained," rejoined Morton. "Baptiste told me it poured when you came into Pau."

"It did. It was horrid. I thought it most fearfully dismal."

"Ah! but now?" exclaimed the marquise, "you like it really? you like it? Will you not say so? You must—you must!"

"Yes, of course I do. I think it is beautiful—up here at St. Hilaire especially."

"Ah! good boy! dear child! I knew you would. And you will love it, Gilbert, before we let you go."

He laughed a little, and Morton went on:

"It must rain now and then, you know, and a great deal too, else how should we have the green trees and grass? The sun is so hot, you see, Gilbert; and yet we pique ourselves on our vegetation. Even in England, I do not think I remember any finer verdure than we can show you here."

"No, certainly not. It is wonderfully luxuriant and beautiful."

"And of course," continued the marquise, "that must come of rain. See in Provence or Languedoc, on the other side of France, anywhere, everywhere, where the sun strikes and it is dry and cloudless, how the meadow-land is arid and bare; while here—look at our lawn and at our roses, Gilbert, and at the green hues of that acacia-tree!"

"Yes, it is wonderful. We have no fresher green at Erle's Lynn than that," said Gilbert. "I think I shall like this country immensely, aunt."

"Like!" exclaimed the marquise, enthusiastically. "No one *likes* the Côteaux of the Pyrenees. Either you do not know them, and are unconscious of them, and indifferent to them, or you know them, have lived on them, and *love* them."

"I think it is very beautiful," said Gilbert. "I am sure I should be fond of the country if it were my home."

"And you must be fond of it because it is mine, dear child, and Morton's, and because we mean to make you so happy here that you will never wish to leave us, and go back, when you must go, with sorrow. Shall we be able to manage it, Morton *cher?* Do you think we shall?"

"We shall try, at all events—and *à propos*, I wonder what Gilbert would like to do now? Will you come and see your room? And after luncheon we might have a cigar, and a stroll about the place, and look at the dogs and hunters."

"Do! take him away! Dogs and cigars and horses—of course those are the sort of things that amuse two boys like you; and Morton has plenty to show you. Make yourself at home, dear, and lead exactly the life that pleases you; and walk or ride, or any thing else you fancy, just when or where you like. Morton will show you all his ways of life, and as long as you stay among us I am sure every thing that is his is yours. I think I can speak so much for him, and I know I can for Léon—the marquis, I mean—and myself. Make yourself as happy as you can, dear boy—and," she continued, putting up her soft fingers to pat his cheek, "when you have an idle moment or a lazy moment, just come back to your stupid old aunt, and lounge away an hour in the corner of her sofa. You will always be welcome, and you won't mind Fanfan and Lu."

"I am sure I shall often avail myself of that last permission," said Gilbert, gallantly, smiling at the pretended humility and pathos with which she depreciated her own society and herself.

"Will you, dear? That's a good boy! Come as often as you like, then, and tell me all the English gossip and scandal you can remember. It will not be too old for me, at all events, for I have not heard any for many a day. And now you are dying, I know, to be off together. Give me another kiss, you great big fellow, and go away."

Gilbert blushed a little as he obeyed this request, bending his head that she might touch his forehead softly with her lips again. He was unaccustomed to the process, informal demonstrations of affection at unconventional times being unheard of at Erle's Lynn.

Morton, too, came close up to them now as the marquise stood, with her sparkling fingers on Gilbert's shoulders, and, much to the latter's astonishment, possessed himself of one of her pretty hands, raised it to his lips with deferential ceremony, and said, "Ah! maman chérie! I shall be jealous of the big cousin if you show him such favor as this."

"Bah!" she answered, laughing, but with a tender look in her eyes, as she turned them upon Morton. "You may well be jealous. I am pleased with this nephew of mine, and proud also. Look at him," she continued, touching the points of his hair; "how fair he is, and tall and clear-complexioned. A Deningham all over, not a bit an Erle. And you, Morton, you brown fellow! go along to your Jeanne—to your fiancée—fickle one! I am not a bit proud of you, and I do not love you at all at all, do I? you spoiled boy! Go away both of you, and leave Lu and Fanfan to sleep in peace. Never mind them, Gilbert; they will not growl at you after a little while, and they very seldom bite. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER III.

ST. HILAIRE.

In the afternoon the marquise went out driving; the marquis disappeared after his own concerns; and Morton took Gilbert into the gardens, across to the stables, to the kennels, and all over the house.

The gardens were beautiful, sloping away on each side of the château, and losing themselves

in deep, woody valleys where ornamental trees grew luxuriantly, and through which winding paths led to the cool shades by the gurgling waters that ran in the lowest depth of each.

The gardens were in the last glory of their autumn bloom, still brilliant with geraniums, verbenas, and roses, with magnificent hydrangeas, with the beautiful magnolia and the graceful shrinking mimosa, all blooming with a luxury of verdure and variety of delicate hue such as we see not in our chillier climes.

Large forcing-beds of lilies of the valley and of violets, white, purple, or rich and sweet-scented Parma, were being nurtured under a south wall with infinite care, all destined to bloom forth with luxury and abundance at the earliest breath of spring. In the long glass-houses and surrounding the garden the azalea and camellia trees sloped in banks of intense verdure, hiding under their velvet leaves countless buds that gave promise of a rich show of brilliant coloring in the winter months to come.

Before March was over they would be banked against the house, in the open air, round the porch and windows, blooming luxuriantly, and unsheltered as the peony in an English June. Glass and hot houses are little needed in a country where the purple grape ripens large and luxurious round the porch of the peasant's cottage, and where the cherry and the plum trees form the hedges of the public way.

From the flower-garden they strolled on to the stables, where Morton's hunters stood ready for the winter, when they would all move to Pau, for hunting and for gayety as well.

Morton's English groom was a native of Erle's Lynn, and had been sent out from there some years ago to superintend the *écurie* on the Pyrenees; and it amused Gilbert immensely to find how much at home he had grown, how accustomed to his French surroundings and his Béarnais strappers, to whom he chattered volubly a curious stable jargon, in which the Sussex burr mingled oddly with his peculiar modification of the dialect of Béarn. The establishment, however, was admirable, and the horses stood, as Gilbert observed, "in as neat a stable as he could wish to see."

There were three hunters in capital condition, looking, as he remarked, "very fit and quite ready for work;" and there was a steady-looking old cover hack, glorying in the name of Dinah, whom Morton exhibited with especial pride.

"She is as tame as an old house-dog," he said, as he patted her lovingly, and she turned to rub her nose against his shoulder. "I have ridden her for years, Gilbert, to the cover-side, and up and down the côteaux here. I have no doubt she spent most of her life in Rotten Row before I got her; for I bought her of a game old Briton who shipped her out here by Bordeaux, and rode her, for constitutional benefit, up and down the soft bit in the Allée de Morlaas daily for a whole season. I used to be exercising my hunters there on the off-days, and fell in love with her; and when the month of May came, I found the old fellow glad enough to be spared the money of her passage home, and so I bought her. Is she not a beauty, eh?"

"She is a dear old beast," said Gilbert, smoothing down the pony's fat sides with a familiar touch, which she acknowledged on her side by a plunge at Morton's coat-sleeve and a whisk of her short, docked tail.

"Dear old pony!" Morton continued. "Will you stand still? You can ride her, you know, Gilbert, as much as ever you like. She is the best for the country over here. The hunters are too fresh to be pleasant for jogging up and down these steep hills. Joe and I exercise *them* in a paddock I have made down in the hollows, and so keep all their energies ready for the real work on the other side."

"How on earth can you hunt in this sort of country?" exclaimed Gilbert, suddenly. "Any thing I have seen yet would be impossible ground—worse than the toughest bit of Irish hill and heather I ever scrambled over."

"Ah! but you have not seen the other side—away beyond Pau, on the flats of the Landes; there are lots of capital runs to be had. A fine wide stretch of country, with nothing to bother you but little ditches, and bits of crumbly bank and wall. You soon get accustomed to it, and I assure you we have capital sport; have we not, Joe?"

"Well, my lord!" responded Joe, who always insisted on addressing Morton in this style, describing him as "the Wiscount." "I don't say, of course, as how it is like the 'unting of the shires; and Sir Gilbert must not expect to get runs with us such as he'd 'ave with the Pytchley, or on t'other side the country with the Dook of Beaufort's hunt; but if as how he'll be moderate in his expectations, I think, my lord, we'll manage to show him as pretty a piece of sport now and again in the course of the winter as he might see with any *ordinary* English pack. And that I *can* say for the 'unt of Pau, Sir Gilbert, and that I *will*."

"I have no doubt of it," said Gilbert. "But, somehow, the climate and the style of things about here do not suggest hunting to *my* mind; hard riding under this sunshine must be tough work—it does not feel like it. But still, Morton, these three animals look like business, and would do a good day's work for you in any shire."

"They would, Sir Gilbert. And they have sometimes got work to do," continued Joe: "them stony banks, and blind ditches, and hedgy walls about the flats across there, need a wide-awake rider and a tidy 'orse, I assure you, sir. They gets lots of croppers, some of them queer 'untsmen who turns out with us. They jog along quite 'appy sometimes with the ladies o' a morning, Sir Gilbert, and show up as smart as a gentleman rider o' Astley's Circus, with their butting-holes and the tight spring in the back o' their vermilion coats; but *I* a' seen a one or two o' them crawling 'ome a werry battered spectacle o' an evening, sir, when I would not like to 'ave 'ad the clay-piping o' their white breeches to do over again, or the blacking o' their French-polished boots, let alone that I don't think a second-hand purchaser, Sir Gilbert, o' old 'unting 'ats would a given sixpence for the curly-rimmed tiles o' theirs, smashed up as they was."

Gilbert and Morton both burst into a fit of laughter at Joe's irony and venom.

"A terrible and most graphic description, Joe. But I should think *these* three would carry you steadily, Morton. How did you pick them up?"

"They are always to be picked up here,"

said Morton. "Men bring them out, and then grudge to take them back again, just as in old Dinah's case. That is an Irishman, that big-boned fellow; I call him Mike. A man rode him here one season, and I kept my eye upon him many a day when he led the hunt. He was only a four-year-old then, and I have had two capital winters with him since. The other pair of darlings I got only last spring—they are sisters; Minna and Brenda mother christened them. Beauties, are they not? Such a perfect brown, every inch of them, except the black forehead stars. Well, a fellow brought them out about Christmas-time last year, and swaggered enormously with them in a little mail-phaeton. He was all over the place; giving himself out as a great swell, and taking the shine out of everybody. Of course, in about a month he knocked up—proved a humbug, and totally impecunious. He could not pay his hotel bill, and so his smart little turnout was seized. Joe suspected him from the first, you must know, and used to wink in the most diabolical manner as the fellow sat in great magnificence of a band-day on the Place Royale, holding the reins of these pretty sisters with the tips of his lilac kids; and before it was well known about the town and clubs that our smart friend was insolvent, Joe had stepped in and bought up the pair for me. He advised me to try them in the saddle, and I did. They are perfect for a light-weight, and I have hunted them gently very often. Time enough to put you into harness again when you are steady old ladies, and on the wane, is it not, my pets? Quiet, Minna! So, Brenda! Quiet, mon bijou, quiet."

"They are perfect beauties, I must say," said Gilbert.

"I am afraid," continued Morton, "they are too light to carry you comfortably, Gilbert, but you shall have Mike the whole of this winter entirely for yourself; he will bear sixteen stone easily; and I have no doubt Joe will ferret us out another hunter nearly as good, and as well up to your weight, before the season comes on."

"My dear fellow," exclaimed Gilbert, "thanks a thousand times! But I am not going to take up my abode here, Morton; it is only the end of September. I fancy I shall be back in the old country by the time the hunting sets fairly in."

"Ah," replied Morton, smiling, "we will see about that. We don't mean to let you away so easily, now we have caught you, mon cousin; and, besides, do not decide any thing till you have tried us all. Some people have found Pau, you know, a very difficult place from which to go away; but we shall see. Come out now, Gilbert; the sun is setting already. How we have idled away the afternoon! and I have lots more to show you. Come along!"

The stable formed one side of a neat court-yard, of which coach-house and servants' apartments and a very showy harness-room filled up the other three. A wide gate hung across the entrance; and just as they reached this, the marquise's barouche turned slowly in, drawn by a splendid pair of dark bays, and driven by a fat coachman, of whom the only insignia of his nationality, beyond his gray-hued, good-tempered Béarnais face, were the colored cockade that adorned his hat and the cut of the epaulets on his shoulders. Except this, the carriage and its appointments were dark, plain, and handsome as could be. The marquise's coronet and monogram were visible on the panels; for her husband liked to see them emblazoned everywhere, though they were by no means remarkable or obtrusive.

"My mother has come in, I see," said Morton. "We will go round and join her presently; she will be taking exercise on the terrace in behalf of Fanfan and Lu. But come down this way a little first. See what a good view of the mountains opens from the back of the court-yard; and here is my paddock down below. Look, I have three promising young animals in there."

He leaned his arms on the top rail of the paddock-gate as he spoke, and Gilbert, full of interest—keener, indeed, for the paddock and its inmates than for the view—leaned beside him.

"Very handsome colts," he said. "That gray one has a splendid shoulder."

"Yes. I think they will turn out well; Joe is such a famous fellow with horses. I have never ceased to be grateful to you, Gilbert, for sending him out."

"The favor was as much to him as to you," said Gilbert. "He seems perfectly happy, and looks most ridiculous, but very much at home."

"Oh, he gets on very well, and I often laugh as I come suddenly to the yard sometimes and overhear him talking Béarnais or French; it is wonderful how he has picked them up. What do you think of that little bay, Gilbert? She is three years turned this autumn, and comes of a capital stock. Joe and I think of entering her for the flat race at the spring meeting this year; but what do you think?"

"Race!" exclaimed Gilbert. "Do you go in for that too down here?"

"Don't we! Wait till you see. We do, indeed, go in for it, and a good deal too much so for a good many of us, I can tell you; but that is not my line, you know, except in a very amateur way. The flat race is for gentlemen's hunters, and I should like my Brillante to proclaim herself the best at Pau, that is all. Oh, the races are great fun, and about as pretty a sight in some ways as you could wish to see."

"Only fancy!" said Gilbert. "How odd it seems! Racing and hunting were about the last things I thought of in coming down here. I had no idea you were such a sporting community."

"Oh, we are every thing! Wait till you have seen us all; we will astonish you, I dare say, in more ways than one. But what do you think of the little filly?"

"I think she is uncommonly pretty," said Gilbert. "Trim as could be, every way, and with a very graceful head. She 'looks like going,' too, Morton. That is an easy, swinging canter of hers. I fancy she could go at any pace."

"I believe she would. We will have her out one morning with the saddle on, and let Joe try her a bit. He is a capital little light-weight, and is very eager about the race. And now I think we have pretty well done the stables, and may as well go round to the other side of the house. But look a moment, Gilbert, is not that a glorious view? Look at the snow now with that red light upon it. I am very fond of this

old gate; I often smoke a cheroot here to look at the sunset and watch the colts scampering in the field. I declare I think they like it too, they always get so frisky on a fine evening, and you can hardly get them in. Look! is not that fine, where the *pics* run up into the crimson sky?"

"It is splendid," said Gilbert; and so it was. The mountains had the flush of the evening upon them now, and the shadows had deepened, and the lights were golden down in the woody valleys below.

"These mountains are glorious!" said Gilbert. "How I long to explore them! Can one not go and scramble about in the snows? I should like to get to the top of that fine fellow throwing his head up into the clouds away there."

"The Pic du Midi," said Morton. "No, it is too late in the year for that; you must wait for the spring; then we will make lots of ascensions, as they say here, and explore as many mountains and passes as you like. You must see the water-falls too—the Gavarnie and all the rest, and you must see the Eaux Chaudes, and the Eaux Bonnes and Argèles, and the lakes of Artouste and Orredon and Seculeijo, and many more besides. Oh, you will have plenty to do in the exploring line if you will only have patience, but we can not let you go off among the winter snows."

"One could look forever at this view!" exclaimed Gilbert, impulsively, fired with a sudden enthusiasm of enjoyment.

"Yes," said Morton, taking out his little, dainty, embroidered case, "provided always one has a cigar. Here, take one; there is something in this sort of evening that suggests to my mind tobacco. There—I thoroughly enjoy it now. That snowy background is splendid, and I am very fond of the comfortable foreground of habitations also. I am essentially a sociable being, Gilbert; I like the feeling that one has neighbors all close about."

"Yes; what quantities there are! Who lives in all these houses? I am sure we could count the smokes of a dozen on these different little hills."

"Yes, there are quite as many. They are all châteaux—neighbors—different people—families large and small. Look! that is my little Jeanne's house there, away over the shoulder of the farthest côteau. Do you see? where the green bit of sloping bank comes in above the oak-woods, and where the smoke is rising from a lot of chimneys. You must be introduced, Gilbert, to little Jeanne."

"Yes; I am looking forward with interest and curiosity to the introduction, I assure you."

"Well, you will have the opportunity to-morrow night; we are to have a dinner party. I wonder, by-the-bye, who are coming altogether; I must ask my mother when we go in. I know Jeanne is, but I forgot to inquire about any body else."

"A dinner party!" exclaimed Gilbert.

"Yes; we are always having them here. Just the neighbors, you know; the people round, and a few, perhaps, from Pau, and little Jeanne, and her father and mother, of course, and I dare say her eldest sister will come, and I should not wonder if we had the Baron Keffel. He lives in the little villa on that hill opposite, and my mother is wonderfully fond of him. Come, Gilbert, it is about dinner-time; shall we be strolling home?"

So the cousins had idled away that first afternoon, and they got back to the terrace below the drawing-room windows too late to find the marquise there. She had gone in, after the walk which she took daily, accompanied by Lu, Fanfan, and a large Pyrenean mastiff, up and down between the garden and the house, on the terrace flanked by stiff borders, and by tall plaster vases filled with geraniums and with many other rich-colored, sweet-scented flowers.

From here the view stretched eastward; it was the opposite side of the house from the stable-yard, and the Pic de Bigorre turned its western shoulder upon them now, with low hills and wooded valleys lying between. The thick foliage of the oak and beech trees made many a shady corner in the bank that sloped below the garden; a winding, serpent pathway lost itself in their shadow, and disappeared into the hollow beneath; and, following the direction of this hidden tract, the eye reached the pointed roof of a picturesque little house (very different in character from any other on the côteaux) that lay embowered in woody verdure about half a mile away.

"Ah!" exclaimed Morton, observing the direction of Gilbert's gaze, "that is the chalet, a pretty little place—a fancy of my father's; and an expensive toy it was, too, till Madame Zophée arrived among us, took it, and made it her home. You must see it one of these days, and Madame Zophée, too."

"Madame who?" said Gilbert, to whom every body's name, as it came fresh upon him, was a matter of difficulty and amazement.

"Madame Zophia Petrovna Variazinka—that is her little designation," said Morton, laughing. "But she is kind enough to be satisfied with Madame Zophée alone from our heretic lips, unworthy and unable as they are to compete with the euphonious and difficult nomenclature of Holy Russia. A very nice person she is, the little madame. You must see her some day soon. She has lived there for years, and we are all devoted to her—I as tenderly as Jeanne will allow me; my father and mother with an adoration that is characteristic of them and of her. Do you like our croquet-ground, Gilbert? You can see it capitally from here. Look! it is that flat on the top of the rising bank there, beyond the rose-walk. These large trees make a delicious shadow of an afternoon, and the view is beautiful. My mother spends many an hour upon these garden-chairs, and in the summer-time it is our evening drawing-room. We have tea or coffee there while my father plays his favorite game; you can not think how fond he is of croquet. Come, let us go in now; it is getting very late."

CHAPTER IV.

BY A LOG FIRE.

Château de St. Hilaire was not a very large house. It was picturesque and old-fashioned and castellated, presenting an appearance of much dignity as it towered in its lofty position on the crest of the sloping hill, but its rooms were

not numerous, neither were their proportions great. The hall was handsome, and so was the dining-room, while the violet boudoir of the marquise was as exquisite and as luxurious as her bower in the house in town. The smoking-room, too, was excellent; and the large drawing-room, where the marquise sat, presented a delicious combination of artistic elegance and domestic comfort as the three gentlemen joined her there that evening in the after-dinner hour.

It was a lofty room, with beautiful old fresco walls and ceiling, of which the rich moldings were picked out in delicate coloring by an Italian artist, in the days of an extravagant Marquis de St. Hilaire, several generations ago. Some courtly old family portraits of lovely daughters and brave sons of the house adorned the panels, the coloring of their dresses and uniforms, the bloom of their bright faces, and the hue of their softly powdered hair, harmonizing well with the walls and fresco frames, which had all, indeed, been toned to suit them. There was a quantity of antique furniture in the room, fauteuils and sofas of Louis XIII., artistic and uninviting; but these were pushed back, and ranged to advantage with the Sèvres paneled cabinets and the tables of old marquetry, round the outskirts of the room; while the window where madame sat in the day-time, and the wide fire-place where she was now cozily ensconced, were surrounded by many little couches and chairs, low, well stuffed, and luxurious, according to those modern fashions which have substituted crétonne and comfort for damask and gilt.

And there behind a transparent glass screen sat the marquise, near an enormous bright-burning log fire. The chimney was open and grateless, in the old French manner to which she clung, loving it ever as familiar and picturesque, and repudiating the rapid inroad which took place around them of modern grates and coal. The room was softly lighted by small lamps shaded with rose-color, the tone the marquise preferred always, the one she considered became her best. Her evening toilet was very pretty; her hair seemed in this light more snowy than ever, her face younger, and her eyes more sparkling and bright. She looked busy and happy as they entered, her fingers working nimbly among her heap of gay-colored wools, her glance wandering continually to Fanfan and Lulu, who both slumbered peaceably on the rug now, in the full glow and heat of the crackling fire. A warm atmosphere diffused itself around her as she sat in view of the cheerful blaze, sheltered by her glass screen; and the air of the room was pleasantly pervaded by the faint, sweet scent of violets and roses, which always seemed to float round the marquise, and to permeate every thing that belonged to her with a delicate perfume that ever reminded one of—herself.

She looked up brightly as the three entered. The post-bag had come in since dinner-time, and the marquis and Morton turned to the round table where it lay, and proceeded to examine and peruse its contents. Morton found letters and newspapers, and was soon absorbed in them; but the old gentleman found little to induce the delay of his evening sleep. He sunk into a huge chair just opposite to madame, and, after nodding to her gently two or three times, and smiling amiably in recognition of her affectionate glance, he soon dropped quietly away, with his fat hands folded across his person, into most profound repose.

The marquise beckoned Gilbert to the sofa beside her. He smiled with a sense of pleasure and of admiration as he sat down, and looked from her to her embroidery-frame, and to the pile of soft wools which he had to push away to make room for himself. He thought of his mother again, as she also worked continually on the fireside sofa at home, and he thought of her works, which were always coarse shawls and muffetees for the poor of Erle's Lynn, and of her colors, all hard and gray. Then he watched his aunt curiously. Her wools were all soft, many-hued, and brilliant, and her work was a shepherdess on a velvet background, tending most remarkable sheep, and listening to a singing swain. When she tired of this, or on saints' days, the marquise stitched at a broidered vestment for the parish priest—a wonderful piece of work of woven gold and silver and filoselle, that was alike a credit to her piety and her skill. To-night it was the frame and the shepherdess, and as Gilbert approached her, she bent over it, and said to him in a soft tone:

"Sit by me, dear boy; I like to have you. I like to see you and hear you talk. You remind me of old, old times, Gilbert; you do so resemble my own family and the brothers of my early days. There was your uncle, my youngest brother; you are exactly like him. Poor Frank! he was years my junior and Anna's. He was kind when I married, and promised to come and see me here. But he never did; he went to India, you know, with his regiment, and fell in battle. A brave fellow, a real Deningham, a dear boy! You are wonderfully like him. These are old days I am speaking of, Gilbert, before you were born. Soon after that event my eldest brother died, and the title went away to cousins. Poor Frank! it would all have been his if he had lived. Does your mother ever talk of these old times, dear child?"

"No, aunt," he answered, hesitatingly, "I do not think she does."

"What does she talk of, then—generally, I mean? Of you, I fancy, and your future and your marriage, and the brilliant figure you are to make as the county M.P.—eh, Gilbert?"

"No, that is not the sort of thing either," he replied. "My mother is a very quiet person, Aunt Violet; she never does talk much. She is very good, but, then, it is in a way of her own. She is very—what they call serious, you know."

"I know," said the marquise. "And I—I am a gabbling, silly old thing, and that is just what she would think me, and that is just what she thought me when I was a girl: then I was a silly young thing, and that was all the difference. Well, Gilbert, I may be. I do not set up for any thing better than my neighbors. But, God helping me, I have been as good a wife to my Léon there as she could have been to old Sir Stanton; and, Heaven knows, I have loved my children as well as Anna can have loved you, her only precious one; though I dare say we have had a different way of showing it, and of altogether acting out our lives."

"I dare say you have," said Gilbert, dreamily, for he was thinking, as she spoke, of that strange

young life of his in the past—of its solitude, and of its narrow scope for all affections and powers.

"I have thought and thought for my children unceasingly," the marquise continued, "and studied their dispositions and calculated the probabilities of their lives. Has Anna done the same for you, Gilbert?"

"In her own way, no doubt she has," he answered.

"Then, has she molded her own prejudices and opinions according to the character she saw you possessed? I wonder if she has, now? I wonder much, because there is something unusual about you, chéri, something of inexperience and want of free development, that is uncommon in a young Englishman of twenty-five; and I marvel to myself if Anna has considered *you* individually and characteristically in your upbringing, or only her own prejudices and herself. What does she think about your marriage, Gilbert?"

"I do not suppose," he answered, laughing a little at this astute analysis of his education and of himself—"I do not suppose she is thinking about it at all, aunt."

"She must be. I am certain it is never out of her mind."

"Well," he assented, doubtfully, "she may be contemplating with aversion a great many people whom, according to her, I am *not* to marry; but I do not imagine I have ever seen any body whom it is possible that she can think I am."

"Well, well, it is time you were *rangé*, Gilbert, and I can quite imagine to myself that that is just the very subject on which Anna would be difficult and unmanageable. Dieu! do not I remember when I married that good Léon? And I dare say she is not much improved in breadth of mind and in toleration since then."

"I must say she has her prejudices," said Gilbert.

"Well, listen: look here," continued his aunt, rapidly; "*I* had my prejudices—I had my bean ideal. I wanted Morton to be an Englishman in his marriage, and to bring me an English daughter here to the Pyrenees; and, above all, I wished Ada to go home, and be as I was in my young days, in one of those beautiful homes of the old country which I have never ceased to love. But I soon realized that Morton was Béarnais in every thing but his name and his tailor, and Ada a petite Française to the points of her toes; so I gave it up at once, Gilbert, I did! And Ada married Réné de la Garonne; and now Morton will be settled, in a few months, with little Jeanne de Veuil. You must see Jeanne, Gilbert; and Ada will come here before Christmas, I hope, to see all of us, and particularly you."

"Jeanne is coming to-morrow night," said Morton, suddenly looking up from where, sunk in the depth of a huge chair, he was perusing *Le Gaulois* by the light of a distant lamp; the name in the last sentence had caught his ear.

"Yes, she is coming. By-the-bye, we have never told Gilbert there was gayety in store for him to-morrow."

"I told him of the dinner party when we were out to-day," said Morton, "and he made a grimace over it, I can tell you, too."

"Ah, the dinner party!" cried the marquis, waking up with a jump and joining in the conversation. "To what proportion has it grown, Violette? I know your ways! How many people are you going to put into the dining-room to-morrow?"

"Oh, you be tranquil, Léon! No one at whom you will growl—a pleasant pot-pourri of Pau and the neighborhood, and of national varieties that I think will do Gilbert's education good to meet. Let me see—there are Comte and Comtesse de Beaulieu; there are little Jeanne and her sister, and Monsieur and Madame de Veuil; there are Baron Keffel and Bébé Beresford; and there are the big English cuirassier, Hanleigh, and Mrs. and Miss Carlisle; and—last, but not least—Madame Zophée has promised faithfully that if the evening is at all fine she will come; then we are three gentlemen and one lady in the house—and that makes us sixteen. Why, that is nothing, Léon! What will you have?"

"Ah, Madame Zophée! Then you will see her; that is famous, Gilbert!" said Morton. "The little 'Solava,' the nightingale, as Baron Keffel calls her in one of his six words of Russian. I am glad, indeed. It is not often she can be got out of her nest."

"No, but she has promised she will really come to-morrow, and I think she will keep her word."

"And Bébé—that is capital: and the big dragoon, the cuirassier, as you call him; I did not know you had asked them," said Morton.

"My dear, we must have had *pendants* for the Carlisles, and they have sat on my conscience for the last month like—"

"Crows on a hand-rail," suggested Morton, for which speech he was instantly snubbed by his father.

"Why do you laugh, Morton? Excellent persons! Fi donc!"

"Fi donc! indeed, you naughty boy!" cried his mother, laughing, as she held up a finger at him. "You shall have Miss Carlisle to take in to dinner for your impertinence, and Gilbert shall have Jeanne—"

"No, no!" cried Morton. "I could not stand that. Gilbert, indeed! I should be furious with jealousy the whole time, and should most probably throw a plate at his head. No, no! Jeanne for me, if you please: all the privileges of my position, or what is the fun of being engaged?"

"And whom, then, is your cousin to conduct?" said the marquis, with austerity, for he thought Morton's tongue was running away with him in a manner far too flippant for so serious a subject as one of his mother's dinner parties.

"Oh, he shall have his choice of all of them, barring Jeanne," said Morton. "He may have Miss Carlisle and her fifty thousand pounds, if he likes, or he may conduct my future mother-in-law."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" cried the marquise. "Gilbert shall take no one in but my own little pet, Zophée, to whom I have boasted of my handsome nephew this live-long afternoon; and as she is almost the only one of the party who can speak English fit to be understood, she is the best one for him to have, if only on that account."

"Well, well, so let it be, madre mia; and I do not think Gilbert will fare badly. I can not say I pity him. If I were not Alexander, I'd

certainly be Diogenes. I mean, if I were not to have my own little Jeanne, I'd have Madame Zophée before any one."

"Temporarily and permanently," said the marquise, emphatically. "But fancy comparing my mignon Zophée to Diogenes!"

"Or Jeannette to Alexander!" answered Morton, laughing, as he rose to light his mother's candle, while she, calling her dogs and gathering up her wool-work, prepared to leave the room.

CHAPTER V.

INCOGNITA.

NEXT day a drive with his uncle in the stanhope across the côteau toward Gans and Louvie occupied for Gilbert the hours after lunch. Then he gave the marquise his arm, as she requested, in her promenade up and down the terrace, while the sun set over the mountains behind St. Hilaire, casting a ruddy light across the hills that lay around them, and on the blue smoke curling from Madame Zophée's house.

Before dinner he disappeared to his own room, where Baptiste had established himself as his special valet, and where all the preparations for a most elaborate toilet were already made. Gilbert got rid of Baptiste for the time being, assuring him that he took not twenty minutes to dress, and that it wanted still an hour of dinner-time; and then, extinguishing half the candles with which that anxious attendant had illuminated the room, he threw himself into the huge chair by the fire-place, intending to rouse up his energies in a few minutes, and to write to his mother before beginning to dress. Meantime he would revolve what he should say to her, and thoughts chased each other through his mind.

He laughed to himself as he realized how difficult, and, indeed, how undesirable, it would be to bestow upon her in the least a *detailed* or veracious description of the inmates or surroundings of St. Hilaire. Nothing could make her understand them, and every thing would seem to her "outlandish," for so he knew she would express it. Every thing here was contrary to the spirit of *her* reflections in every way. He knew she would call the marquis "a frivolous old man," and Morton "empty-headed and unregenerate." Above all, how *could* he confess to her that he was much more than half in love with his aunt, that reprobate daughter of the Red Lady, or how describe her in the charming and delightful light in which she appeared to him?

He grew drowsy as these difficulties arose, and he kept on planning the sentences within his brain by which he would impart to her simply that the country was, after all, beautiful; that life at St. Hilaire pleased him; that his relations were kind; and that he should not wonder if he lingered a little, and whiled away a few desultory weeks here before he went farther on his travels or returned again home. So he mused very drowsily indeed, and the occupation must have been an agreeable, if a passive one; for the time slipped somehow imperceptibly away, and suddenly Baptiste broke in upon him with a hasty knock, an immediate entrance, and the intimation that it was ten minutes to the dinner-hour.

Gilbert managed to achieve his toilet in very little over that time, entirely to his own satisfaction, if not to Baptiste's; and he even found a moment, as he was running down-stairs, to put into his button-hole an exquisite little bouquet of jessamine and stephanotis he had found ready—a pretty attention of the marquise, as Baptiste informed him: she had laid it on his dressing-table herself.

He entered the drawing-room, to find it full of people, and all perfect strangers to him. It was a moment calculated to induce a state of hopeless shyness on his part, if it had been the least in his disposition to become shy. Happily, it was not so; in fact, quite the reverse. He had known few people in his life, but these he had known so well that a sort of unthinking confidence in himself and in every one about him—a ready frankness in intercourse with acquaintances new and old—had become habitual as second nature to him, an effect upon a character like his, not of great knowledge of the world, but of little. He smiled into every countenance he met as upon the face of a friend; and he held out his hand with a ready and instinctive cordiality that aroused always from the other side an immediate and similar response. Thus he was apt to say that he "liked every body," and he was ever ready to increase his acquaintance with an unsuspicious alacrity that made to him acquaintance, and even friendship, a thing of rapid growth.

So he came into the room now, and met his aunt's scolding and salutation with a laughing apology for his tardiness, which he delivered without any apparent consciousness that every eye in the room was turned curiously upon him; for, of course, every friend of the marquise *was* curious as to the looks and manner and entire *personnel* of this newly arrived nephew of hers.

"I am not so very late, am I?" he said. "I hope I am not the *very* last!"

"Not quite, but nearly, you lazy boy! I have been wanting you this last ten minutes. See! I must present you to all my dear friends, and there is not a moment now: only Madame Zophée to come, and then dinner. You unkind boy! whom shall I take you to first? Let me see."

This last was *sotto voce*, as she wheeled round the room, resting her hand on his, and glancing over the circle of her assembled guests. Then she began:

"Madame la Comtesse de Beaulieu, allow me the honor of presenting to you my nephew, Sir Gilbert Erle."

This was to a stiff, little old lady, well-dressed and well-preserved, who sat very bolt upright on the corner of her chair. It was a moment of high ceremony. She accepted the presentation of Gilbert with much graciousness, and he answered her smile and recognition with his lowest bow, while the marquise passed on.

"Madame de Veuil, in anticipation of the happy event that is to connect our families, allow me the honor of presenting my nephew to you."

Madame de Veuil had been a very handsome woman, in part Spanish; she was brilliant in expression, olive in coloring, very expansive in

form. She received Gilbert with great suavity, but he scarcely glanced at her as he performed his bow, so interested was he in looking behind her to where, safe as to propriety, in the near vicinity of the maternal wing, Jeanne and Morton were engaged in a blissful bickering over some very amiably disputed point.

Jeanne was as small as her mother was portly, mignon as she was majestic, a little bright-cheeked, merry-eyed, laughing thing, French in her pretty movements and piquante ways, Spanish in her olive tints and in the soft expression that alternated with fun and laughter in her big, almond-shaped eyes.

Morton had a drooping flower in his hand, which he was begging permission to put into her hair; and she was resisting him with excessive zeal and energetic assurances, pointing out to his stupid and most masculine observation that it did not in the least suit the color of her gown.

The introduction of Gilbert was a happy diversion, and Jeanne turned round to flash a shy glance upon him, and to hold out her hand at Morton's bidding; "for this," he said, was "the English way to say *welcome;*" and he made her repeat the word after him, adding to it the term "my cousin," which called up a bright blush to Jeanne's cheeks, and excited an indignant, "Be quiet, will you? you naughty one!" *sotto voce* in French from her lips.

Gilbert thought her charming, and inwardly applauded Morton's taste. He would have gladly lingered there with them, and have tried to draw more of Jeanne's pretty broken English words from her pouting lips, but the marquise drew him on.

There were Madame and Miss Carlisle to whom he must be presented, an English heiress and her mother, the first installment of the winter arrivals to come. Then there were all the gentlemen, and she went quite round the circle, exhibiting her nephew with loving pride.

The Comte de Beaulieu was a fine old aristocrat of a past *régime*, with thin figure and courtly manner and gray head, with an order at his button-hole, and a stock of amazing stiffness and height inclosing his neck. He bowed grandly to Sir Gilbert, and addressed him some appropriate phrase, but he spoke no word of any language save his own, so Gilbert, who was prudent still in his exercise of the French tongue, was glad to get away from him as fast as he could.

Monsieur de Veuil was of another type: a stoutish man, with large features and face, with a great quantity of black hair in a bushy condition upon his head, and with a mouth that (like his eyes) had a way of standing continually wide open, as if he were transfixed with a chronic astonishment. In fact, it was exceedingly fortunate that Jeanne did not at all take after him, for he was exactly like an astounded turkey-cock, and you were always expecting him to gobble.

The big, broad-shouldered English dragoon, who had come among them the winter before with an introduction to Morton from an old school-friend, was the only remaining guest, except two men who stood together upon the hearth-rug. The dragoon received Gilbert with little grace or felicity of manner, for he was utterly put out and knocked off his balance by the ceremony with which the marquise pronounced their two names. "Aw de doo?" was all he managed to say, with an awkward shuffle from one foot on to the other and a sort of nod, as—much to his satisfaction, and still holding Gilbert's hand imprisoned—she passed on.

The two on the hearth-rug turned and bowed as madame approached them. One of these was old and gray-haired, the other was young. The latter Madame de St. Hilaire passed with a smile and a playful tap of her fan.

"Go away, Bébé," she said, "I am not going to perform a ceremony of introduction for two boys like you; but here, Gilbert, this is Monsieur le Baron Keffel; and my *dear* friend," she continued, laying her hand gently on the older man's arm, "will you allow me the pleasure of making my nephew acquainted with you?"

"Ah!" responded the baron, in a quick, sharp tone, like the shutting-up of a snuff-box. "Ah! I, am, glad; I, am, de, light, ed, sir; how, do, you, do?"

He held out his hand to Gilbert, who, taking it, found his own closed up into a tight, eager clasp, while the old gentleman peered with sharp, hawk-like eyes and with amazing inquisitiveness into his countenance.

"How, do, you, do?"

This was just the way he spoke, in clearly defined and single syllables, jerked out in English as perfectly correct and grammatical as was Gilbert's French. Probably, in successful imitation of either speech as spoken by the natives they were about equal.

The baron was an extremely odd-looking old gentleman, and there was certainly something very interesting about him. His figure was slight and short, his gray hair was brushed back from a very broad and knotty forehead. His mouth was a restless one, and the thin lips worked curiously when he was silent, with a quizzical expression of intense irony playing over them continually. But this was not their only expression; they could part sometimes with a sweet and very brilliant smile. He had sharp little eyes, and the most inquisitive-looking nose imaginable. It was rather long, it tapered a little, and the point seemed to stick out before him with an unmistakable expression of continual inquiry and insatiable curiosity. It looked full of interrogation now as his gaze was raised to Gilbert's face, but he had no instant opportunity for investigations of any kind, as the young fellow whom the marquise had addressed just before was answering her sally with the most perfect composure, and was insinuating his person to the front. As soon as the presentation to the baron was over, he exclaimed, in a laughing voice,

"Well, madame, if you will not do it, I must just introduce myself."

"You tiresome Bébé, there is no suppressing you! Here, Gilbert, let me present you to Mr. Henry— How do you say it, Bébé? Tell me; I forget half your name."

"Henry Edward Fitzgerald Beresford, late of Her Majesty's Coldstream Guards, and very much at your service. That is the way to do it, madame. See, I have saved you the trouble."

The marquise answered, as she laughed at him,

"'Béhé!' 'Bébé!' that is the only name by which *we* know him, Gilbert, and the only one he deserves."

Bébé Beresford — so called from his earliest days at the Wellington Barracks, and called so still, now he went there no longer—shook hands with Gilbert, who looked up at him, amused at his *sang-froid* and impertinence, and recognized the origin of the name in the youngest and smoothest face ever seen on such tall shoulders, in the fair hair waving back from the boy's forehead, and in the pretended expression of astonished innocence that played over his laughing mouth and his clear blue eyes. He was fair to delicacy, and the hectic color and transparent temple bespoke indeed the reason of his having left the Coldstreams and the beloved barracks, and of his becoming an *habitué* of Pau. He was a merry fellow, fond of his foreign home now, both people and place, and he was a universal favorite and a privileged character among them all.

The marquise attacked him again presently, but he parried skillfully her rallying words. The baron joined in with a dash of pungent satire, and Gilbert for a few minutes listened, amused. Then his attention wandered; he began to glance round the room; and so it was that *he* observed first what the marquise in her eager altercation did not notice immediately, that the door opened again, that a lady was announced, who, unheard in the hubbub of voices, quietly entered the room. The marquis had his back toward her, bending over Madame de Veuil; the marquise was ejaculating with vehemence to the baron; so the lady stood still a moment, unreceived and unnoticed, looking inquiringly from side to side, while Gilbert's eyes had time to rest upon her, and to realize her, for just that moment before his aunt had turned.

She stood quite still, hesitating, in that shady light, which Madame la Marquise thought as becoming to herself as to her friends. Dark eyes, soft and deeply shadowed, wandered slowly and steadily across the room, an inquiring and just slightly astonished expression creeping into them as she paused, still unobserved. Her features were short and irregular, resisting all classification under any describable type. They were harmonious, however, and artistic in their irregularity, and the mouth was in itself beautiful. Indeed, some people were fond of saying that it was the only perfect feature she possessed; but in that they were wrong, for the low, broad forehead, with its line of straight and clear-drawn brows, was perfect also in refined and expressive intellectuality; and the white teeth, shining between the full, parted lips, were small and pearly, and exquisite in their perfection as well. The figure, rather tall than short, was full and undulating, essentially graceful when she stood now in perfect stillness as when she moved. Like many who sought a home in these Southern climes of Béarn, she looked fragile, but not painfully delicate. Just enough so to have furnished, perhaps, sufficient excuse for the style of her dress, which, though becoming, was unlike all those around her. The long skirt sweeping the ground was of a rich, dark shade of chestnut-brown, and round her shoulders and close up to her throat she had thrown, in soft festoons, a scarf of some delicate and pliable material and of a pale primrose hue. It was carefully chosen, and harmonized as perfectly with the shade of her dress and the tone of her own coloring as the gold of the autumn leaves with their sombre tints of brown. In her ears, round her throat, and twined through the thick coils of her shadowy hair, she wore ornaments of the precious primrose-tinted amber of Russia, that matched exactly with her scarf. Of her coloring and complexion it need only be said that they were of that rare tone with which amber can be worn successfully—the *blanc-mat* of Madame de Maintenon—pale, delicate, and clear, without being sickly, opaque rather than transparent, and with a faint flush of color that came and went quickly, speaking a fervency of life and an energy of intellect and feeling quivering below the shield of composure and strong self-control.

It was but for a moment that Gilbert could thus contemplate her, and then he touched his aunt's arm; she paused in her rapid flow of words, glanced at him, followed the direction of his eyes, perceived her visitor, and rustled instantly across the room with eagerness and speed.

"Zophée! my dear little one! A thousand pardons! I did not hear you come in."

"I have but just come," she answered, smiling in assurance to the marquise, who was sadly troubled at her inattention, and became profuse and affectionate in her apologies.

"I am so enchanted to see you," she went on; "it was so good of you to come, you darling. And you are cold too!" taking both the small white hands in her own and chafing them gently. "Come to the fire, dear; come to the fire."

Then she wound her arm round Madame Zophée and kissed her on each cheek; and while that composed person laughed softly at the effusiveness of the marquise's salutation, she was drawn irresistibly on to the hearth-rug by one arm still round her shoulder, her hands being held clasped in those of her kind old friend. She responded in gentle, caressing tones to the tenderness of the old marquise, without any unwonted excitement of demonstration certainly, but in a deferential, pretty way, as if submitting to it willingly, and full of grateful and affectionate response.

There was a little buzz then among her gentlemen friends, all eager to welcome her. The marquis had rushed forward with alacrity equal to his lady's as soon as he observed her, and waited only till the energy of the marquise had a little expended itself to make his salutations as well.

"Madame," he said, with profound obeisance, "I fail in words to express my pleasure in the reception of you, and my sense of the favor you accord me in thus at length honoring my humble table with your fair presence."

It was a very fine speech indeed when heard in all its native dignity, in its proper tongue; and when the marquis had concluded it with deliberate emphasis and entirely to his own satisfaction, he took the hand which Madame Zophée had managed to extricate from his wife, and he pressed it with respectful tenderness to his lips.

Morton came forward also, and when he reached the vicinity of Madame Zophée he drew back a step, clicked his heels together, and made her a low bow. With the etiquette of his nation in ceremony, he did not advance to take her hand until she held it out to him. It was the left one this time, in token of friendliness and familiarity.

But though he raised it and bent his head over it, he had no time to kiss the hand, as his father had done, before she drew it lightly away.

"I hope," she said, with a kind, bright glance of her eyes up to his, "that you appreciate the honor I pay *you*, Monsieur Morton, in choosing this evening for my first dissipation for many a year."

"I do indeed, madame," he answered, with another profound bow.

"I do not think I could love little Jeanne better than I have loved her always," she continued, looking round for the girl; "but I felt I must come this evening to congratulate you, vicomte, and to embrace her as your fiancée."

Morton turned and drew Jeanne toward her, all blushing and sparkling at once with new-born shyness and bliss.

"Chérie!" whispered Madame Zophée, as she kissed the girl, and then held her back a little to look tenderly into her face. "Do you know, Vicomte Morton, I did not think a week ago that these eyes and cheeks could possibly look brighter than they did then; but to-night I see, after all, they can. God give you sunny days, you happy little one!" Then she murmured, "God bless you!" in the Russian tongue this time, and in a soft, low voice.

"Go on, go on!" broke in Baron Keffel. "Please go on in that tongue of music of yours. It is long since I have heard you speak it, and its accents do drop, as I have told you, madame, like pearls over velvet in my ears."

"And you quote it in your simile," she said, smiling her recognition to him, while he bowed low, delighted at having succeeded in making her turn his way. "'They flow like pearls over velvet,' was what Bestuzhev said of Pushkin's verse."

"And I say it again of you when you speak in your Æolian voice your own poetic tongue," answered the baron. "Solava moja!" (my nightingale) he added, with one of his rare bright smiles. "So may I call you, eh? with my privilege as your adopted grandfather? and because —ha-ha! except you and me together, not one body can understand."

"I think," she answered, "when you were in Russia, baron, you only learned such words as were pretty and useful for *flattering* your friends."

"Ha-ha!" laughed the marquis, with a heavy shake of his portly sides, for the conversation continued in French at the moment, and so the repartee was within his reach.

"Well hit," said the marquise. "But please, chère Zophée, do not cure him of making *you* pretty speeches; for, if so, he will be a savage bear entirely, seeing he makes them to no one else."

"Ah, Madame la Marquise!" cried the baron, in horrified expostulation, and turning to enumerate on his fingers all the graceful things he had that very evening said already to her.

Gilbert had been watching the group with unconscious admiration all this time, *feeling* rather than thinking how picturesque they all looked in that pretty, old-fashioned, soft-shaded room; and he had been congratulating himself the while inwardly that he, and not the baron, was to take Madame Zophée to dinner.

Suddenly at this point he felt his gaze transfixed and fascinated by the expression of old Keffel's face, and he burst into a fit of merry laughter as he waited for what was to come next. It was irresistible; the baron looked so horrified at the accusation of the marquise, and yet so delighted to enter into battle again, eager as ever over this new cause for parry and attack, that Gilbert's sense of the ridiculous was touched irrepressibly, and he laughed outright; with such a merry peal too, striking so fresh and youthful on the ear, that it drew Madame Zophée's eyes instantly upon him. At that moment dinner was announced.

The baron's self-defense and expostulation were quashed for the time being, for the marquis was immediately in a state of bustle that absorbed the whole occasion and himself. He went off at last with the Comtesse de Beaulieu, the comte following with Madame de Veuil. Then the marquise exclaimed, "Mon Dieu! Gilbert!" and, seizing his arm, performed a rapid introduction, and hurried him off with Madame Zophée without delay.

Then it appeared that Monsieur de Veuil, who knew no English, must make the best of "Madame Karrleel," who spoke little French. The marquise waived this difficulty without any observation whatever, and dispatched them into the dining-room, making strange remarks to each other by the way. The big dragoon fell to Jeanne's elder sister, who, having happily a comfortable facility in the English language, did not give that heavy person "so bad a time" as he had feared. The Bébé conducted Miss Carlisle. Then Morton tucked his Jeanne cozily under his arm, and sent the baron and his mother out before them, that they two might be the last, and have a little bit of joke, as they lingered, quite to themselves.

Gravely, however, they (as all the others) had to file through the regiment of servants—who stood lining the hall—truly magnificent to-night in their full dress, looking exactly as if they had come down, with the gilt chairs and sofas, direct from Louis XIII. Conspicuous among them, alike from the dignity of his person and the plainness of his costume, was Baptiste, who walked solemnly into the dining-room with the procession, and placed himself behind Gilbert's chair—a post he assumed and a privilege ceded to him on the score of his eloquence in the language of Britain, and "Monsieur Sare Geelbert's" acknowledged difficulty in contending with French. There he stood, and when Gilbert smiled, as he turned round and saw him, Baptiste bowed with that air of conscious merit and importance which never forsook him under any circumstances, however trying.

Gilbert and Madame Zophée, delayed by that tardy introduction, had hastened after the Comte and Madame de Veuil into the dining-room, scarcely exchanging a word. There was no time for it. They barely reached the entrance as the marquis turned round in consternation at the processional pause.

As each couple entered the dining-room, the outburst of admiration was unanimous; the table was so pretty, and the compliments implied by its appearance were precisely of the graceful and poetic nature so much in sympathy with French taste. Decorated in honor of Jeanne, and of the happy occasion which brought them

all together, it was a mass of snowy flowers, relieved by quantities of green maiden-hair fern, through which the lamp-light glistened softly, veiled with dexterity by the feathery shade. It was beautiful, fresh, cool, and most artistic in arrangement, as became the perfect taste for which the marquise was renowned. It drew forth congratulations from every body; a graceful acknowledgment from Morton, who was highly pleased; and from Jeanne the grateful glance of her bright, happy eyes, as, all blushing and overcome with the blissful excitement of her position, she bowed with reverence to her future mother-in-law, and took the place of honor allotted to her between the father and son.

There was much laughter, and many apologies exchanged in high-toned French, as the party sat down, and Gilbert found himself in dangerous proximity to the lace flounces of Madame la Comtesse de Beaulieu. He had to bow and murmur respectful depreciation of himself and of his chair before he felt he could venture to appropriate it; and, alas! when the comtesse was pacified, he found Madame Zophée had Monsieur de Veuil on her other side, and (*à propos* to long trains and ladies' dress, and Pau rooms and crowded receptions at the Préfecture) that gentleman had already begun to "gobble" a great deal.

"*Guère possible maintenant*—scarce possible now, madame," he was saying; "in this lower world for men there is really no room! At the Préfecture, for instance, what with trains and laces and trimmings, one can not move—one can not speak—one can not breathe! It is impossible!"

Gilbert bent slightly over to listen. He had not the least intention of allowing Monsieur de Veuil to absorb his lady beyond the limits of the soup; but for the moment he amused him. The wide open mouth, the round staring eyes, the expression of serious importance on his countenance, the eager gesticulations of his large hands, were all amazing; and Gilbert was gazing at him when Madame Zophée (not having at all forgotten her own squire) turned and met the laughing expression of his eyes. It pleased and touched her, and she smiled in response. Gilbert had good eyes, of a bright and true blue; they were fringed with dark lashes which gave them color, shadow, and change, and the look in them, now he was amused, was so merry and boyish that it was impossible not to answer with a sympathetic smile.

"How I wish I understood French better!" he said at last to Madame Zophée, when they had exchanged one expressive glance in recognition of their mutual sense of amusement.

"Do you not understand it?" she said, speaking for the first time in his hearing in English. "I beg your pardon! How very rude I have been!"

"Not at all. I did gather a meaning, as it happened, just now, enough to be appalled at the difficulties of existence as Monsieur de Veuil paints them."

"Perhaps it is not so bad," she answered, "for people who do not take up so much room."

"Well, I hate crowded parties myself, I must say," continued Gilbert; "and at home I frequent them very little indeed."

"You will have to get accustomed to them if you stay at Pau," she answered. "I think there, particularly, people like to live in crowds."

"But the crowds have not arrived yet, have they?"

"Oh dear, no! only just beginning to come. You and Mrs. Carlisle and that tall gentleman, whom I do not know, are the first installment of the visitors for this year."

"But I do not count, you know," he exclaimed; "at least not for the winter, and the balls, and that kind of thing. I fancy I shall be back in England long before my aunt goes into town."

"Shall you? ah, indeed! I am sorry! I know the marquise hoped to keep you for a much longer time, and that will be quite a little visit."

"Well, I do not know," answered Gilbert; "one can never tell—can one? But, you see, I am by way of making a tour, and I am only supposed to be beginning it at Pau here. There are all sorts of places, besides, that I have got to visit."

"Really! you are starting on your travels, are you? And how far do you mean them to extend?"

"Well, do you know I—forget exactly," he answered; "but I have made a list of the places I had a fancy to see, and marked them all out on a map. I shall look over it if you like and tell you."

"That sounds rather an original way of planning a tour."

"Do you think so? Well, I dare say it is; but I remember how it happened, and somehow to me it seems quite natural."

"And it happened—how?" Madame Zophée inquired in her turn, looking with a little amusement and some awakening curiosity into his bright face.

"Well," he continued, "it was one evening last winter in the old library at home. I was reading something—in the *Times*, I think, it was—that put it into my head that I ought to travel, and I went and ferreted out the big atlas, and wrote a list of places, and penciled out the way, and made up my mind about it there and then."

"How very energetic!" said Madame Zophée, laughing softly at the rapidity of his descriptive style.

"Yes, it is the sort of way I *always* like to do a thing: if you are determined upon it, just do it right off systematically at once. But then, you see, I could not get started directly," he added, assuming a more serious air.

"No? Were there difficulties in the way?"

"Not difficulties exactly, but there were quantities of things I had to attend to at home before leaving, and I had to make arrangements for all to go on smoothly till I get back. But I feel I must not stay here long, because I have a great many other places to go to, and I ought to be getting home again some day very soon."

"Why, you have only just left home."

"Yes; but, do you know, I have not quite got reconciled to the idea that I *have* left it, and I do not feel sure that I ever shall. I do not like being so far from the old place, somehow. It is the sort of feeling I did not in the least expect to have, but I can not get rid of it."

"But you will enjoy being here with your cousin, surely?"

"Oh yes, immensely, and I am beginning to think this a very pleasant place; but still I do not know—I long for the old home too. So there, Madame Zophée, I have given you the whole history of my projected travels, and confess to you that I do not feel like extending them very far."

And a funny little history she thought it.

"You seem very fond of your home, Sir Gilbert?" she said, presently.

He paused an instant before he answered, a sort of unconscious feeling coming over him, as he looked quickly round at her, that he would give a great deal to make her repeat the sentence again, or at least his own name at the end of it. It struck him suddenly as a most euphonious one. Madame Zophée's English was faultless in grammar and expression, and in accent perfectly pure, but she spoke the language with an intonation that was curiously musical, and quite peculiar to herself—so Gilbert thought; really, it was only peculiar to those finest of all modern linguists, the women of her race. Her voice was round and mellow, and in pronouncing her English words she lingered on the vowels, and softened the harder consonants, and seemed to blend the syllables together with a sort of harmonious rhythm that recalled every moment Baron Keffel's simile of the velvet and the pearls; and when she came rather hesitatingly to pronounce Sir Gilbert's name, she softened the *g* just a little, leaned slightly upon the *r*, and dropped the *t* at the end altogether, till it became in his ear a most singularly agreeable sound.

He had thought to himself, when he had first contemplated addressing her, that he should never have patience to converse with a woman who talked broken English; but as she spoke, he conceived suddenly a new opinion, namely, that it was the height of folly for any of the favored race of Anglia to learn any foreign language whatever, seeing that their own was certainly the most musical ever heard out of Eden on this earth. It had never struck him before, but now he was sure of it. After pausing a moment, she thought she had spoken indistinctly, and she repeated her question again.

"You are fond of your home?"

"Oh, very," he said. "I am fond of a country life, and of all it comprises, and my home is in the country, far away from any town."

"And you live there entirely?"

"Yes, with a couple of months' variety to London or Scotland now and then."

"In the country of England, all through the year, and quite alone?"

"No, no; not alone," he answered, "not quite; that is to say, I have my mother."

"Ah, she does live with you. Zo—"

"And you live in the country here, Madame Zophée?" he said, turning the tables of inquiry to her side. "In that taste we are unanimous."

"Yes, I live in the country too; but—I have no mother to live with me," she answered, with a little fall of sadness in her voice.

"You live alone—quite alone? you don't say so! Fancy! Well, I do not think I should like that. I know I should miss my dear old mother terribly if she were away. But still I would live in the country all the same, I think. You see, one has always the dogs and horses, hasn't one?"

"One has," she answered, smiling a little; "and they are wonderful companions, certainly. And here, you know, no one could feel dull, even in the most utter solitude, while there is the country itself. The mountains and the flowers are society sufficient, surely—nobody *ought* to complain."

She seemed to murmur the words absently as she spoke, as though more to assure herself than him.

"Well, no; it is glorious, but you should see our part of the world as well, Madame Zophée. It does not yield the palm to any, I think, taking it all round, as a place to live in. It is pretty, and it is thorough country, and then it is home, you know; and, then, there is the sport. I am sure there is nowhere else one could have such runs as we have sometimes of an open winter, and there is always something to do every month of the year. Have you never been to England, madame?"

"Never."

"But some day you will come?"

"I should like it immensely," she answered. "Some day I hope I may."

"I am sure you will. How I should like to show you Erle's Lynn!"

"You are very kind, and I should very much like to see it. It is a phase in life of which I have read much and fancied more, but which I have yet to witness—the English country home."

"I am sure you would like it. And do you think some day you will come, really?"

"I hope so, indeed. I do travel now and then—in the summer-time, you know, when it gets too hot on our côteaux here—and one of these days I shall certainly make my summer journey to England."

"That is famous; and then you will come down to see us at Erle's Lynn. There is so much I should like to show you there, as you are fond of the country and flowers and every thing of that kind. How pleasant it would be!"

"It would indeed be very pleasant," she replied; "and when, some day, I do come to England, I will certainly claim the full privileges of your invitation."

"There! that is a promise," he continued, smiling with sunny pleasure as he turned to her, just in expression of the half-conscious feeling he had of his enjoyment of her society, and of self-congratulation as he felt how well and how easily they got on.

Madame Zophée was looking with a soft, bright smile at him, much amused at his eagerness and at his instant impulse of hospitality.

"Ah!" she said, presently, "England is far away. Who knows? I wonder, after all, if I shall ever go there."

"Of course you will," he answered; "and I am sure you will enjoy it."

"I shall look forward to it, at all events," she said.

"And are you really fond of horses and dogs?" continued Gilbert, presently. "I am so glad you are, for it is so nice, I think, when one first knows people, to find we like many of the same things."

"I wonder if we do?" she replied, laughing softly. "I am fond of many, many things, Sir Gilbert. I should think you were a lover much

more of people than of things—of living, I mean, rather than inanimate surroundings."

"I am fond of most people I know in a sort of way, certainly," said Gilbert; "but as to loving, I really do not think there is any thing for which one can care more than for a dog you have had since you were a little fellow, or a horse that has carried you well for years and years. I am sure I could never like a man who did not feel his dog was a real friend to him, and who could not love his horse."

"There we quite agree," she said. "I most sincerely do both. My biggest dog is *one* of my dearest friends, and my horses are real pets."

"Are they, indeed? I am so glad! Are they English—did you have them out?"

"No, we are all Russian—dogs, horses, and every one of us, except a Pyrenean hound, my trusty watchman, and an old Belgian who is ending his days in repose with me."

"A Belgian dog?"

"Yes; I bought him out of a cart once, in which he had worn away his strength, in the streets of Bruges."

"How delightful! and what a number of them you seem to have! How I should like to see them all!"

"Well, perhaps the marquise will allow one or two of them to come and pay you a visit; but I think I must send my Ivan also, or my Russian Lustoff, my special friend and companion, would certainly devour Fanfan or Lu."

"That *would* be a catastrophe!"

"It would, indeed! Fancy the dear marquise's feelings—it would be terrible!"

"Well, at all events that is one point on which we are completely sympathetic, Madame Zophée, and that is very pleasant. I wonder if we should find many more if we went on?"

"Probably a great many," she answered; "but would you mind the effort of making a few remarks in French to your other neighbor? because I hear a dreadful pause succeeding to frantic efforts at a mutual understanding between Mrs. Carlisle and Monsieur de Veuil. They have been torturing my right ear all dinner-time. I think I must put in a word or two by way of assistance."

Gilbert looked round to see what she meant, and caught sight of Monsieur de Veuil's profile, on which sat a fixed expression of despair. Beyond was Mrs. Carlisle, also at the end of her energies, and, after resting an instant upon her, Gilbert's eyes wandered round the table to the different couples, and then suddenly he threw his head back and laughed again with that same ring of boyish glee in his voice which had struck Madame Zophée so much in the drawing-room.

"Why do you laugh?" she said, a little reproachfully, for she thought it hard on her right-hand neighbor and on Mrs. Carlisle, and she felt compunction for having drawn his attention to them; and then she looked up at him, for he was laughing still, and could not answer her, and she thought again that she had never seen any thing so bright, so cloudless, and so youthful as the expression of his face.

His youthful look specially surprised her, for his aunt had said that he was twenty-five. She herself was scarcely quite that, and yet, surely, she thought, she looked much the elder of the two—and so she did.

Not that the bloom of her youth or her beauty had in any way left her, but there rested in her eyes and on her brow that expression of having lived, and of much of the knowledge of what *living* means. There was a depth in her tranquillity that a quick observer, sensitive to the impression of inner character, felt immediately was profound and impenetrable.

A brightness floated above, the soft, clear radiance of a sunbeam shining on a calm, running stream, but the evidence was there, in the smile, in the glance, often even in her tones and words, of under-currents in the life-stream where the waters ceased to be transparent, and where their reflections were unseen.

On his countenance, on the other hand, as now in his laughing eyes, there was no knowledge of a past, and nothing of experience. The stream was all glistening and clear, reflecting quite unclouded every fleeting sun-ray or shadow as it went or came. But the stream was fervent and rapid, so there was no foretelling for him into what stormy cataracts or surging whirlpools it yet might fall.

"I am laughing," he said, at length, "at every body. I am very sorry; it is very wrong. But do look at my aunt and that old baron! They have never once ceased fighting since dinner began. And look at my uncle! The comtesse has been too much for him, and he is going quietly to sleep. And there is that big fellow, Hanleigh, has been staring at his plate for the last half-hour, and has not been able to think of a single word to say to poor Miss de Veuil. And do look at that Bébé, as they call him! He has neglected Miss Carlisle shamefully, and has been joining in as usual with the baron. He and Morton and little Jeanne are the only ones who look thoroughly happy, unless it is my aunt and—Oh, what a bore! she is bowing to the table in general, and you are all going away. I am so sorry. I thought, in France, you went, ladies and gentlemen, all together into the drawing-room. May I not come?"

No! he must not. His aunt scolded him as she passed him for the proposition, and, tapping him on the shoulder, told him to stay where he was.

"An English custom my mother clings to," said Morton, as the door closed on the last of the lady-procession, and he came back to the table. "She says it freshens us all up to be left behind for a while, and that we are twice as agreeable in consequence when the blissful moment of reunion arrives. I used to agree with her, but somehow I do not do so to-night."

"Nor do I," said Gilbert, decidedly.

"Do you not? That is all right," Morton answered. "Then, as soon as the venerated elders have settled to their claret, you and I may perhaps fight off."

CHAPTER VI.

CHRONIQUE SCANDALEUSE.

"The elders," as Morton called them, took kindly, apparently, to this fashion of the marquise. The old Comte de Beaulieu and Monsieur de Veuil gravitated toward the lower end of the table where the marquis sat, and where

the claret bottles, also in English fashion, were ranged in front of him; and the three were soon deep in whatever to the mind of the Béarnais gentleman and landlord represents poor-rates, taxes, magisterial duties, or any such rural interests and concerns.

Morton, with a graceful air of courteous hospitality, proceeded to beg the three younger men to take their seats again, and to help themselves, as they desired, to wine. But Captain Hanleigh, the big dragoon, had risen with glass well replenished, and, walking to the fire-place, he leaned upon the high carved mantel-shelf and began kicking the burning logs about in a rather unceremonious effort to produce a blaze.

"On the whole, a bear!" soliloquized Gilbert, staring at his compatriot; but Morton, after one glance of astonishment at this heaviest of all heavy dragoons, took the hint immediately, and applied himself with energy to the replenishment of the fire. Gilbert paused on the hearth-rug beside him. Bébé Beresford wheeled round in his chair, sat riding backward upon it, and with his arms resting on the top bar and his wine-glass in his hand, proceeded to gaze up at his military countryman, and to survey him with an air of supercilious and speculative curiosity, just as if he had never seen him before, and had *not* spent the whole of last winter, more or less, in his society.

Meanwhile Baron Keffel felt *his* hour had come. He had had his eye on Gilbert as the newest phenomenon of interest in his horizon during a great part of dinner, and had formed many theories upon him in his own philosophic and very observant mind; and information, as much and as direct as possible, was now necessary to satisfy his inquiring faculties to the full extent.

Old Keffel had been a great traveler in his youth; he had been nearly everywhere and among all sorts of races and kinds of men. He had been a little in Russia, a good deal in the East, very often in Italy, and once or twice in England, and by dint of inquiry, minute and undaunted, everywhere and on every conceivable subject, he had collected an enormous mass of versatile information. All this, in the seclusion of his study at his favorite retreat on the Pyrenees, he perseveringly reduced from copious notes and diaries into theories, which again came into recognized existence and were announced to the world in eccentric articles in reviews and monthly magazines, both in Germany and France. By such media he conveyed to the reading mind of both nations many wonderful theories and details that would indeed have much astonished the particular people under notice and description for the time being.

He had opinions on government sprung from observations stretching from London to Afghanistan; but specially upon domestic life he had many original views, gathered from personal acquaintance with nearly every form of social conventionalism, from the Calmuck or Kirghez Cossacks of Tartary to the time-honored institutions of the British hearth. "Seizing opportunities" was his strong point, and now in Gilbert he saw one not on any account to be lost. Gilbert was indeed, in his eyes, a representative of a great class—the "English Kontree-gentleman," "Lord of the Soil," "Knight Nobleman of the British Empire;" so the baron would probably, in his next article in the "Review of National and Foreign Manners," describe him. In the mean time, a little investigation would be opportune. So he came round the table, joined the group on the hearth-rug, and standing very close to Gilbert, turning up toward him his inquisitive little nose, and his sharp pair of hawk's eyes, he opened the conversation with the leading inquiry,

"Do, you, feesh, or, do, you, shoot?"

"Both, when I have the chance," said Gilbert, smiling in answer to the bright little eyes.

"Ah, zo, then, I, would, meet, you, *double*."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Yes, I, have, traveled, a, great, deal, sare. I have been in many contrees of the world, and I have never been to the top of a highest hill or to the bottom of a valley, to the bed of any river, anywhere, not in any land, but I find there an Englishman who *feesh* or shoot."

"Ha!" exclaimed Captain Hanleigh, with a loud, heavy laugh, as he sipped the marquis's claret with a critical air. "He won't have much chance of doing either here, at all events."

"Yes, he may," cried the baron, sharply, turning on the dragoon, whom he had already on a former occasion profounded, angry at the interruption which threatened to disturb his investigation now. "He may feesh the Gave, if he will—like, what is he—the captain—bah! I forget the name—a very high, thin man who goes to shoot in the côteaux, and catch the many little feesh."

"Very *leetle*, and not many," responded Captain Hanleigh, mimicking rather pointedly the baron's accentuation. "I should think Erle's ideas of fishing would fit in with Captain What-is-his-name about as well as his ideas of hunting would with a run with the Pau hounds."

"Come, come," cried Morton, "we can not let you run down the sports of Pau to my cousin, as I mean him to stay here and enjoy them."

"By Jove, I do not want to run them down!" said Hanleigh; "why should I? I do not care two straws about them, whether they are good or bad."

"But I do," said Morton, rather hotly. "I do not think it is fair of men to come here two winters running like you have done, Hanleigh, and to have lots of fun out of the place, fun enough at least to bring you back again, and yet go on abusing it the whole time."

"Not on the square," said Bébé, decidedly.

"By Jove," repeated Hanleigh, "I do not say it is a bad sort of place. A fellow can have a very good time here in some ways, I grant ye, but to talk of sport is ridiculous."

"Please, captain," said the baron, snappishly, "did you ever shoot a boar of the Pyrenees?"

"No, never; can't say I did—never had the chance," said Hanleigh.

"Well, I have," said Morton; "and I do not think any man should go running down the sport of a place till he has tried it. Pheasant battues and deer drives are not the sport of the Pyrenees, if you like, Hanleigh, and I'll grant that our fox-hunting is but an offshoot from your part of the world, consequent on the place becoming an English winter station; but go up into the mountains and spend a month or two above us here among the Basques, and then, when you have shot a couple of isards and a boar or two, you

may come back and boast that you are *blasé* of the sports of the Pyrenees, if you choose; but not till then."

"I should like tremendously to do that," put in Gilbert, eagerly.

"Well, wait a bit," said Morton, "and by-and-by, when the time comes, we shall."

"Awh, of course—but—fact is, one does not come to Pau at this time of year for that kind of thing," began Hanleigh.

"No!" struck in Bébé. "You come to hire the Pyrenees for the season, certainly, but not for the sport they can afford."

"Hire the Pyrenees?" said the baron, inquisitively, with a little puzzled sort of laugh.

"Yes, of course. Half the people who come down here," continued Bébé, "feel exactly as if they had rented them with their apartments and their sunshine, for which they pay so many more francs a month. Have you never noticed one or two of the genus Briton promenading the Place of a fine day, and exhibiting the view to the last comer as if it were a meritorious achievement of their own, and the winter sunshine a performance that did them especial credit? I have often."

"He-e-h!" sniggled the baron. "How eccentric!"

"True, though; and so men like our friend here — begging your pardon, Hanleigh — come and hire us all round (for I consider myself as of Pau, you know), us and our balls, and our hunt, and our band-day, and our promenade, and our cricket-field, and every thing, and patronize us, and take us down about it all the whole time. I call it hard lines, I do. It works me up tremendously."

Bébé was a person privileged to speak his mind.

"I did not say any thing abont the society," said Hanleigh. "I think in some ways it's an awfully nice place."

"And containing a few rather nice people," said Bébé, sarcastically, "who have been, on the whole, rather civil to you—and me."

"Uncommonly civil — overpowering civil, sometimes," responded Hanleigh. "I think you have to be careful, I do. I do not think a man can know every body in a place like this, can he? It is so uncommonly awkward sometime afterward, you know, at other places — at home, and that sort of thing."

"Oh no!" said Bébé, with pretended solemnity; "it does not trouble one a bit. You can always do like—who was it?—Old Brummel, I think—a capital plan. A man came up to him in St. James's Street once, and said, 'How do you do?' and 'Ah!' was the old beau's reply, in meditative accents, 'don't know you, sir; you have the advantage of me: I never saw you before.' 'Oh yes!' says his friend. 'Don't you remember? I met you at Boulogne; you used to dine with me there.' 'Indeed, I dare say,' responds the cool old fellow. 'It is very possible; and I can only add that I shall have great pleasure in knowing you when I meet you—at Boulogne again.'"

"Ha-ha!" laughed the baron, intensely delighted at the acquirement of a fresh anecdote, which he always found, in his annotations, gave the evening's conversation a certain finish and point.

"What a snob!" said Gilbert.

"Do you think so?" said Bébé, with innocent astonishment.

"Well, I don't know," continued Hanleigh, in his drawling tones again. "It is all very well, but, nevertheless, one can *not* know every body in a place like this."

"*I* know nearly every body," said Bébé, "and I am tremendously fond of them all. They have been wonderfully kind to me; and I came out here as seedy a little chap as possible, Erle, and I am as right as a trivet now."

"I have got to take my cousin round and introduce him, one of these days," said Morton. "There are numbers of people I should like him to know. Has any body come back yet, Bébé?"

"Well, yes; nearly all the stationaries have turned up again. The set that have been to Biarritz have come back, and several others; but very few new people have arrived yet."

"Well, Erle will have the advantage of a first selection," said Hanleigh, "for his specialties in the circle of his winter friends."

"All very well, Morton; but you know I can not allow myself to while away the whole winter here," interrupted Gilbert; but Morton had no time to answer, for Bébé began to hold forth again.

(Alas for the baron! the opportunity was lost to the cause of investigation forever; the conversation continued persistently general, as they still stood grouped upon the hearth-rug.)

"Well, you see," said Bébé, "if Erle *is* going to winter here (as, of course, he is), he *ought* to be introduced, and put *au fait* with the whole thing at once, and then he is sure to enjoy himself. There are quantities and quantities of charming people he must know, and perhaps there *are* just one one or two he might as well avoid."

"A few of the widows, for instance," said Hanleigh. "They are sometimes some of them uncommonly kind."

"Well," began Bébé, sagely, "but—"

"Yes," the baron interrupted him, with a sardonic grimace. "Ha—ah! There is certainly a *masse* of veedows at Pau. And me! I am a veedow man—and ah! yes! it is sometimes very deefficult, very deefficult indeed!"

This was uttered with an air of plaintive depreciation that sent Gilbert and Morton off into a fit of merry laughter again; but Bébé was very solemn over it indeed.

"Yes," he sighed. "'Don't marry a vidder, Sam!' But then, alas! it is just the thing Sam is so *very* apt to do."

"Ha-ha! he has the opportunity, at all events, here," laughed Captain Hanleigh; "and if he is lucky enough to escape 'a vidder,' long before the season is done, ten to one he falls into the snares of a mature siren."

"Wa-a-h!" growled Bébé. "Go on. I'll sit perfectly still till you are done."

"Fi donc, Bébé," cried Morton. "And you, the acknowledged slave of Madame Philistaire! Oh, Bébé!"

"Confessed, confessed!" sighed Bébé. "And 'tis the knowledge of my chains that makes me groan."

"I do not mind—them," drawled Hanleigh; "I won't abuse them. You know," he continued, confidentially, "they are so *awfully* safe."

"Peste! I do not know what you mean, you, young, men," snapped the baron, suddenly, failing to catch exactly these new views of the sex acknowledged fair and tyrannical, and consequently much disgusted that he should not be able to make sufficiently lucid notes of the conversation to build any novel theory upon it when he went home. It dealt, in fact, with matters in an age of the world's history just a little ahead of him, and quite beyond his old-fashioned and very chivalrous ideas.

"Does that little woman we have here to-night, St. Hilaire," continued Hanleigh, presently, "belong to the phalanx of the fair and frisky?"

"Who?" said Morton.

"Why, the Pole—Russian—or what is she? that little woman with the killing eyes and the yellow beads in her head?"

"Are you talking of Madame Variazinka?" exclaimed Morton at last; while Gilbert, flushing up suddenly, he scarcely knew why, turned upon Hanleigh with a frown.

"What do you mean?" he said, in an angry tone.

"Is that her name? I suppose that *is* who I mean," continued Hanleigh, coolly.

"She!" exclaimed Morton. "No, I should not think so, indeed! Why, she has not been at a single ball ever since I have known her, and nobody could be less—that kind of thing than she is."

"Oh, oh! of the quiet sort, is she?" said Hanleigh, sneeringly. "Well, I don't know but *that* is not about the most dangerous kind. She is awfully pretty in an odd kind of way, and I call her double-barrels uncommonly dangerous—should not like to run the fire of them, I know; I should be making an 'ath' of myself."

"Not a very difficult achievement either," growled Gilbert *sotto voce* to Bébé, as he bent over the table to pour himself out a glass of wine.

"Who is she?" continued Hanleigh again.

Morton colored as he paused before answering this question, and looked into the blazing wood fire for a moment as if considering what he should reply. But suddenly, before he had time to speak, the baron turned upon the big soldier, and exclaimed, in an authoritative tone, "Sir, I, did, not, quite, understand, you, in, your, remarks, at, first, but, now, I, do, penetrate, them, and, I, do, request, that, you, make, not, *this*, lady's name, a subject, of your discussion. She is here, a stranger, and alone. The ladies of your own nation and society, I leave to you, but for Madame Variazinka, I demand, an immunity, from your remarks."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Hanleigh, quite taken aback by the baron's outburst, "I meant no offense, I am sure. Mayn't a fellow talk?"

"If, he, will, mind, what, he, says," said the baron, with much knightly valor and determination, for which he was loudly applauded by the younger men.

"But, hang it!" continued Hanleigh, not quite certain that it did not behoove him to get very angry, and to take a high hand, "*I* do not want to interfere with your Madame What's-her-name or with any other person in whom you take an interest, baron. *I* am not given to walking into other people's gardens, and I am sure we need not come over to the côteaux in search of charmers fair and frisky, youthful or mature: they flourish in abundance, thank you, at Pau."

"Now don't go on!" cried Morton. "I will *not* have my cousin prejudiced against the whole of Pau society—now you have done your best to doom the hunt in his eyes. You and Bébé, Hanleigh, have managed to give him any thing but a pleasant impression between you, so do leave him to make further acquaintance with it all for himself."

"Ah!" began Bébé. "No, Erle, do not be afraid: give yourself a little time—a few sunny days—and you will soon fall in love with Pau and with all of us. As for society, and charming society, I assure you, just wait a little bit, and you will see there are 'brown eyes and gray eyes,' 'black eyes and blue,' that before long will sparkle on the Place Royale and in the beloved ball-room of the Gassion, like unto the stars in the canopy of the heavens of a winter night on the Pyrenees."

"Very well said," remarked the baron, approvingly, feeling it was the sort of thing he liked to say himself, and that, in fact, it would have come very much better, if he had thought of it, from *him!* Indeed, he, as well as Bébé, was given to much extravagance of speech. They would probably have gone on now at any length, snatching the thread of conversation jealously from one another; but up rose the elderly trio from the table at that moment, and they all simultaneously realized the immediate duty of joining the ladies in the other room. As they hurried through the hall, finishing the fragments of their conversation together, Bébé came sauntering with Gilbert behind, and as he went he trolled out in his favorite style of philosophic and musical soliloquy the "results logical" of the "discussion general" as it presented itself to him.

"Brown eyes or blue eyes, hazel or gray,
What are the eyes that I drink to to-day?

"No matter their color, I drink to the eyes
That weep when I weep; when I laugh, laugh replies!"

CHAPTER VII.

COURT-CARDS.

In the drawing-room they found Madame la Marquise absorbed in a game of "Patience." Sitting in the middle of the floor at a small card-table, she looked certainly very like an old French picture to-night; her hair *frisé* to its highest pitch, her dress beautiful, her jewels sparkling as her pretty fingers played rapidly across the outspread cards.

Madame de Veuil and the Comtesse de Beaulieu stood one on each side of her, both deeply interested with her in her occupation: they were competing with a new "Patience" just imported to Pau. This was an event of the most exciting nature, and one worthy of much attention and study. With hand uplifted, the old comtesse stood, her eyes flitting eagerly across the shoulder of the marquise from card to card, while Madame de Veuil pressed the points of her fingers to her lips in profound meditation, as the queens, knaves, and aces mingled themselves in obstinate and despairing confusion. Exclama-

tions of "Mon Dieu!" "Tiens!" "Doucement, doucement!" "Hah, c'est épouvantable!" "Mais!" "Ciel!" and many other such (equally expressive and assistive) broke unceasingly from the lips of all the three ladies as their efforts still failed in success. Mrs. Carlisle sat also in this group, but her interest in their amusement was evidently cool; a faint smile of cynical disapproval sat upon her countenance as these cries of childish excitement and enthusiasm burst from the two foreign ladies, and from that renegade compatriot of hers who had so fallen from the frigid dignity due to her nation and her name.

Miss Carlisle was improving her French accent by conversation with Mademoiselle de Veuil, who was a bright, pleasant girl, a taller and handsomer edition of her younger sister; and on a sofa, a little drawn back from the card-table and its surroundings, sat Madame Zophée, listening, with soft answers and sympathetic eyes, to many tender little confidences from Jeanne.

As the gentlemen entered, the marquise looked up from her absorbing game.

"You wicked persons," she said, in French, "what a time you have been! I regret infinitely that we bored you *so* much at dinner that you required a long period of refreshment and repose."

"Ah, madame," cried Bébé, coming to the front, as usual, at once, "we have had such exciting topics of conversation, we could not tear ourselves away. We have been discussing—'Pau society,'" he added, with affected dignity, "and we have enlightened Sir Gilbert Erle as to all the pitfalls spread for his destruction."

"Discussing Pau society!" exclaimed the marquise, "which means that you, you wicked, precocious Bébé, have been talking scandal, and saying a great many ill-natured things—you and the baron between you. Ah, I know you both!"

"Ah, madame, de grâce!" cried the baron, pausing as he was making his way very quietly toward Madame Zophée across the room. Pausing unwillingly indeed, but the glove thus so openly cast down in challenge to him must needs be at least picked up.

"I will not have my nephew's mind poisoned," the marquise continued. "I mean him to enjoy Pau and to love it, and you will undermine me, I know, you two, with your tongues."

"True, madame, true!" cried Bébé. "'Nil admirari' is in these days, I grant you, the only philosophy that pays; but pray waive the dispute for a moment—hold! what pretty amusement have we here? A new Patience—delightful! allow me—may I take this place?"

He had glided gently in between Madame de Veuil and the marquise, and had found a stool pushed under the table by the latter's side. He dropped on one knee upon it, and very coolly began to re-arrange the packets of cards next to him, for which proceeding his fingers were instantly and sharply rapped by the marquise's fan. Vociferous altercations followed in mingled French and English, at which the baron stood laughing immoderately, delighted at the discomfiture of his usual companion-in-arms. Bébé declared he knew intimately the mysterious ways of this game of Patience, having been taught it by an old Frenchman more than a year ago; while madame declared that that was impossible; for it was a newly invented game, and the préfet himself had shown it to her in strictest confidence when she had dined at the Préfecture only a night or two before: she had half forgotten it, but was determined to puzzle it out again, and she would not admit the idea of Bébé's superior knowledge, nor be instructed by him on any terms. They wrangled away, much to their mutual edification, and to the amusement of Gilbert, who lingered in the circle of the lookers-on.

Meanwhile Morton slipped quietly over and gained the position the baron had coveted in Jeanne's vicinity and by Madame Zophée's side. He satisfied himself by gazing and smiling at the former as she sat opposite him, blushing and sparkling with happiness, and nestling close to Madame Zophée. It was to the last-named lady that he had come to speak.

"I hope you have forgiven us," he said, in English, and in a low tone, "for having broken our compact, by introducing a stranger unpermitted to you to-night; it could not be helped, you know. My cousin *must* have taken you into dinner as it happened, according to the proper arrangement of the people generally. I hope you did not mind."

"Not at all," she answered. "In fact, I had forgotten our compact. Somehow, belonging to you, he did not seem a stranger at all."

"Then you liked him? I am so glad!"

"Yes, I did, extremely; he is wonderfully pleasant and bright."

"And under which head, pray, does he come in your classification of Englishmen?"

"My classification? I do not know—let me see—what did I say about Englishmen? I do not recollect."

"Well, you are not generally very complimentary to the nation. Do you not remember one evening last summer, on the croquet-ground, you ran down the species 'British traveler' very severely indeed?"

"Ah! I remember. No, I did not do that exactly, did I? I did not mean to do so, I am sure, for it would be unjust in *me*, who have seen too few of the nation, to judge. But what I think I must have said is what I have often realized with regret, that the ideal Englishman of our youthful fancy, taught by Corinne and such rulers of romance, is no more—the man, I mean, who came among *us* in foreign lands to awe and inspire us with a dignity of presence and a degree of intellectual culture to which we were unused. A wonderful being, was he not? combining every thing that was attractive, according to our ideas. Refined, artistic, reserved, marble in exterior manner and countenance, and full of beautiful and impassioned sentiments, all suppressed below. He scattered gold in rubles around him, for *nachai*—tea-money, I mean—and did not know the meaning of the term *copeck*. He had marvelous adventures, too, and did wonderful things, always on a jet-black steed. Ah, where has he gone? Do you not remember him? How we did admire him! I fear he went out of fashion with the post-carriage and four fleeting steeds with which he used to travel."

"But surely he was a stuck-up fellow!" said Morton. "I do not believe I should have liked him really. I think the present typical Englishman, when he is a thorough gentleman, suits me better."

"I dare say," said Madame Zophée, looking over with her quiet, meditative glance to where Gilbert stood, bending over his aunt's shoulder and her *frisé* head, his eyes glistening with amusement as he watched the game. "You may be right. I think I should like *that* type if I knew it well; there is something wonderfully fresh and happy about the character. But when I spoke of Englishmen last summer, vicomte, I know what I was thinking—of Paris and of months I have spent there, and of Baden and Homburg, and even of St. Petersburg too. The English of whom I have seen something in these places did not make me admire their country or themselves: most of them were men ignorant of art and insensible to historic association or natural beauty, or any thing that used to bring my grand old English hero abroad in his chariot; and they seemed to like only to give *us* to understand that they were 'tout ce qu'il-y-a de plus Parisien' in all the knowledge and tastes and habits which are of Paris the perdition and doom. And they used to boast—how do you say it?"

"Swagger," suggested Morton.

"Well, yes, so—of the money they lose at Baden and Monaco, and of the places where they amuse themselves, of which in our society we do not speak at all; and so, altogether, they seemed to me but a poor edition of the worst form of Russian, who at least carries off his extravagance and his gamblings with that dignity and magnificence by which he notoriously ruins himself *en prince*."

"You have seen a bad side of my mother's countrymen, I fear," said Morton. "I hope Gilbert will persuade you to alter some of your views."

"I should like to do so. When I was young I was very enthusiastic for England, because at my guardian's I read so many English papers and books. I was disappointed when we went into society in Baden and Paris, I can assure you."

"But, indeed, that is only one type of the nation, madame; there are others as well."

"Yes, I know. In Russia once at my guardian's I saw another type—he was 'an English bear:' he came with a letter to us; but he was worse, I think—not my old dear hero at all, though he was very learned indeed, and full of ideas and notions. Oh! but so rough, and disliking so much the drawing-room and the ladies, old or young, and always saying so. I remember how my little cousin, the Comtesse Zaida, was furious. She did not think the man lived, I can tell you, who could resist her smiles; but *he* did: he often turned his back upon her in her own reception-room, and talked to her father (my guardian) about governments, and taxes, and serious literature, in an obstinate, dogmatic, uncomplimentary way that little Zaida thought unsuitable to her presence indeed. I did not mind him so much, because I was a little interested: he spoke well, and he had much to say; but I did not like him. No. He had none of the graces of life in his address or person, and I did not admire the type. And yet the embassador said, I remember, one evening to my guardian, that, excepting for the taint, as he called it, of *Radicalism* in the character, it was about the best type of man they were sending out of the universities in England in these days: he said he was great intellectually, and I was very sorry, for I did not like him at all."

"Well, I must say you can not classify my cousin under either head," said Morton.

"No, no, indeed. I like him, I think I do, very much. But he is so very young. He is not as old as you are, vicomte, surely not?"

"He is just about it, but he *is* young, somehow, and more so in manner and mind than in absolute looks; that is, you see, madame, because, as we say in English, he has been tied all his life to his mother's apron-strings."

"You mean he has been always at home, he is campagnard, rustic; but he is not at all commonplace, all the same. Ah! how can one be so youthful and look so happy as that?" she added suddenly, pointing to Gilbert's face glowing with merriment just opposite to them.

"He is a dear, jolly fellow," said Morton, with most earnest affection and approval, "and I am sure, madame, there is a great deal besides all that fun in him too—it will come out. I believe there is often just as much underneath in the character of Englishmen, now that they hide it with that John Bull cheeriness, as there used to be in your old-day hero who shut himself up in a stony reserve. It is reserve all the same, I fancy, in reality—I have enough of the Englishman in me, madame, to realize that. Eh? do you not agree with me? Observing *him*, for instance, now."

"Yes, I do. To speak artistically, Monsieur Morton, and without pretense at any special power of penetration into character, there *is* a great deal more than the reflection of his laugh in the changeful light and shade of his blue eyes; and observing artistically as I say, if I wished to paint my ideal of Davidov, our young soldier-poet—the Körner of our Russia—I should like to have my model for the expression I should want from that bright, brave glance, and from a peculiarly sensitive curl and quiver of the upper lip which was one of the first things I remarked in your cousin's profile as he sat next me for *just* one moment in silence at dinner to-night. But, dear me! here he comes toward us, and we must try to look as if we had not been discussing him in every possible light, philosophic and artistic, to say nothing of characteristic and national."

"Ha, Gilbert! take my place," said Morton, rising with ready alacrity and a happy unconsciousness of manner as his cousin approached; a proposal that was less unselfish than it appeared, for there was an opposite corner of the sofa vacant on little Jeanne's other side. It looked most suitable for himself, he thought, if he thus magnanimously resigned Madame Zophée to Gilbert.

But it was all too late to be of much avail on Gilbert's behalf. A very pleasing impression remaining in his mind from their introductory conversation during dinner had inclined him often to glance toward the corner where his cousin and Madame Zophée sat in such confidential and comfortable-looking converse, and had disposed him many times to desert the merry party at the card-table, and to join them over there. But he delayed the move too long, as it turned out, for he had but just dropped into Morton's proffered seat, feeling particular satisfaction in doing so, when the door opened, and the groom

of the chambers of the marquis glided in to whisper mysterious announcements to the Comte de Beaulieu, Monsieur de Veuil, and others. Following him came Baptiste, who walked over to that special corner at which Gilbert had at last arrived, and informed them, in suppressed tones of extreme confidence, that "the carriage of Madame Variazinka awaited her."

The pleasant dinner party was over.

"Oh, not yet," remonstrated Gilbert. "Surely it is quite early still. Not just yet, please"—for Madame Zophée had moved immediately.

"Yes, at once it must be. You remember I told you my horses are favorites, and surely *you* of all people would not wish me to keep them waiting."

"Ah! of course not; I never thought of that. I am so sorry. But, at all events, I may go to the door and see your horses, may I not?" he added, rising to make way for her and to offer his arm.

"You may. My Vasilie will be proud of the attention, only I fear it is rather dark. Stay a moment—I must say a number of good-nights."

And there were many to say. First to the marquise, who infolded her in a kindly embrace, complaining bitterly the while of Bébé and his tiresome ways. Then to all the rest—a smile, a friendly hand-clasp, or a gracious bow; and finally there was the baron, who first kissed her small soft hand, and then held it long between both of his own, caressing it gently, and murmuring, "Prastchite, prastchite, galoupka moja" ("Farewell, farewell, my dove"), while she smiled and answered the old man's fatherly kindness with grateful eyes and many soft Russian words.

Then at last Gilbert possessed himself of her completely, and led her triumphantly from the room, the marquis and Morton lingering (as they saw her under safe escort) to make farewell speeches and compliments to their remaining guests.

In the hall Gilbert had only time to say, "How selfishly Morton has absorbed you the whole evening, to be sure!" when conversation was arrested, for they came upon Baptiste obtruding himself with madame's equipments much in front of the row of other domestics, who were assembled now again to help the guests to depart.

Next to Baptiste stood a very tall man in a peculiar costume, with a fair, rugged countenance, very strongly in contrast to all those around him. He bowed lower than any of them as Madame Zophée approached, and she smiled when she saw him, and said, "Ah, Vasilie!" adding some words in Russian. He answered, "Sluches" ("I hear and obey"), and immediately walked to the door, flung it open, and disclosed the bright lights of the carriage without. At the same moment the huge head of an immense mastiff appeared round the corner, obtruding himself humbly, but with very longing gaze, into the hall.

"Oh, you beauty!" cried Gilbert, drawing Madame Zophée's glance toward the entrance as he spoke.

"You naughty Lustoff!" she said. "Who gave *you* leave to come here? No—do not come in, sir, do not come in," for one big paw was immediately laid upon the inner step as she raised her voice. "Do not come in. For shame!" she continued, and the paw was withdrawn again, while the big face and the brown eyes looked wistful and disconsolate.

"My love, I am coming," she called to him, in a soothing voice; and, "Thank you, Sir Gilbert," she added, as he wrapped her closely in her swan's-down mantle.

The white feathery ruff came up close round her neck, and was so becoming that she looked prettier than ever in it, and more uncommon even than she had done before.

"How deliciously soft and warm!" he exclaimed, admiringly.

"Yes, it is warm—a medium, you know. I thought it too hot still to think of fur. Now will you put *this* on for me? But I do not believe that you can."

"Why, what is it?" he said, taking from her and turning about awkwardly in his fingers a piece of soft crimson material, all embroidered with delicate tracings of silver and gold. "Please—oh, I can not. Where is the opening?"

They both laughed, and then she showed him, twisting it dexterously, and throwing it over her head.

"It is a Baschlik," she said, still laughing at his difficulties. "It is the old national headdress of the women of Russia. I bought this one at the Gastinnoi Dvor—the bazaar, I mean—at Moscow, and I think it makes such a cozy head-covering for evening dissipation—do not you?"

He thought she looked too enchanting for any thing, thus hooded and cloaked, and he laughed merrily again, and exclaimed, "Why, you would do now for a masquerade in that costume, I declare!"

"I dare say I should; but I am not going to one just at this moment, only home to bed. And all this time my Volga and Vazuza are waiting, and Vasilie and Ivan must think I have a heart of stone."

He gave her his arm again, and out they went to the porch entrance, where there stood waiting for her the daintiest of little broughams. The door was being held open by the big Vasilie; a pair of dark-bay horses, driven by another man in a similar costume, were champing their bits impatiently at the delay; and there was Lustoff, ineffectually held back by Vasilie's hand, scrambling forward with a rush to rub his head against Madame Zophée's dress as she passed him into the carriage.

"Good dog—down! Now, as you *have* come, you may just trot quietly home again. Good-night, Sir Gilbert. Do not stand in the cold."

"Cold! it is glorious. I could stay here for ages!" he exclaimed. "Good-night, Madame Zophée, good-night."

And then he did stay. The brougham rolled slowly down the deep descent from the château; the lamps, glistening brightly, illuminated its way; and a little behind it might be seen the dark form of Lustoff trotting slowly along, a faithful and untiring guard. And so they all rolled into the distance through the beautiful still autumn night, under the splendid canopy of the dark-blue heavens with its myriad of clear, glittering stars, until the shade of the hanging boughs absorbed the lamp-lights, and hid them completely from Gilbert's view. Then he turned with a

short and unconscious sigh, just as Morton with a train of other ladies and gentlemen came trooping up to the door. Other carriages were called, last good-nights were said, ladies were handed in and gentlemen sprung after them, and in ten minutes every guest was gone.

"Well, my dear fellow," said Morton, half an hour afterward, to Gilbert in the smoking-room, "I hope you were not bored."

"Not a bit," exclaimed his cousin. "On the contrary, I thought it all capital fun. I was amused immensely, I can assure you, from the beginning of the evening to the end."

Morton looked at him curiously, at his placid and life-enjoying countenance, not self-satisfied, and therefore not irritating in the least, but contented, complacent, and, as he said himself, "amused." Madame Zophée was right; Gilbert was wonderfully young in his way of looking at life. Had he never, thought Morton, done any thing but amuse himself? Never felt a sentiment stronger toward any thing than these two extremes of his, "a bore" or "immense fun?"

"You got on with your neighbor at dinner?" Morton continued.

"Oh dear, yes. How nice she is! Quite different, you know, from any body I have ever seen before."

"I dare say," said Morton. "And you will not see many like her in time to come."

"No? Why should I not? Are not most Russians like her? I was just thinking they must be a very pleasant sort of nation."

"She is not altogether Russian, I fancy," said Morton.

"Really!" said Gilbert, between the puffings of his cloudy pipe. "Really!"

It did not seem to him to convey much, one way or the other, whether she was Russian or not, only he did not exactly see any thing more extraordinary or out of the way — to his mind — that she could possibly be.

"No, I fancy not," continued Morton. "You see," he went on, meditatively, with interest, as if the subject had been one of frequent reflection with him, "there are a great many points about her that are not Russian at all, and little things she has often said confirm me in the opinion, though, of course, one always is so careful not to draw toward subjects in conversation that would make her fancy we were trying to dive. But I sometimes think that she is simply a Pole."

"A Pole? Ah, yes!" exclaimed Gilbert, with sudden energy, as if fired by a brilliant inspiration. "Of course, Poland is quite close to Russia."

"It is; but, up to a few years ago, being one or the other was a widely different affair."

"Of course, they are always fighting," said Gilbert, decisively. "But has she not told you all that in these years?"

"Not a word. In fact, you would be astonished, Gilbert, if you could realize how absolutely nothing—nothing at all—we know about her, though she has lived at our park-gates there for five years."

"You mean you do not know who she is, and all that?" exclaimed Gilbert, opening his eyes very wide indeed, and sitting bolt-upright in his luxurious smoking-chair in real disregard of his pipe.

"Not a bit," said Morton. "Who she is, who her father or mother was, or who her husband was, or whether she ever had one, or any thing about him. No; I am wrong in saying we do not know if she ever had a husband, because she says she had, and," he added, enthusiastically, "she is as true as gold."

"How extraordinary!" exclaimed Gilbert; "why, it is like a book! But, by Jove! of course Baron Keffel knows; he has been in Russia. Why don't you ask him, Morton?"

"Because he knows nothing—no more than we do. He has only traveled once a little in Russia, and got up a few words of the language; but he knows nothing at all of the people: in fact, that is just what travelers do not do in an ordinary way. It takes more than a journey from Archangel to Kasan to know the very outermost run of Russian society. No, he has only fallen in love with her, like every body else about here."

"But," continued Gilbert, on whose organs of bewilderment these communications had made a great impression—swamping, indeed, for the moment all individual interest in the lady *per se*—"could not you find out? could not you make inquiries?"

"Yes," said Morton, with much indignation, "I dare say we could. I suppose if you had such a neighbor in England, you would set 'Pollaky's Private' to work; but that is not what we call friendship or hospitality here on the Pyrenees. No; we take her for herself, and are thankful when she will deign to let us have any thing at all of her. Five years is enough to prove a person, I think, without asking questions or showing impertinent curiosity."

"But it is so extraordinary."

"It is; but so it is," continued Morton. "When my mother came to like her so much, and to try to draw her here at the beginning, she told her plainly one day that if she wished to have her, we must take her on her own ground simply and for herself. She allowed there was mystery, she made no secret of that; but she said she could tell nothing then or at any time, and we forbore questioning, of course. And so we know nothing more of her to-night, Gilbert, than we knew five years ago—except that we know more fully, what we then discerned, that she is the best and sweetest woman that ever breathed, and ten times worthy of all the confidence that is placed in her. The Princess—you know whom I mean, "our Princess" at Pau—knows a little more about her than we do, but not much. She had a letter from some very great Russian people when Madame Zophée came here, speaking of her, and recommending her to friendly notice. The Princess was very kind to her from the first, which is not wonderful, because *she* is kind to every body, and would be certainly especially so to any one lonely and desolate as Madame Zophée appeared to be; but now, apart from kindness, she is quite as fond of her as we are. Indeed, I, beyond liking, honor Madame Zophée very much, and the life that she leads here. She is always doing some one good."

"She is very charming, no doubt," said Gilbert, who had gone comfortably back to his pipe.

"She is," said Morton; and then he went on, evidently inclined, probably under Jeanne's influence as well as Madame Zophée's, to be a little sentimental to-night. "She is, and she has behaved so well altogether. You know I got awfully hard hit when she first came here, though I had cared for Jeanne since she was a child. But Jeanne was away at school, and there was Madame Zophée in and out with my mother, and adored by her, and if she had liked it just then Jeanne's chances of my fidelity were gone. But she did do it wonderfully (Madame Zophée, I mean)—wonderfully, never seemed to see it, you know; but, somehow, just quietly and imperceptibly, her coming ceased to be, and when I have been at home she has never dined here, not once until to-night. It was so graceful of her to come too, I think. Jeanne adores her, and some way or other she has managed to develop in my mind into the sweetest and dearest of friends."

"I think you are a very lucky fellow, Morton," said Gilbert, in answer, in tones philosophic, but also very contented indeed, shaking the dust out of his pipe the while, and emitting a yawn that was most suggestive. He eyed his cousin a little curiously too, and was, in fact, making the mental observation that "It was true, after all—Morton was sentimental, certainly; but then, you know, it must not be forgotten that he was half French."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRINCESS OF THE CHALET.

It was astonishing how much more at home that little dinner made Gilbert feel with them all when they met next morning at the late combination of breakfast and luncheon which the marquise had established as a compromise between habits English and French. He felt *au fait* with the social politics of Pau; he could discuss the eccentricities of the old baron, the absurdity of Bébé Beresford, and the snobbishness of Captain Hanleigh, much to Morton's satisfaction and his own. The marquise was highly indignant, when the after-dinner conversation was repeated to her, to find that Pau sports had been run down, and Pau matrons and widows submitted to sarcastic criticism.

"Do not listen to a word of it all, Gilbert!" she exclaimed, as she sipped her Sauterne and picked daintily at her *côtelette panée;* "not to a single word of it. There is nobody to be found at Pau—looking, if you must, on the shadiest side of the social picture—of whom you will not find the parallel in any similar community collected for mutual entertainment in every other part of Europe, England, or elsewhere. People need not lose their money over baccara at the Cercle Français, or over whist and écarté at the English Club to any scamp that turns up, unless they please to do so; and if they *do*, why, they are geese, my dear, and they would do it somewhere else if they did not do it at Pau. And as to the ladies—"

"Oh," said Morton, wandering round the table to help himself from a Bordeaux *pâté* on the other side, "no fear of Gilbert on that account, mother. He has been so fascinated with that song of Bébé's about 'brown eyes and black eyes, gray eyes and blue,' that he is consumed with impatience for the first band-day, that he may see them all paraded, and make a selection of his shrine for the winter's adoration—eh, Gilbert?"

"I am sure I do not know what may become of me before the winter sets fairly in," said Gilbert.

"Now that is nonsense! That is all Bébé's fault, and the baron's, and that horrid Captain Hanleigh's," cried the marquise. "You will not commit yourself, after all they have said. I know where you will be when the winter sets in—just in the Rue du Lycée, Pau, my dear nephew, and nowhere else, and you will be delighted to be there, and very much amused. Is that not true, Léon? Speak, wilt thou not? Say, must not Gilbert stay here?"

"Certainly, certainly," answered the marquis, who, like any excellent paterfamilias of a British fireside, had been much absorbed all this time in the perusal of his morning paper, the *Écho des Pyrénées*. "Gilbert had better come with me to-day, Violette. I must go into Pau, and Morton also. It is the préfet's first reception-day since his return. Gilbert must be presented to him."

"Good gracious!" cried Gilbert. "What an ordeal! Must I go through it, and necessarily to-day?"

"You must go through it, my dear," said his aunt, "because the préfet and Madame de Frontignac are very charming people, and their evening receptions are delightful; but I do not see that it is imperative you should go to-day—is it, Léon?"

"I must go, chérie," he answered, "and Morton must accompany me. As to Geelbert, he can do as he please. I will tell the préfet of him, and say, if you like, that he remains with you to-day, Violette, and will pay his respects at another time. The next Sunday or Thursday will be soon enough; but Morton and I must not delay."

"Well, that *is* a nuisance," said Morton, impatiently. "Gilbert and I were going to have had a long ride to-day on Mike and Dinah, and we were to come round upon Château de Veuil to visit Jeanne and her people in the afternoon. What a bore, father! Must I really go?"

"Assuredly, Morton, without fail; you must indeed."

"Ah, well, it can not be helped, then; and, Gilbert, if you don't care about coming into town to-day, you must just ride alone."

"Well, I must say I like this side of the country a good deal the best of the two as yet," said Gilbert. "I should enjoy poking about a bit on Dinah's back, if I may take her, Morton. It is awfully good of you."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow. The stable is at your service; take what you like. Dinah would be the best, I dare say; and I can just point out a capital round for you, which we can trace clearly in the view from the court-yard gate, that will give you a ride of about three hours over a beautiful bit of country."

"Then, dear child," said the marquise, in soft tones, as she rose slowly from the table, "I will not invite you to 'dowager' in the barouche with me; but after your ride, if you like to give your old aunt an arm for a quarter of an hour, you

know where to find me, on the terrace at my evening promenade."

The marquis and Morton soon started down the avenue in the stanhope, and went bowling at a fine pace into town; while Gilbert, after prolonged colloquies with Joe over French and English bits and bridlings, and all the national differences and peculiarities in details of equestrian management, mounted at length upon the broad, fat back of Mistress Dinah, and rode slowly out of the stable-yard.

It was a splendid afternoon, such autumn weather as is peculiar to the slopes of the Pyrenees, and is worth a long journey to enjoy. Radiant sunshine gladdened the valleys and wrapped the mountain-tops in a silver glory. The sweeping branches of the oak and beech trees made abundant shadow as he rode beneath them, and the sweet mountain air met him as he cantered slowly up the gentle sloping sides of the undulating hills, fresh and delicious, cooling pleasantly the atmosphere after the fiery rays of the midday sun.

There was endless variety in the ride, and at each moment some fresh object to amuse or interest caught his eye as he dipped into a valley, or topped the low summit of a hill. Morton had pointed out the way carefully to him, and, by watching certain conspicuous landmarks, he found himself winding through the côteaux over a vast extent of ground, and coming constantly upon new views of the distant mountains, and new openings in the valleys.

St. Hilaire, and Château de Beaulieu, and Monplaisir, and the villa of the De Veuils, always remained in sight, towering upon their different summits; although, as he wound through the country below them, and crossed or circumvented the woody hills, they seemed to change their position continually, and to present themselves in fresh aspects from each new point of view.

Sometimes he passed through a bit of sombre, monotonous pine-wood, and then again he would emerge upon a gentle descent into a sylvan glade, traverse perhaps a stretch of green meadow-land, and then wind along for miles by a glistening stream, enjoying the delicious murmur as it fell gently on his ear, wondering over the excessive purity of the transparent water and the marvelous tints of beryl and emerald which it had gained far away high up among the melting snows.

Often he passed a peasant settlement lying on the hill-slope above him—a cozy, well-built cottage, ugly, indeed, as to architecture, but picturesque withal from the rich autumn tints of the leaves on the creepers that clustered thickly over lattice and door; a big dog; a goat tethered to the palings, and nibbling at the sprouting edges of the path; an old woman cutting cabbage into a red earthen pot; a group of brown-legged children; a girl leaning idly at the porch, with a laughing look in her black eyes, and a bright handkerchief knotted round her head—one or all of these gave to each wayside cottage action and color and life. Ascending a deep gorge that reached seemingly far into the country, he met a band of "bergers"—the mountain shepherds, coming down into the lowlands with their herds—wild, picturesque-looking fellows, dressed in their native costumes, with tight gray breeches and untanned leather gaiters, with odd-shaped hanging caps on their heads, and with crimson sashes tied loosely about their waists. Endless ox-carts, too, came slowly toward him, sending the familiar music of their tinkling bells before them, heralding their approach, as they came round a shady corner or wound through the depth of a valley below. He passed many maize-fields, where the men were gathering the last relics of the autumn harvest, and loading high the ox-carts with the rich golden grain, and vineyards on every side covered the sunny slopes, but the purple fruit was already garnered, and the leaves were falling in a crimson and russet shower all over the ground.

He enjoyed the ride; and in this new country, surrounded by such novel influences of scenery and coloring, and light and shade, he enjoyed the solitude. He was accustomed to ride alone, and in action and movement he enjoyed even the silence. Breathing the soft, soothing air, his glance wandering over hill and dale, mountain and river and wood, watching the light become rosy and deep as soft billowy clouds gathered over the hill-tops and the sun began to set, he felt all the while, without attempting to express to himself or to realize it, that the scenery and sunlight and all the soft atmospheric influences were creeping over his spirit and reaching the very life-springs of his whole heart and being, creating infinite new thoughts and sentiments, throwing strange reflections, vague and shadowy, across his dreams, striking deep somewhere within him musical and poetic keys that vibrated in answer with an intense and thrilling power that was sweet as it was unfamiliar.

The sun was setting, indeed, when he at last began to wonder whether he was far from home. He had wound through meadow and valley, and by vineyard and stream, so long now, and he had turned round by Château Beaulieu just, he thought, as Morton had directed him, and yet he did not appear to be getting any nearer to the lodge and park-gates of St. Hilaire, nor did he seem to be approaching it from the right side. It was, in fact, easy enough to take a wrong turning, and thus to lose one's way in these winding paths of the côteaux; and so, having drifted into a pleasant dream-land as he rode along, Gilbert had very naturally done it.

So far from being now in the direct road to Château St. Hilaire, and approaching it by the *south* entrance, as he had intended, so passing up by the paddock and court-yard, to leave Dinah at her stable-door, he had wandered over to the west, and the Pic de Bigorre lay now behind him, while he was really breasting the ascent toward St. Hilaire out of the valley on the side below the terrace walk. He had been there only the night before with the marquise, and had watched the sunset view, as it appeared in this aspect, and he ought to have known it, but he did not; the road seemed very unfamiliar, and he did not at all realize how he was to reach home.

Suddenly the corner of a garden-wall attracted him—an old, lichen-grown wall, with rich flowering creepers hanging low over it, and beautiful almond and acacia trees towering beyond.

"I am outside the garden of St. Hilaire, no doubt," he thought to himself, as he looked up and saw the château on the hill above; and as

Dinah seemed to know the way, and stepped briskly on, he felt satisfied, and let her skirt round the wall and under the shadow of the hanging creepers as fast as she pleased.

The shrubs topping the creepers thickened presently, and clusters of roses appeared between them; rich festoons of the "Malmaison," long, hanging branches of the crimson "Géante" and of the golden "Gloire," twined and rambled with careless and wonderful luxury amidst the acacia and almond trees. His head nearly reached them as he rode along; he could have stretched out his hand easily, and robbed the bright rose-garden, but he only looked in as he passed, wonderingly and admiringly, and enjoyed the delicious flower-scents that filled the soft evening air. Suddenly Dinah stopped, cocked her ears inquiringly, and threw up her head, for the rose-branches just above her were shaken violently, and a shower of crimson petals fell upon the sunny road. Gilbert urged her on: a few paces she advanced, then rounded a corner, and this time he himself stopped her again suddenly.

They had come upon a gate-way; upon stone pillars covered thick with roses; upon an opening stretching back through a garden where a pathway, leading between greensward and clusters of bright-colored flowers, reached to the open window of a low, curious house. Pointed gables, faced with wood in carved picturesque devices, fronted the gate-way. Wooden balconies crossed below the upper windows, and wooden pillars supported the porch top. Not in the least a Béarnais house, a fanciful structure apparently; and—as he now realized, recollecting and recognizing at the same moment—evidently his uncle's favorite extravagance, the Swiss chalet, and as evidently Madame Zophée's house. It was wonderfully pretty, lying on the edge of the hill, with the vine-covered slope rising above it, and a peep through the gorges toward the mountain opening in the view beyond. Flooded by the sweet light of the autumn sunset, framed in rich coloring by the scarlet Virginia creepers, the fading western leaves, and the hanging tendrils of the vine, it lay seemingly embowered in verdure, in roses, and in brilliant and wondrous flower-tints of every shade and hue.

Removing all doubt as to its ownership, there, on the soft greensward before the open window, lay Lustoff; and in another moment the rose-branches rustled and shed their petals again, and out from among the bushes came Madame Zophée herself. Her white dress swept over the short grass; a snowy Pyrenean shawl, knit in soft fluffy wool, was thrown across her shoulders and wrapped close about her neck; she had a bunch of crimson roses in her hand; her cheek was a little flushed in her exertions to reach them, and her eyes were glistening softly in the deep evening light.

"Sir Gilbert Erle!" she said, in her low, clear voice, as if slightly but very calmly surprised to see him.

He took his hat off and bowed, and answered, "Good-evening, Madame Zophée," which, in his astonishment, was all that occurred to him to say.

"What are you doing"—she continued, smiling a little at him across the barrier of the closed gate, as he sat there on Dinah's broad back, with his hat still in his hand, looking admiringly about him—"What are you doing upon my private road?"

"Your road, Madame Zophée? I really beg your pardon, but, do you know, I have lost my way."

"And most effectually, too," she answered, "if you hope to reach St. Hilaire on horseback by this road. You are really quite wrong: you turned out of the proper path about half a mile below. This is *my* right of way, Sir Gilbert; this carriage-approach leads only to my house."

"I am sure I beg your pardon," he said, again. "I am very sorry; but if you will forgive, I do not think that, after all, I can really regret it so very, very much, for it *is* so lovely here."

"Yes, the view is charming, is it not? It *was* quite worth your while just to ride up to see it; and if you will be very grateful I will fetch my key and let you in by the gate below the marquis's walk into the grounds of St. Hilaire; and, if you do not mind leading your horse, you can get through the shrubbery up to the stables by that way. It will save you a round of quite a mile."

"Thank you so much," he answered. "I have been very stupid."

"It was easy to make the mistake you did; the two roads are so exactly the same. If you do not mind waiting, I will fetch the key in one moment."

"Thank you. I am so vexed to trouble you. But please do not go just yet: let me look for one minute more into your garden. How beautiful it is!"

"Yes, my flowers have done well this year; we had plenty of rain in the spring. But these rose-bushes do grow so fast, and then the best bloom is always so very high, quite on the top. Look, I have been struggling for the last half-hour with these large red ones, and I have only managed to reach this one bunch."

He had sprung from his horse before she had finished the sentence, and had thrown the rein over the pillar by the gate side.

"May I not help you?" he said. "Look! I can reach huge, splendid clusters even from this side, and I see beauties just over the wall. May I come in? I will gather them for you, as many as you please."

He laid his hand on the upper bar as he spoke, where her small white one lay already, and he looked longingly across at her, and into the garden, where broad sheets of golden light from the slanting rays of the low setting sun were stretching across the grass and glistening through the evening mists that were gathering under the shady hill.

"May I not come in?" he repeated.

She, too, was looking up at him, her darkly shadowed eyes reflecting that warm sun-glow, the color deepening on her cheek, as he repeated the question.

"I think," she said, laughing lightly, "that you might have waited till you were invited, monsieur; you know I never have visitors. And then," she added, as if conclusively, "you *can not* leave your horse."

"Oh yes, I can! Dinah evidently prefers standing to moving; just look at her, and Morton says she does just as well by herself. Let

me only gather that one big bunch there for you; it looks so tempting hanging just above your head."

"Yes, just above," she answered; "but just high enough to be beyond me. I have been gazing longingly at it this last half-hour. Well, come in, then. Will you gather it for me? Thank you; you are very good."

He looked so bright and cheerful and unconscious as he tied up Dinah to the stone gate-post, that she pushed open the gate and admitted him, with some mental assurance to herself concerning his youth and inexperience. There was the same re-assuring boyishness in his enjoyment, too, when he found himself once within the garden. It was that something so practical and straightforward in his manner, as he looked around him and admired, that, as she thought, made intercourse with him so pleasant and easy. Conversation came so readily, and it always remained so safely external, so *far* away from that region of the sentimental, which, with his cousin, and with most of his cousin's nation, at all events in *language*, was so quickly reached. There was a sense of security which she felt to be mutual, and with this there was also a sense of enjoyment on her side of his sunny looks, and cheerful smiles, and eager, hearty expressions, that formed a temptation to which she yielded, though hesitatingly, as she drew the gate open, and he passed in.

Then he gathered roses for her, his tall height reaching the rich clusters that grew far up against the sky, and he filled her hands with them, in glorious masses of crimson and gold, until she could hold no more. Yet still he gathered, and she stood by him, and exclaimed with delight as the long, hanging branches were drawn within her reach, and the fading petals from the full-blown flowers fell in soft-colored showers on the greensward at her feet.

Soon his hands were full also, and he turned to her smilingly again.

"Will that do?" he said.

"Thanks many times. I am so glad! I did so want to fill all my vases to-night; and Vasilie and Ivan gather so roughly, they make all the petals fall."

"I fear I have brought down a great many," he answered, looking at the tinted carpet between them.

"No, you have not; that is only natural; they must come down. They are nearly over now, they are all *so* full-blown. And, ah dear! how I shall miss them when they are quite gone!"

"Now I must carry them in for you," continued Gilbert. "What will you do with them all?"

"Fill my vases with them; it is just what I like. Will you carry them? Oh, thank you! But—no, never mind; leave them on the grass here, and my Marfa shall fetch them in. I *must* not keep you."

"Please do not say so. Look! I have got them all so nicely together in this great bunch, may I not carry them as they are? It would be such a pity to lay them down. Let me—do let me take them just to your window."

"Will you? Come, then, and you shall see how I arrange them in my huge jasper vase."

And then she turned and walked up the little pathway, he following closely and picking up a few scattered roses as he went that had fallen from his hand upon the turf.

"Do you like my little house, Sir Gilbert?" she said, presently. "I hope you do, I am so fond of it."

"I think it is perfectly delicious!" he exclaimed; "it is so pretty and picturesque, and I never saw such flowers."

"It is not commonplace, at all events," she answered, as she paused beside him on the narrow way and looked up at the windows. "And it is so pleasant having this glass door opening into the garden. This stone step is my favorite seat; and indeed, on a fine evening such as this is, Lustoff thinks I should never be away from here."

"How lovely it is!" Gilbert exclaimed again, turning, as he reached the house, to look back across the garden.

The shadows were deepening now, the mists thickening in the valley below, and a long stretch of soft pastoral scenery opened away toward the west, where the Pic de Bigorre, a dewy rose-tint now in the evening lights, stood up against the horizon of the sky.

"Come in," said Madame Zophée, but softly, hesitatingly, from the window behind him. "Come in, will you not, since you have come so far?" And he crossed the threshold, bent under the curtain of delicate lace-work that hung in low festoons above his head, and entered her room. Again he exclaimed in tones of surprise, of bewilderment, and of admiration.

It was certainly not a commonplace room—low-ceilinged, and furnished with comfort, with simplicity, and with elegance. Full of *causeuses* and low *fauteuils* such as a lady always, a man never, chooses for their respective use. Beautiful tazzas of jasper, lapis lazuli, and malachite stood in different alcoves and recesses, filled in luxuriant quantity with roses and large virgin lilies that were already fading from the great heat of the day. Curious, unfamiliar-looking ornaments, in gold and silver carving, in amber and delicate-hued marble, were strewed abundantly over every table and chiffonier; glistening vases of exquisitely tinted glass covered the mantel-shelf and filled one small hanging cabinet, while several others displayed treasures of china of curious and various kinds.

Right round the room ran a low ebony book-case quite filled with books, all bound in the sweet-scented leathers of Russia, and mostly named in the cabalistic characters of the Russian type. A thick Turkish rug made a resting-place near the fire for Lustoff, now the dew fell and the grass grew chilly without. A small piano, made of ebony inlaid with silver, and with a curious monogram worked into the wood, stood open in one corner; pieces of music were strewed carelessly over it, and a broad sun-hat was left lying on the top.

All this he seemed to take in, in one rapid glance, with several other details that struck him still more curiously. One of these was a picture hung high up in the west corner of the room facing eastward. It was a portrait, evidently, of a sacred character, for a glory encircled the bending head, and on a golden bracket just below there burned a soft glowing light. A small round table stood by a low chair near the wood fire, and on this was arranged what appeared

preparations for a curious and solitary repast. A shining salver bore a small fizzing urn of antique shape in gold and silver repoussé work; two tiny vases of opaque glass stood on either side, filled, one with big lumps of sugar, the other with slices of lemon daintily cut and arranged; one tall, slim crystal tumbler stood in front of the urn, and a plate of thin wafer-biscuits completed what appeared to him indeed most uncommon fare.

The very pretty and artistic arrangement of one part of the room remained still to attract him. Close to the window by which they had entered, standing half across the lattice and half drawn back from it, was a green wire folding-screen with festoons of flowers and leaves twining all over it, which sprung from a narrow earth-trough that ran round the edge. This inclosed a room within the room—a little painting studio. There was an easel, surrounded by all the artistic confusion of colors and palette and brush, and on this rested an unfinished picture, which at length, as he glanced round the room and its various curiosities and characteristics, fixed his attention and unsealed his lips. Madame Zophée had been engaged in disentangling her roses during the moment that she had left him to gaze undisturbed, and she had been merely murmuring on to him her delight in their beauty, and her thanks to him for having gathered them; but now she turned round again as he sprung toward the easel, and exclaimed, in his quick, impulsive way,

"Oh, Madame Zophée, how lovely! Did you paint this? Why, how wonderful you are! Do you paint? and do you play? Do you do every thing?"

"I do very little of any thing," she answered, "except think and dream of doing a great deal."

"But you painted this?"

"Yes," she said quietly, coming up to him as he stood before her picture, and looking at it from a little behind him with half-closed eyes in a meditative, critical way, as if to test its points with his assistance in a new light.

"But it is wonderful! it is beautiful!" he went on. "What is it, Madame Zophée? I have never seen any scene like that—how could you do it? What have you taken it from?"

"I have seen it," she said. "It is not a creation, only a memory. But I dare say it *is* scarcely a scene you are likely to have come upon in your native land. It belongs peculiarly to mine."

"It is Roman Catholic," he continued, vaguely, "is it not? These are priests, monks, or something of that sort, surely?"

"It is the atelier," she answered, "of the Monastery of Troitsa, where I went once with my guardian years ago, and which has staid ever since in my memory and my imagination as a dream of the Middle Ages."

"It is like something I have read in some old book," said Gilbert, dreamily, "in the big library at home. I wish I could understand it! Will you explain it to me?"

"Well, you know, it is the workshop, as you would say, the atelier, just as I saw it; and they are all busy, the holy, solitary men, each at his different art, each at his separate easel. I remember how they sat there, just like that, in their monastic robes, all grave and silent, with that broad sheet of sunlight streaming through the window upon their close-shaven heads; and I thought, when I saw them, of Fra Angelico illuminating his precious manuscript in the quaint old times, and so I never forgot them in all these years. One was painting, like this old monk here, in deep, glowing colors such as these, grouping delicately drawn figures on a background such as I have copied, of golden scroll-work, like fine chasing upon metal, only more intricate still. Then on this side," she went on, warming with the enthusiasm of the artist, as she explained her work, "see they are working on the silver settings of the Eikons. That pale monk is hammering out a plate of metal, embossing it on a pattern of wood; that one with the delicate features and the eager look on his face is engraving the glory rays; that one is sinking gems in a riza; this one is gilding a frame; and, look, this monk, quite by himself, is repairing jewelry. I have copied that bit of green enamel wrought into arabesques on the stand there beside him from an old piece I have upstairs; and that is the Greek cross of the Archimandrite he is holding in his hand. See, it ought to glitter with sapphires and rosy beads. These are sacramental cups embossed and gemmed with rubies, and the rest are relics and crosses and jeweled caskets, all brought for him to repair. I am so glad you like my picture. I have been working at it and dreaming over it for a long time now."

"I think it is perfectly wonderful."

"It is only water-color, you see; but I tried to finish it highly, and I think I have succeeded just a little, though only very little, I fear."

"And that is your church?" he said, thoughtfully.

"Yes," she answered, in her quiet, low, steady tones; "that is my church."

He sighed a short, quick sigh, wherefore he knew not, except that the picture impressed him, and his thoughts went rambling about for a moment in a tangled sort of manner, seeming to reach home and return again before he spoke. Then rousing himself, to throw off some effect of these reflections that seemed to have fallen over them both, he said:

"You do paint beautifully; and I suppose you have quantities and quantities of others. Ah! I see—here is a great port-folio full," he continued, delighted, as he observed one leaning upon a sloping stand. "Oh, may I open it? may I look at them? Do let me, Madame Zophée, please."

"How absurd you are!" she said, laughing at his eagerness. "No, certainly not; not this evening, at all events. Another time, perhaps; who knows? the marquise may bring you here again, and I will show them to you. You are indeed a sympathetic spectator; but now, no, certainly not now. Have you forgotten your cousin's horse?" she added, reproachfully.

"Oh, she is all right!" he answered, glancing toward the gate where Dinah's nose appeared peaceably resting on the upper rail.

"But my roses are not 'all right,' and I must arrange them. But first, as you *are* here, Sir Gilbert (where you were never, by-the-way, invited to be), I must not neglect all the ceremonies of hospitality as we hold them in Russia. You must eat of my salt and drink of my chai."

She turned as she spoke, and took a little silver embossed box from the table, and, opening it, held it out to him and bid him partake. It was filled with fine salt, of which she took a pinch between her fingers and made him do the same, then—with a wafer, which was of plain flour, and therefore equivalent to bread, as she said—she made him eat it, standing opposite to her, while she welcomed him in words of melodious Russian, and bid him softly to "come and go in peace." Then, as the ceremony was finished, she laughed, and turned to her fizzing tea-urn, and sat down by the table on her low chair.

"Have you ever drank Russian chai?" she asked him.

"Do you mean tea?" he replied. "Do you drink it in tumblers, and make it in the urn? How funny! Do you not have a tea-pot? I have been all this time expecting to see it come in."

"This is not an urn," she said, indignantly. "It is a samovar, and all arranged inside for the tea-making. But it is not tea according to your barbarous ideas of the beverage. You must call it chai, Sir Gilbert; and if you will ring that bell for another glass, you shall drink it in the proper manner, without cream, but with a slice of lemon instead."

The bell was not answered, as he expected, by Vasilie, whom he was anxious to inspect again in his odd-looking kaftan and shirt, but by a tall woman, whose dress and general appearance, however, amazed him far more even than Vasilie had done. She was a fine-looking woman, with a pleasant expression, clear complexion, blue eyes, and lint-light hair, and her dress was extremely picturesque. The snow-white chemisette and bodice and short crimson skirts recalled some of the Italian peasant costumes, but the head-dress was quite peculiar. It was national, and, to those who could recognize it, announced her position in the house. It was a loose cap of rich crimson satin, with a lofty diadem of the same material, delicately embroidered in silver, and worn high upon her forehead.

"What a magnificent personage!" exclaimed Gilbert, when Madame Zophée had given her order, and, with a murmured answer of "Sluches," the woman had retired.

"Is she not? My faithful Marfousha! she is such an excellent soul. She is my nurse, or was, rather, in my juvenile days. She has been with me since I was five years old, and will remain with me, I trust, till one or other of us die."

"Your nurse—fancy! And is that the correct costume of the profession?"

"Yes, exactly so; and she never likes to give it up. I imagine she feels she would sink to the level of an ordinary domestic if she dropped her diadem, and would lose her right, perhaps, to call me the 'douschinka,' as I often overhear her do at present to Vasilie or Ivan in the garden."

"Vasilie? that is your man-servant."

"Yes, the big yellow-haired fellow you saw at St. Hilaire in the hall. A most worthy person, also, is Vasilie: his name in your tongue is William."

"He wears a wonderful costume too, does he not?"

"Yes, we are all very national together. They seem to prefer wearing the dresses they have always worn, and I do not see why they should not be indulged."

"How did you get them all to naturalize here?" he asked. "I mean for all these years. Do not they ever want to go back to Russia, to their country and their home?"

"I have become a sort of movable *patrie* to them, poor things," she said, smiling a little sadly. "They are very good; they would never leave me. They came here when I came, you know; and as I have never gone back again, why, they have staid. They are free to go if they like, however. They were once my serfs; but long ago, even before '65, I had set them free."

"There are no serfs in Russia now, are there?"

"No, thanks to our Alexander, the great and good, 'Svobodnaya Rossia,' our Free Russia, has at last sprung into life. And such a life it is too," she added, smiling with enthusiasm; "it already goes far to assure us that the freedom of the Russian serf has been the greatest historic deed of our age in any country whatever."

"You must tell me much more about it all," said Gilbert, eagerly.

"Ah! do not set me off on these kind of topics, or you will be tired long before I am, I can assure you. There is so much to think about it, so much to know."

"And I know next to nothing," said he, solemnly.

"Ah, I should like to tell you—but no," she continued, decidedly, "we *must not* wander into that sort of talk; it is too interesting, it would last too long; and do you mean *ever* to remember—what do you call her? poor 'Deena'—your cousin's horse? See, Marfa has brought your glass, and now, before you go, you shall have some chai."

Then from the fizzing samovar Madame Zophée poured the clear golden liquid that (sweetened and flavored with the citron juice and peel) was, indeed, much more like a delicate and exhilarating liqueur than any thing conveyed to the Western minds by the word tea. Gilbert thought it delicious, and sat drinking it in a frame of mind strangely in harmony with circumstances as they surrounded him. It was very pleasant indeed.

"What a quantity of pretty books you have!" he said, presently, glancing round the room again, as if to fix every one of its curious details in his mind.

"Yes, I am very dependent upon my library. You see, Sir Gilbert, I have a great deal of time on my hands."

"But they are all Greek—worse than that to me," he said. "If they were Greek, I might make something out of them, but I can not even read their names."

He turned to the low case that lined the wall quite near him, and pointed to the row of brown volumes on the level with his eye.

"Ah! these are my poets—Lermontof, Pushkin, Derzhavin, Lomonosof," she went on, touching book after book in succession as she said their names. "Why is it you do not know about them in England? We read your poets."

"Yes, indeed! Why do we not? You may well ask: it seems to me we know very little in England outside of the circle of ourselves. Languages, for instance. Why is it you know 'all

about *us*,' Madame Zophée, and can talk to me in my own tongue, and have got all that collection I see over there of English books? and I—I know nothing at all about Russian writings, and I do not think I am singular in my ignorance either."

"Ah!" she answered, laughing, "you know we have all talked English in Russia ever since our Vladimir the Second married the daughter of your Danish Harold, and that is a good while ago; so we are pretty well at home now in the language. Russians are supposed to speak every civilized speech, I imagine because their own is so difficult that no one will learn it. But do you know, Sir Gilbert, you really must go. Look, it is positively becoming dark. Indeed, please I *must* say, 'Prastchite,' farewell."

"But the key! You have forgotten you were to show me my way home."

"I had forgotten. Well, here it is. Come, we will go, then. I will walk with you down the garden, and let you through the little gate; come. Dear me, how the evenings are closing in upon us! We shall have winter immediately, and this year winter means a tiresome move of my household gods for me."

"Move! Are you going away?" he exclaimed, as they passed out from the window into the garden again.

"Only to Pau," she answered, "and quite against my will. But my doctor has decreed it; this year I am to spend the winter in town."

"Ah, really! but will it not be pleasant?"

"I prefer my home here, and my garden, and my leafy trees, which are just the very things from which he wishes to drive me. He says my house is too closely surrounded for the winter, too much under the hill, and, moreover, my sitting-room is too low upon the ground; so I am to be moved, and I do not like it at all. How quietly 'Deena' has stood, to be sure!"

"Yes; she is as good as Morton thinks her, which is a rare thing to be able to say of a man and his horse," said Gilbert, as they pushed the gate open together. He glanced back into the garden with a lingering look as he untied Dinah's rein.

"Is not *that* Vasilie?" he added, suddenly, pointing across the rose-bushes to a corner some distance away; and Madame Zophée turned also.

"Yes, that is Vasilie; he is going to water the flowers."

They watched for a moment as the man moved solemnly among the gay borders, and stood pouring from his green can a shower upon the drooping roses and on the scarlet hydrangea heads. A picturesque-looking figure he was, in the deepening shadows of the garden, attired in his strange costume. He wore tall boots, and his loose shirt hung outside his pantaloons; he had no hat on, and his big flaxen head looked tangled and shaggy as a lion's mane.

"In his beloved peasant costnme," said Madame Zophée. "He is a thorough 'moujik,' is Vasilie, quite a type; he firmly believes in all the 'domovoy'—the house spirits—and he will never call Pau (for which he has a great contempt as a city in comparison with Moscow and St. Petersburg) any thing but the 'Gelinka,' the little village. Come, Sir Gilbert, shall I ever succeed in sending you home? Please tell Madame la Marquise it was not my fault—either your coming or your staying, or any consequent anxiety she may have had at your non-appearance. It was not my fault. Do you know that she is to have a croquet-party to-morrow, and that I am coming up to see Bébé Beresford and the baron in combat with the dear marquis and little Jeanne?"

"Of course, I quite forgot. And you are coming? I am so glad! Well, please say I have not bored you very much. I do not know when *I* have had such a pleasant afternoon."

"No," she answered, doubtfully; "I do not think I have been bored. But here is your gate, Sir Gilbert; so good-evening; and pray be more careful of your way another time."

A moment more, and she had locked the gate again behind him, and was wandering back to the chalet by the little pathway, along which a tiny stream ran, fringed with sedge grass and green, feathery ferns. And he led his horse up through the beech wood and the thick shrubbery below St. Hilaire, treading slowly over the leaf-strewed turf through the soft shadows of the autumn evening, much in the frame of mind in which the prince may have been who wandered into the Enchanted Palace of the White Cats, and spent an evening with that immortal princess of the dear old fairy-lands.

CHAPTER IX.

CROQUET ON THE CÔTEAUX.

On the côteaux of the Pyrenees in those days we were very fond of croquet. Baron Keffel, though not an adept, was an enthusiast, losing his temper as regularly as he lost his game. The old Marquis de St. Hilaire was both enthusiastic and expert. Bébé was the "crack" mallet of the club. Morton was a fair match for him. Jeanne had proved an apt pupil; and Mademoiselle Lucile, Jeanne's elder sister, ran Bébé very close for the champion cup.

These days are now past, we hear, and on the wide sunny plain of Bilhère "the Ladies' Golf-ground" is the important feature of the age. The "putter" has expelled the mallet, the round earth-holes supersede the hoops, a princely hand dispenses prizes, and the neat little white balls go skimming over the turf, sent triumphantly in "drives" and "puts" by the same fair steady hand that used to croquet Bébé Beresford, as he phrased it, "out of all existence." Still, surely, the Marquise de St. Hilaire gives her croquet teas.

In that lovely garden—where sun and shade chase one another over grass and flowers, where the view is heavenly and the air is sweet—it was Madame de St. Hilaire's delight to gather her favorite coterie of an afternoon. And there, a few days after her dinner party, she was seated under the broad shade of a sweet-scented tree, her feet perched carefully upon a velvet stool, a white shawl thrown lightly over her shoulders, a broad parasol shielding her unbonneted head and her dainty cap from the wind and air. Lu and Fanfan lay curled on a small rug beside her; and Gilbert, in a happy condition of *dolce far niente*, was stretched on the grass at her feet, lounging as only an Englishman can lounge, with that curious power of voluntary resignation

to the perfect enjoyment of utter laziness which generally accompanies much real energy and strength.

"Play croquet? No, not for all the world on a day like this, when it is so perfectly delicious to do nothing." Such had been his answer to Morton's appeal to his energies and to his aunt's pretended scoldings, when he had thrown himself down beside her and lay gazing up through the autumn leaves at that wonderful sky.

Bébé had come over from Pau for the afternoon, and was fixing the hoops busily on the croquet-ground, while the marquis and Jeanne distributed mallets, and Morton and Lucile discussed the sides. A Monsieur de Challonier had fortunately arrived a few minutes before, and accepted an invitation to the game with alacrity; so the match of six could be made up, notwithstanding Gilbert's disaffection. They waited only for the baron now.

Meantime the select little tea-party of the marquise arrived — the comte and comtesse from Château de Beaulieu; Monsieur and Madame de Veuil, to look after their two daughters, who had preceded them on foot by the short cut through the valley, having been fetched by Gilbert and Morton earlier in the afternoon.

As the De Veuil carriage drove up to the croquet-ground, two servants appeared carrying the tea-tray, which, with some clusters of beautiful fruit, some glasses of lemonade and cups of iced coffee, was laid on a round rustic table beneath the shadow of the broad-leaved tree by the marquise's side. It was just at one end of the croquet-ground, this seat and table, erected in the shade especially for her. She could watch the game from here, and she did watch it, always joining eagerly in the disputes that rose thick and fast as the match proceeded, and siding ever with her husband, who was expert but speechless, against the baron, who was voluble, but always in the wrong — a piece of conjugal partisanship which the baron resented most bitterly, but the marquise continued stanch.

"Ha! see there," she would cry, "Monsieur le Baron, the injustice that my poor Léon would suffer did I not defend him against your stratagems. Yes, he has indeed well croqueted your ball. Ah, Dieu!"

But the baron was late to-day, and they still waited for him; so presently the marquise said, "As you do not begin, Léon, had you not better come first and have your coffee and tea? See, it is here, and it will be all cold long before your horrid game is done."

"A good suggestion," said Morton. "Come, let us fortify ourselves for combat by an invigorating cup. Gilbert, you lazy fellow!" he called out, "if you will not play, we shall at least utilize you to hand round some tea."

"With all the pleasure in life," said Gilbert, dreamily. "Does any body want some? Mademoiselle Lucile, I beg your pardon, can I do any thing for you?"

He sat up as he spoke, and, raising his hat, tipped it over his eyes, and smiled as the whole party of antagonists strolled up the croquet-ground to the tea-table, and grouped themselves round the marquise under the spreading tree.

Jeanne and Lucile looked fresh and pretty in soft Indian silk dresses and geranium-crimson ribbons, very becoming to their warm, bright coloring and big Spanish eyes. They wore broad-brimmed sun-hats set coquettishly on their pretty heads, the wide flaps turned up on one side with a bunch of wild flowers, and lined with geranium silk, matching exactly with the trimming of their dress. They both obeyed presently the suggestion of Morton, that they should all imitate Gilbert and sit down on the grass. The comtesse and Madame de Veuil were accommodated right and left of the marquise with chairs, and supplied with their favorite beverage of iced lemonade—what Monsieur de Veuil called "quelque chose de rafraichissante." He sipped it complacently himself, and pressed it enthusiastically upon the ladies. The marquis was becoming very hot, even now before his game began, so he took his wife's solicitous advice, and sat down quietly upon a wicker chair, opened his coat-flaps very wide, fanned himself gently with his straw hat, and sipped a cup of warm tea, "a tisane," as he called it, to prevent a chill.

And thus they were all sitting—a complacent, picturesque party—enjoying alike the heat and the shadow, the soft sense of fatigue and the pleasure of repose, and sipping respectively their tea, coffee, and lemonade: all were perfectly satisfied with the state of matters—excepting Gilbert. He alone among them veiled a certain restlessness beneath his pretended indolence and ease; he was vaguely conscious that the party was still incomplete, that he wanted and looked forward to something more, and that—neither a game of croquet nor the coming of Baron Keffel.

Quite suddenly he sprung to his feet. He had been looking from under his low-tipped hat for some time away beyond the croquet-ground down the slope that reached into the valley, toward the blue smoke curling from the chimneys of the Swiss house; and now he had caught sight of some one—the princess, surely, of the enchanted palace of the day before—coming slowly over the meadow at the foot of the hill and turning up the narrow pathway that led through the garden to Château St. Hilaire.

"Ha!" he exclaimed to his aunt, "there is Madame Zophée coming up the hill; but she is making straight for the house. Shall I go and tell her we are all here?"

"My dear boy, do. Why, she would have to go all up the hill and down again, and in this heat, too. Catch her, there is a darling child, if you can. Dear me! I wish there was a way through that great railing, Léon. We must have a wicket made just there."

"Not for me, thank you," said Gilbert, laughing; and in another instant he had crossed the croquet-lawn, sprung lightly over the railings, plunged into the thick wood, and was running at top speed down the precipitous bank, endangering, but just saving, his neck every moment in his rapid springs over tangled brush-wood and long, knotty roots; he came in sight again, skimming over the turf toward the garden-road where Madame Zophée was slowly winding her way through the sunlit meadows, long before Monsieur de Veuil had shut that expressive mouth of his, which had sprung wide open in his surprise.

"Mon Dieu! What energy have those English!"

"Ah, ha!" said the old comte. "They do make well the jump."

"Yes," said the marquise, proudly, "there is not much real laziness about him."

A few minutes more and, with flushed cheeks and hat in hand, Gilbert was back again, walking slowly through the flower-garden along the terrace by Madame Zophée's side. He brought her up to the croquet-ground, and stood fanning himself violently, and pushing back his tumbled hair during the little bustle of her reception, and then he found her a shady corner, a little back from the marquise and the tea-table; and, having carried her some iced coffee, and refreshed himself, at Monsieur de Veuil's entreaty, with some cool lemonade, he threw himself down again on the grass in her near vicinity, feeling somehow this time that, for the moment, there was nothing left in life to be desired.

"Dieu! what a domes-tick scene!" This was the next remark that broke upon his repose, uttered in snappish and sardonic tone that induced every body to start and turn round, with the certainty of secing Baron Keffel. And there he was, standing at the corner of the lawn, pausing to inspect the party, with an admiration of which he himself was full worthy a share, being resplendent this afternoon in a rural costume. He wore white pantaloons, broad straw-hat, coat of a huge gray check—in fact, Scotch; and his own private weapon, ebony handled and ivory tipped, was flourished menacingly in one hand. Combat was for the moment forgotten, however, in poetic contemplation.

"What a domes-tick spectacle! It touches me, dear marquise, to the very depth of my heart."

"Or it would, if heart and depths were not alike a mythical existence," she answered. "Come here, you cynical old bachelor, and tell us if you are in good humor and will have a cup of tea."

"Ah!" he sighed, approaching her with his quick, uncertain footsteps, and bowing, hat doffed, almost to the ground. "What do we not owe to the charming queen of our society, Madame la Marquise de St. Hilaire, who introduces into our circles of solitude and barbarity the delightful customs of England's family life?"

"Bah, nonsense!" began the marquise.

"How touching!" continued the baron, pathetically. "The good papa"—indicating the marquis, who acknowledged the compliment instantly with a bland bow; "the beautiful mother, who presides at the festive board," he went on, waving a hand to the marquise, who, however, only responded with that snappish, "Will you hold?" "And then the branch, Morton, and the charming fiancée—"

"You are more insufferably ridiculous than usual," interrupted the marquise at this point; "keeping every body waiting, too, for the croquet-match the whole afternoon. Will you sit down, I say? Will you have your tea? or shall I send the tray away and make you play without it?"

"Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed, with very real alarm, for he saw a servant approaching across the garden at that moment, and he knew madame to be capable of revenge. "I will be good, then: I will take this seat beside you, and be docile and obedient and grateful. Ah, what a cup of tea! Madame, your fair hand has lent the subtle charm: it is exquisite. Ah, Ciel, this is 'deleecious!' I do call it 'deleecious!'"

And, like a bristling old tomcat soothed for a moment into a state of purr, he spread his silk handkerchief over his duck pantaloons, sighed complacently, and sipped his tea.

"Madame Zophée," he said, presently, "when am I to have that promised enjoyment of a glass of golden caravan from you? Ah, that brittle thing—a woman's promise! broken ever, ever made again."

"No, no, not broken—only delayed," said Madame Zophée.

"Chai," he went on, meditatively; "the golden chai, that is the bulwark of domestic life in Russia, Madame la Marquise."

"Containing," put in Bébé, "perhaps a little more acidity even than we infuse into our domestic concoctions, *vide* the lemon-juice."

"Bébé, Bébé!" cried the marquise and Morton, simultaneously; "what an execrable effort at a pun!"

"Good for me," said Bébé, philosophically. "Do you know, baron, how *we* really make the beverage at the domestic hearth?"

"What? no, no! I can not ever make it at all," said the baron, eager for immediate information; and then Bébé sung,

> "Lovely woman is the sugar,
> Spoons we poor men always be;
> Matrimony is hot water—
> *So* we make our cup of tea."

"That is capital, capital, most capital!" roared the baron.

But the marquise shook her head at both of them, and cried, "You naughty Bébé! I will not have you bringing your vulgar little fast songs here. I wish you were nearer, you wicked child! I should like to box your ears."

"Ah, well," continued the baron. "I do not know, I am not all approval of the domestic life of Great Britain. I, have, seen it also myself."

"Ah, but—" exclaimed Madame la Comtesse, bending toward her hostess. "It is all that can be surely of what is most beautiful, the life of the family in your land?"

"My dear comtesse," replied the marquise, "believe me there is a deal of nonsense talked upon that as upon most other subjects on which people have preconceived prejudices and fixed ideas. English home-life is all very well—God forbid I should say a word to disparage it—but, believe me, I for one have found domestic bliss is not confined within the shores of Britain, and that no happiness of family life can exceed that to be found in many parts of France, my dear madame, and most especially on the côteaux of the Pyrenees."

"Brava!" cried the baron, "brava!" And as for the marquis at this juncture, he found it necessary to express his feelings by laying down his cup, hat, and handkerchief, and stepping gallantly over to clasp and kiss tenderly his wife's hand. With profound courtesy he bent before her as he murmured, "Thank you—thank you infinitely, my Violet—my love."

"Well," said the baron, presently, having had all the refreshment desirable for him by this time, and feeling ready for a return to his chronic condition of general combat—"well, as the marquise gives the lead to me, I will say the truth. For the English domestic existence I would not give that—Pouff!" And he snapped his fingers,

shrugged his shoulders, and pursed out his lips with indescribable expression.

"Ha, come! I will not allow that!" cried the marquise. "Baron! baron! Order, order! My turn!" For the baron went on, persistently:

"No, not *that*, I say, not a straw. It is all Sunday rost-biff and Christmas plum-pudding; but no, not for me, it has no 'distraction.' I, will, tell, you. I went once to England—three times, you know, I went indeed altogether—but once for this alone, to study the château life, the great domestic home of England. I had a friend; I knew him in Vienna. He marry, has two sons and a daughter, make a home, and became a family man, and I went to see him. Well! all was charming—dinner charming, evening charming. Handsome wife, every thing delightful, so I think at first. But in two or three days I see my friend was altered. What was he? I can not say. Dull, stupid, troubled, and his wife so, often also. There was coals, and servants, and cooking," he continued, checking off the national and domestic trials on his fingers; "and there was company to come, or not coming, or something. Oh, so much! I begin to see that even with a great deal of money it was a most difficult thing to live the domestic life of Britain at all. It was indeed a most intricate art. He was dull, my friend, cross—"

"Bored, I dare say," suggested Bébé.

"Well, yes; bored—so you call it—and so did he. I say to him, 'My friend,' I say, 'you go and distract yourself;' and he replied, 'Good God, I am distracted enough already.' So I answer, 'Oh no. Take madame—she is charming—go to town, to London, saunter a little, look in the shops, smoke a cigar on the boulevards or in the cafés, go in the opera, buy a new dress for madame, and you will come home refreshed—perfectly distracted.' And he replied, finally, 'Perfectly distracted, I dare say. I should certainly come home most infernally bored.' So I say good-bye, and I come back, and I write that month in the 'Review of the Strange Manners,' in Berlin—I write that the life of the castle in Great Britain is a very perplexing thing."

"'Review of the Strange Manners,'" exclaimed Bébé, "of which you wrote, baron, doubtless some strange things!"

"I told them," said the baron, stoutly, "I liked three things in England much—veerry much."

"And they were?" said Bébé.

"The Tower of London, Oxford City, and—the fat oxes of Lord Valsingham," replied the baron, conclusively, rising as he spoke, in emphatic evidence that the occasion was ended, and the argument conducted to a theory and a final point.

"*After* that," said the marquise, with a sweetly ironical smile, as if for the moment he was utterly beneath answer or opposition of any kind—"after that, *will* you go and play your game of croquet? a little minor accomplishment of which at least you owe, Monsieur le Baron, your scientific knowledge and superior skill to your prolonged and successful visits to *my* country."

"Madame la Marquise is always charming, always amiable, always complimentary," said the baron, smiling in bland acknowledgment of her flattery, which he appropriated in earnest, and with great satisfaction to himself.

Then he shouldered his mallet, and broke ruthlessly into the different little duets which had all this time been murmured in pleasant under-tones by the idle croquet-players in various corners beneath the shady tree. One and all they were roused now by him and marshaled, and were soon in high combat upon the field.

Not by any means the least pleasant of these duets had been that one carried on very *sotto voce* between Madame Zophée and Gilbert, in a continuous running translation, for his benefit, on her part, of the generally eccentric language of all the past conversation, which had indeed rambled about backward and forward in a curious manner, calculated to suit the understandings of all parties, from broken English into voluble French. Now the croquet-match was fairly started, the marquise joined in this *tête-à-tête*, while Monsieur de Veuil devoted himself to preparing a fresh glass of lemonade for the comtesse, and the old comte escorted Madame de Veuil on a short and stately promenade round the precincts of the flower-garden.

As the afternoon advanced, and the feeling of the approaching sunset came creeping on, and the light began to glow and deepen over the glorious landscape, and the shadows to stretch broadly across the lawn, it was, as Baron Keffel loved to say, "deleecious" to sit under that spreading tree and toss the conversation-ball here and there in occasional and desultory remarks; to let the eyes wander idly over the changing view across valley and mountain: or to watch, for variety, with many a burst of laughter and ringing merriment, the party of antagonists on the croquet-ground, who were all worked up into various stages of violent excitement long before any body had reached the middle hoop.

Gilbert declared that croquet was a decided mistake, except, as in the present instance, as a spectacle for the amusement of your inactive friends. In this light he very much enjoyed it, lying comfortably upon the shady grass, with one hand supporting his head and the other occupied in picking industriously every daisy within his reach, and throwing it, for his own edification and much to *her* annoyance, with very dexterous aim straight at Fanfan's nose, waking up that somniferous little person each time with a jump and a vicious bark which caused his aunt much excitement and agitation. He listened, in a dreamy, very pleasant frame of mind the while, to the conversation that rippled on between Madame Zophée and the marquise, interrupting it only now and then as he broke into a laugh or exclamation over the croquet match.

The venomous expression of the baron's face was very irresistible, as he took one of his wary though unsuccessful aims at an enemy's ball, sending his own driving over the ground with a vicious energy of purpose deserving of a better result. His stamp of fury as the ball glided rapidly forward, quite six or eight inches wide of its point, was delightful, and Bébé's triumphant wardance over each of these achievements did not tend to tranquilize his nerves. As the game went on, indeed, the splenetic and explosive condition at which the baron arrived was something terrible.

"I can not think it is good for him," said Monsieur de Veuil, solemnly, at one point at which the baron's agitation had quite exceeded

all rational bounds. "It is not good, it is dangerous, to agitate so much the mind, with such a weather too. Madame la Marquise, you agree with me. Entreat him, I do beg of you, to tranquilize himself."

"Bah! Allez!" responded the marquise. "There is no fear; be tranquil, Monsieur de Veuil. He adores the emotions, I tell you he does. He loves to excite himself! And how would he do so, I ask you, in his life, without a family or any cares, unless he had now and then the innocent indulgence of a little rage at croquet? He would not know otherwise any of the great passions or excitements of this life. Leave him; he is perfectly happy: that last explosion at Bébé has done him good; he is much better now. Ah, my good Léon, that was a noble stroke!"

There were truly much pride and triumph in her heart as she watched the marquis play, for he sent his spinning ball with a careful dexterity that carried it surely to its mark; and as he poised his huge, soft figure, and took his slow, steady aim, the baron's outbreak of impatience was always drowned in the "Brava! brava!" of the marquise and the eager applause of her fair hands.

So the afternoon waned onward, and the shadows lengthened, and the subtle chill of the sunset began to creep into the air; and Madame Zophée drew her shawl suddenly close round her shoulders, and said she must be going home: but the combat still waxed hot and violent upon the croquet-field.

"I must see the game out, my dear," said the marquise, wrapping herself up in her soft vicuña. "It is one of the chief pleasures I have in life, you know, seeing my Léon put the baron to the flight. Is that Madame de Veuil's carriage? You must wait a moment, my dear madame, for your two charming girls. And is the comtesse going? Well, a thousand times au revoir, my dear friend. I will not ask you to pause an instant; the evening is certainly becoming chill. And, Zophée, must you, too, leave me? Well, Gilbert shall open the gate for you below the garden, and so you will reach your own little nest through your postern-door, dearest, by the quickest way."

Madame Zophée had no time to answer just then, or even to say her adieus, for suddenly Bébé called out, as he saw the party round the tea-table was beginning to move, "Is every body going? Stop a minute! Madame la Marquise, I beg your pardon—did I interrupt you? Monsieur le Baron, I see your gesticulations. *Is* it my turn? Ah, well, I will not keep you waiting a moment, but I have two very pleasant bits of information which I must not forget to impart."

"Ah?" "So?" "What?" "How?" according to the usages of their respective languages, broke from each listener, as Bébé paused triumphant to enjoy the eagerness of his audience for an instant, until his own impatience to give information prevailed, and he exclaimed, "Have you heard that the first meet of the winter is fixed for this day fortnight, and that Graham, the M. F. H., has returned? and that, moreover, beyond this delightful piece of news, there is another? The season is to be opened in due form at the Gassion on the Thursday following by a bachelors' ball."

"No; is that really true?" cried Morton. "That is famous."

"Yes, quite true. A lot of us fellows settled it at the club last night. Not the big B. Ball, of course; you know that must come off, as usual, at Mid-Lent—at Mi-Carême; but this is to be a little throw-off, just to set things going."

"Ah! on purpose, I fancy," said Morton, with a side-glance and smile toward Jeanne, "to catch *me* for the last time on the acting committee. Hurra! once more. Then away goes my rosette. I'll hand it on to the next comer for good."

"Then, are people arriving already?" asked the marquise.

"Lots of them!" cried Bébé. "A new turnout of young ladies show up on the boulevard every day, and the club list is fast filling. It is going to be a capital season, madame. Ah, I hear you, baron; I see—do not agitate yourself, I entreat of you; I am coming. There! that was a comfortable little corner you had got into, but I think I have croqueted your ball."

"And now I must really go," said Madame Zophée, rising. "Dear marquise, adieu."

"Chérie, are you positively off? Then Gilbert shall go and open the gate."

"I will walk home with Madame Zophée, with her permission," said Gilbert, who had sprung up instantly when she spoke of leaving.

"No, no; please stay comfortably where you are; do not let me disturb you. I can open the gate easily, and I think I know my way."

"But, please, I want to go," said Gilbert, eagerly, in that downright, simple, and very matter-of-fact way of his.

"But I do not require you. Really, do sit down again. Dear marquise, farewell."

"But, Madame Zophée, stay one moment," he urged. "You don't forbid me—not in real earnest? May I not escort you?"

"I had much rather you did not. I dislike particularly disturbing people on my account, so you had much better stay and finish your cigar."

He flung the cigar away as she answered him, and stood opposite her a moment, looking his appeal for her permission as she half hesitated and paused. "You do not *forbid* me?"

"I think I do. Yes, I am rigorously exclusive in the defense of my rights, and beyond that door through which I let you pass yesterday I like to preserve my solitary and despotic reign."

"Beyond the door, yes, I dare say!" he exclaimed, triumphantly. "There you may assert your rights; but I beg to state that your tyranny is limited in its range of exercise, Madame Zophée, and on this side that particular barrier I deny your power. You can not forbid me walking through the grounds of St. Hilaire and across my aunt's flower-garden, however unpleasant you may choose to be when we reach the boundaries of your especial kingdom in our promenade."

"No more I can," she answered, laughing. "Well, just to that point I suppose I must submit; on one condition, remember, Sir Gilbert—that you promise to respect my right of way in your tours through the country on horseback in future. Come, then. I must really go."

CHAPTER X.

HER PORT-FOLIO.

Sir Gilbert and Madame Zophée went off together across the flower-garden, he walking by her side, talking and laughing still with that ease of manner and gayety of spirit which she found so pleasant. Pulling a rose here and there to give to her, and rattling on about Bébé and the baron and the croquet match all the way down the slope and through the beech-wood till they had reached the path along which he had led Dinah home through the twilight the night before—then they were in view of Madame Zophée's gate. All the while there had remained in his voice and manner that ease and unconsciousness—apparently equally of himself and of her.

It kept the conversation on the ground of most surface pleasantry, disarmed all her usual reserve, and made her feel at home and at ease with him; more at home, indeed, than she had allowed herself to feel with any one for many a day, even with a friend of her own sex, and far less with one of his. But from the very first he had somehow disarmed her; his boyish, sunny ways were so very pleasant to her; and it seemed almost foolish to be ever watching and warding off the advance of their acquaintance when there was really *nothing* in his manner save that eager, ready courtesy which seemed to spring alike for every body, and certainly for every woman, old or young; nothing in his clear blue eyes, as they turned continually upon her, but kindliness and cordiality and a boyish satisfaction in her presence. He seemed so young to her, so much younger than her life-sobered self. Yet she started and said "No" directly, when he requested, as the wicket came in sight, that he might accompany her still, just along that little pathway to her home.

"Do you not want me to pull a few more roses for you?" he said.

"No, thank you very much. There are so few left now I think I shall let them live out their own little day."

"But there really were some beautiful clusters very high up yesterday, which it just struck me, I remember, would be quite in full bloom to-day. It is really a pity not to gather them."

"Thank you, no. I shall let them bloom unmolested where they are."

"Then I must speak my real wish," he continued, eagerly, "and lay aside all subterfuge and excuse. May I go all the way home with you, and see your port-folios of drawings?"

"Now, Sir Gilbert, that was really a base subterfuge, trying to delude me into a belief in your amiability and desire to be of use. And now this is also a mere excuse for the idlest curiosity. You can not really care for my drawings the least bit in the world."

"But I do," he answered. "I have been thinking of those dear old monks ever since I saw them, and wondering over the odd dreamy sort of life they must lead there among those pictures and beautiful old jewels; and you can not imagine how new these ideas are to me, and how I wish to see into some more of them."

"Do not tempt me!" she answered, almost wistfully. "You do not know what it is to an artist to have a sympathetic spectator, such as you, at all events, pretend to be."

"And as I am," he went on. "*You* do not know, Madame Zophée, what it is to have lived the sort of life I have, and to wake up all of a sudden to find out that you are pretty nearly ignorant of almost every thing you want to know."

"But you are not ignorant, Sir Gilbert—as people go," she was going to add, but she stopped the remark with instinctive tact at that point, and he finished it instead.

"Not as fellows go, I dare say," he answered. "I have been educated in an ordinary kind of way like my neighbors; but there is a sort of realizing of things one does not get at home—there is no doubt of it; and a man has so little time for books and reading travels, or thinking any thing about it all, once his school-days are over, what with hunting and shooting and all that, and the parish and magisterial matters besides. And so really, before I met you, and before I came here, I did not take in at all that there were other nations in the world besides us, and other countries with the same interests and full of histories of human life; only I had a vague idea that I disliked a foreigner. Now I want all of a sudden to know all about it."

"But I fear my port-folio of drawings will not teach you much."

"Yes it will; it will help me to realize—that one picture of yours did—about other religions, you know, and the life people lead who believe differently from what we do, and the art, and the literature, and all the results that grow out of the difference."

"If your mind travels as fast as that," she answered, "you will get very quickly over a great deal of ground."

"And that is just what it does do," he went on; "it travels very fast, and I go groping away often in the dark, quite satisfied, never seeing a thing for ages; and then, all of a sudden, it flashes upon me and lights up my whole mind in a new way, and then it takes hold upon it instantly firm and fast, and I never let it go again. That is my character, you see, Madame Zophée."

And so in the course of prolonged experience she found it to be.

"But really—my port-folio of drawings—it is nonsense! they can not be of any use to you. Here is the gate, and I really think you had better go back."

But as he pushed it open for her, somehow *he* passed through as well, and then he closed it behind him, and they were threading their way, still side by side, along the path by the stream toward the back entrance to the chalet before he had nearly finished his eager answer to her last remark.

"Yes; every thing you say is of use to me, and makes me feel inclined to go back to the school-room and begin over again to learn. I can not describe to you what a curious sort of pleasure it has suddenly become to me to feel the powers of realizing the existence of other countries, and of sympathy with other nations coming suddenly into life. I feel, Madame Zophée, as if I had lighted upon the spring of a wonderful, hidden, and far-winding stream, which I long intensely to follow through its course."

"That is simply that your latent national love of travel and exploration and enterprise has been waked up. It has always been peculiar to your

countrymen, you know. Why, the old stories of your Challoner and Anthony Jenkinson, as far back as the days of our Ivan and your Elizabeth, fighting their way up the Dvina and down the Volga, to seek for Eastern treasures at Nijni and Astrakhan, were the favorite histories of my youngest reading days; and all over the world you are doing the same thing still."

"Not all of us," he said, impetuously. "There *is* a sort of man who never goes abroad, and I was rapidly growing into one myself a few months ago."

"But now you never will," she answered. "The energy of travel is very lively in you indeed, Sir Gilbert, and more than travel—of exploration, and power of theorizing from what you see. I suppose *that* always *was* the difference in your nation between man and man, as you have all gone rambling about the world. But, talking of the Volga, here we are at the back entrance to my kingdom. Will you come round this way and see my pets—my old Belgian friend, and my Pyrenean watchman, and my Russian horses? You know I call them Volga and Vazuza."

"What pretty names! But why? What do they mean? The Volga is a great river, is it not?"

"Yes; and Vazuza is a river also. It is one of the old peasant legends that the two challenged each other in a race once to see which could first reach the Caspian Sea; and the Vazuza started first, at a rapid and impulsive pace, but grew soon exhausted, so that, by-and-by, the Volga, coming along at a grand, steady, even flow, overtook her, and poor little Vazuza, dreading to be left behind, cast herself on the mercy of her stronger sister, and prayed that she would bear her to the sea. Thus it was that their streams mingled, and they flow on together. And so I call one of my pets Vazuza, because she is so eager and impetuous, and the other the Volga, because she is the elder and steadier of the two: the fiery young one could never achieve a lengthy journey without her. But you shall see them. Come in this way."

They turned together off the winding path, went through a broad gate-way and across a yard behind the chalet to the neat little stable-door, where they came upon a large dun-colored dog, lying unchained on a thick mat by his wooden kennel.

"Ah, here is my Dolle, sound asleep. Get up, you dear old hound, and show yourself. Look, Sir Gilbert, is he not a darling? Is he not worthy of his peaceful repose here? Poor old dog! he has done many a hard day's work."

"Is that the kind of hound they work in Belgium?"

"Yes, and in some parts of Russia too. Did I tell you how I found Dolle? I was traveling with my guardian and his daughter Zaida, and we stopped four weeks once at a big hotel in Belgium by the sea-side near Bruges, and my window looked over a court, where, day after day, I used to see them loading Dolle's luggage-cart so high and with such heavy boxes, and his poor old legs tottering under it all, hardly able to stand. And Zaida and I used to feed him till he got to know us, and he would drag his cart after us along the garden if they left him for one moment alone; and one day we persuaded my guardian, and he let us buy him for the price of a strong young dog; and so he traveled all the way to Russia with us, and then with me down here. Dear old Dolle! I fear he will not live very much longer."

The old dog rose as she called him, and made a feeble effort to wag his tail; and Gilbert stood by admiring and deeply sympathizing with her devotion to her old favorite, as she took his huge sleepy head between her two little white hands, and kissed him tenderly between his blinking eyes.

"I see you really are nearly as fond of your four-footed friends as I am."

"No one could help loving this faithful old thing," she answered. "Zingaro, the Pyrenean, keeps watch at the house-door; Dolle has been so long accustomed to the stables, he likes to be about here; and Lustoff, you know, never leaves me, wherever I am, either night or day. He lies on a big rug beside my bed while I am asleep, and his paw scraping the door is the first sound I hear of a morning as Marfa's footsteps pass down-stairs. Now, will you push that door hard for me? Here we are at the stables."

And in they went. The pretty pair of dark bays excited Gilbert's admiration as much as Joe's proudly exhibited stud at St. Hilaire had done, and he stood, half alarmed and half delighted, as Madame Zophée left his side to walk up close between her favorites, and smoothed Vazuza's pretty, arching neck.

"This is Vazuza," she said, "this restless, fidgeting young thing; and this steady old one is the Volga. Is she not beautiful and good?"

"They are very pretty," said Gilbert; "but ought you to go up so close to them, Madame Zophée?"

"Oh, they know me so well; I come in often. They are only fidgeting because they want a lump of sugar, and think I must have one hidden somewhere. Volga is really very old. I used to ride her some years ago, before I came here, and she knows every tone in my voice. I feel her really a companion and friend. Is it not so, douschinka?" she continued, laying her cheek down, with a saddened expression, upon the Volga's neck. "She is so accustomed to me in every sort of mood. She thinks she is responsible for the safe-conduct of both Vazuza and me. Good-bye, you pretty one! No, I have no bits of sugar to-night, not a scrap. Stand still; don't fidget, Vazuza, till I get past."

"I declare, it looks fearfully dangerous. I am glad to see you safely out," said Gilbert, as she slid her way from between the two pairs of stamping heels, and escaped laughingly from within reach of Vazuza's mouth, which opened in playful though alarming-looking efforts to catch her dress.

"They are so accustomed to me. It would not do for any one but me or Ivan to go up between them so; but they do not really mind either of us."

"I suppose they are Orloffs, are they not, like nearly all the Russian horses one hears any thing about?"

"No; oddly enough, they are not. They come from my old country home—my guardian's, you know, in Vladimir; they were reared on the place. He has numbers of them, all with arched necks and long, bushy tails, like these

two. He gave me Volga on a birthday once, and sent me Vazuza soon after I came here."

Dozens of questions sprung to Gilbert's lips as she talked thus to him; and a wondering interest in herself and her belongings made him feel there was much, so much, he should like to ask and know: but a recollection of Morton's warning restrained him, and he asked nothing, only looked curiously round as she led him through the garden to the other side of the house, and toward the open window by which they had entered the evening before. By a sort of tacitly established consent, they walked on together, and she said nothing more about his going back or not accompanying her, but talked to him in a dreamy, spontaneous sort of way, as if she had quite forgotten that his being there was any thing beyond her ordinary custom and habit.

So they entered together, to find the fire burning low, and the room dark and cheerless, the sun-glow having left it, and the shadows falling heavily across her pictures and in the corners where the tazzas stood. Madame Zophée shivered, and said,

"Dear! how late I am, and how Marfa will scold me! And this room—how inhospitably dull and dark it seems!"

"We can remedy that, surely, in a very few minutes," said Gilbert. "May I," he added, hesitatingly, "may I put on coals for you or poke the fire?"

"You would find either very difficult," she replied, with a laugh, "simply for the want of coals and pokers. But I dare say we can manage. Do let us make it burn up before Marfa comes in; then she won't know how cold it has been. But I should not wonder, now, if you did not know how to make up a wood fire."

She knelt down on the rug as she spoke, and he answered, looking doubtfully on, "I have made one *in* the woods many a time. I am sure I could help you;" and then he knelt down also on one knee, a little distance away from her, and watched while she laid big blocks of wood deftly across the shining brass dogs above the pile of white, smoldering ashes, in the midst of which, as she moved them gently, appeared a hot, crimson glow. Then she drew down the "blower" sharply for a few moments, and waited, looking round at him with a smile.

"Well," he said, "what good will that do?"

She shook her head. "How impatient you are! Wait—there! do you not hear?"

A roaring gust, as she spoke, seemed to rush up the chimney, and in another instant she threw up the iron covering again, and disclosed a bright, blazing fire. The wood crackled, and the flames danced up and wrapped her in the warm reflection of their light. She knelt still for a few minutes, looking into the fire, her deep, dark eyes returning the glistening reflection, and the color on her cheek glowing with the soft lustre of "a light seen through alabaster"—the glow of the eager inner life that with passionate fervor flushed and faded, and went and came.

He was delighted with the fire she had made for him, as it burned up and danced and crackled with a cheery, noisy blaze, and he remained still kneeling before it, rubbing his hands, and looking about the room, recognizing it all again, while Madame Zophée moved on to a low chair at one corner, and leaned back and threw her hat aside, as if tired out with the day's exertions, and glad to be at rest. Her eyes, with that deep fire-glow in them, glistened with strange, unspoken feeling, as if her thoughts had become suddenly sad and absent while he still knelt there.

He watched her furtively for an instant, then glanced again round the room. They were both silent until—

"I beg your pardon," she said, suddenly. "I am so accustomed to solitude, you know, my thoughts go wandering so easily away; and I am tired this evening."

"And I beg yours," he answered, rising instantly to his feet. "I have inflicted myself persistently upon you, notwithstanding every possible remonstrance from your side. Never mind; forgive me, and I will take myself away."

"No, it is not that. Stay," she said; "I did not mean to be rude to you; and, indeed, believe me, I think it very kind of you to care to come. Let me see—do not go—what was I to have shown you? Oh yes; my drawings. Would you care to look at them, really? There they are: in that huge port-folio you will find all my collection from several wandering years."

Gilbert turned eagerly. "May I look at them?"

"Certainly, if you care to do so. Will you draw the stand here toward the fire? There is a better light just now in the evening from this window, away from that screen of leaves. Now, sit there, Sir Gilbert—that is it—and turn them all over; and when you are curious about any of the subjects, apply to me."

It was like an unread book to him, this experience—quite new and intensely interesting; it was a phase of life fresh and unexplored, novel in its attraction, seductive as it was strange.

He sat down on the low chair she had indicated near her own; he bent eagerly forward; he opened the large port-folio with its Russian-leather covering, curious monogram, and clasps of gold; and then, with an exclamation of eagerness and delight, he plunged into its contents.

He came first upon her latest sketches—water-color drawings of the country round her on the Pyrenees: the warm colorings of autumn sunsets over the giant hills lay rich and glowing before him as one after another he slowly turned each sheet. Then the fresh, bright tints of the spring met him; light, washy sketches of the sunlight silvering the rippling streams of the côteaux, and the green tints of the opening leaves on the clustering woods.

Numbers of these he turned over first, exclaiming and admiring as each came fresh upon him, wondering much within himself why he had never really cared for water-color drawings before. He had never known, indeed, that he had any taste, to speak of, for scenery or painting, but this afternoon it seemed suddenly to develop into life; and whether the beauty of the paintings, the scenes they depicted, or Madame Zophée's soft voice as she leaned slightly toward him and murmured the name of each, formed the true element of its existence, he never asked himself, and he would have found it difficult to tell.

By-and-by he came to different scenes. He had been pursuing his investigations calmly for nearly half an hour, turning sheet after sheet, Madame Zophée looking over each as he held it out to her with a critical, considerate eye;

looking with a real interest that was as natural and accustomed on her part as it was unfamiliar and unwonted on his.

She had been amused when he first asked to see her drawings, but, as he turned them over, she became rapidly interested in tracing her own progress displayed in them, from the first drawing to the last. Painting had been one of the chief occupations of her life for several years now; and as she sat there by him, leaning her cheek meditatively on her hand, glancing over his shoulder at one after another, her interest in her art and her love of it drew her out gradually from herself, absorbed in her mind all consciousness of any thing unusual in their circumstances, led her to take it as "quite natural" that they should scan her work thus together, and expelled from her thoughts any suspicions that this enthusiasm for art might be less genuine on his side, less familiar to him than to her. She loved the Pyrenees, she loved her artist's life among them; indeed, for many years it was all in her daily routine that could be called *life* for her.

Suddenly the scenes changed, and Gilbert exclaimed with astonishment, as he laid aside a sunny sketch of the valley of Bagnère and came upon, evidently, some other ranges of mountains, bolder, grander, wilder even than the Pyrenees —upon a painting of a great hill range by moonlight.

It was a winter scene: the mountains, rising in the far distance across a great wide plain, seemed to glisten like crystal in wintry robes of snow. The moon looked drowsily forth through the night air on them and on the silent plain that lay, vast and immeasurable, outstretched like a glittering silver sea. A solitary fox, with ears erect and brush drooping, stole stealthily over the snow, the single speck of animation and movement visible amidst the silence and the solitude. Far away, near the sky-line, half buried in the drifting snow, appeared the gables of a building. It was a post-house—low-roofed, log-built, and unpretending, but promising, in such a scene, to weary traveler in teljéga, or sleigh, a cozy corner by a huge stove-side, and the dear refreshment of the golden chai flowing, hot and delicious, from a fizzing samovar.

"Ah!" exclaimed Madame Zophée, softly, as Gilbert turned astonished toward her, with this sketch in his hand. "We have left the Pyrenees now and reached Caucasia; we have traveled far."

"What an extraordinary picture!" he said, wonderingly, his eyes fixed still upon the wild, weird scene.

"A Russian steppe," she explained. "Have you never seen a drawing of a bit of my country? That is very good, is it not? But it isn't an original of mine; it is only a copy."

"It is beautiful," said Gilbert. "But what a country! How glorious and stormy and wild it looks! And that fox stealing away—the wary old sinner!—how capitally it is done!"

"Yes, at least the original was. I have it upstairs.

"Ah!" he said, absently, still looking, full of interest, at the picture. "You did not paint it from nature yourself, of course. No—how could you?"

"No," she said, smiling, "I could not. When I was there I was much too young."

"But you have been there, have you—in that wild, desolate place?"

"In that very place. I can just remember it —that *pic* rising so grandly there, that opening beyond in the shoulder of the mountain; and, oh! I can quite recollect the night we slept at that old post-house. It is near Gevzk, in Cis-Caucasia. I remember how Petrush, the little child of the official, was kept up to amuse me while I had my chai. I was a child myself then."

"Were you? Do tell me; go on; describe it to me a little more."

"What, the 'stanzia'—the station, I mean? It was like many others in Russia. I was traveling with my father, you know. We were coming from Persia, from beyond the Caspian Sea; we traveled for weeks in a teljéga, a sort of queer snow-carriage, you know, when we crossed Caucasia, and it was my first journey; so, of course, many little incidents cling to my memory, though I was not ten years old."

"But your first journey. Fancy taking a child to such a country as that!"

"Taking her across it, you mean. We had to come over the steppes, you know, to reach my father's country from my own."

"Your own?"

"Yes. Ah! you do not know my own land was a very sunny one. We were coming to the Pyrenees, to little Amélie Les Bains, and we had to come to Moscow—at least my father wanted to go there just once again; so we had to cross the Caucasian steppes to come by Moscow to Western Europe from my far-off home."

"But is your country there—what you call your own?"

"Yes, my own, my very own, for I was born there—beautiful, sweet land of the sun! luxuriant, flower-gemmed, lovely land! Ah, yes! That is my only real *patrie*. See, I will show you a little sketch of *it* now: let us turn away from wild mountains and the dreary plains of snow."

She bent over him as she spoke, and turned the collection of drawings rapidly over, and, choosing out another, gave it him with a smile.

Swift transformation again! Sunshine (instead of moonlight) bathed a soft Southern scene in a dreamy, poetic lustre that blended harmoniously with drooping, feathery foliage and with delicate, bright-hued flowers: a blue sea glistened across a silvery beach, the aloe bloomed, and the rich tropical foliage waved above the flowers. It was the change from winter to summer, as from a frigid to a torrid zone, from the snow-reefed mountains and desolate plains of the steppes of Caucasia to the sunny South-lands on the Persian coasts of the Caspian Sea. To Gilbert it seemed as if he were wafted into dream-land, as vision after vision, all new, bewitching, and intensely suggestive, was passed, as if by magic wand, before his enchanted view.

"The sunny South-land," said Madame Zophée, quietly, "the land of my oldest memories and of my childhood's dream."

"And you were born there?"

"There, in that verandaed house. This is, again, but a copy from my father's paintings."

"Ah, your father?" he said, with a faint accentuation of inquiry in his tone, for all Morton's injunctions were forgotten between them; and it seemed quite natural now that he should draw

out, with softly expressed interest, all she might like to tell.

"My father—ah! he is no more. We traveled that long way together: we came across Russia, through all that wild snow, from our Persian home, and we came through Germany and to Paris, and down here to the dear Pyrenees, to Amélie-les-Bains—look at this sketch here—to this sweet, quiet little place across the valleys beyond Bagnère. And there he painted a little, and wrote still a little, and then he left me to Angèle, and he died. I was only ten years old."

"Left you!" repeated Gilbert, the sketch dropping unnoticed into the port-folio. He raised his eyes, as she stood by him with clasped hands and drooping, saddened face—raised them to fix them upon hers with intense eagerness and interest.

"Yes," she said; "we were alone, he and I; there was no one else—except Angèle. She was my Béarnaise nurse, and she was faithful and kind and good; she kept every thing for me—his books, and his money, and his pictures—until—"

"Well? until—"

"You are curious. Why should I tell you?" she exclaimed, with an impetuous gesture. "Why should you care to hear?"

"Because it is beautiful; it is like a fairy tale to me; like the strangest, sweetest story I have ever read or heard. Go on—do! You were here—here near Bagnère, in the Pyrenees."

"Yes, in the Pyrenees. Of course, that is why I love them, and why I came back to them *now*—now," she added, sadly, because I am alone again, and because I would see Angèle, my good, dear Angèle, who was such a mother to me in the old, old days."

"Oh, but go on!" he exclaimed, earnestly, looking up at her with the eager, boyish impatience so natural to him, and with a sweet light of interest and sympathy in his eyes that drew her out irresistibly to obey him and to go on.

"I staid with Angèle till I was twelve, here with my father's books and poems and pictures; and then a carriage came one day—there was no railway then—a great, huge carriage came, with four horses, and two Russian servants, and a queer, pompous secretary, driving, with my good Marfousha, in solemn state, inside. They came from St. Petersburg from my guardian, and they took me away."

"Away to St. Petersburg?"

"To St. Petersburg, yes; then to the plains of Vladimir, where we were many years—my guardian, and Zaida, and I. But I longed often to come back here. I wished to see Angèle again, and Bagnère, and the mountains, and Amélie-les-Bains, and my father's grave."

"How you have wandered across the world already!" continued Gilbert, after a moment's pause. "But why were you living first down—in Persia, was it? Why, I mean, were you so far away?"

"Ah! because my father went there before his marriage," she continued, hesitatingly. "He was sent away eastward, you know—exiled."

"Exiled?"

"Exiled. And for a poem. Ah! a little thing it seems, does it not?—only a score of lines; but they rang through Russia, and cost him his freedom and his home. My father was the poet Variazinka; but ah! of course, you have never heard his name."

"I think I have never heard any thing," said Gilbert, shaking his head with amusing gravity and decision.

"Not of Russian politics, I dare say—at least very little; but, nevertheless, his was a name well known. They made short work of him and his career, as regards St. Petersburg; but they left him some choice of refuge, and so, when his Siberian term of bondage was over, being still exiled from Russia, the Sun-lands became his home. They were thus my nursery, as I tell you; and therefore, when I came at length among my people of the far North, and to be brought up beside my friend Zaida, of fair coloring and flaxen locks, I seemed, by her, like a dusky sun-burned child of the South. Would you like to look at one more picture, just in illustration of my tale? See!"

Once more she bent over her port-folio, and drew forth another water-color, which she placed silently in his hand; and he looked at it intently for some moments, utterly speechless, with a smile of wonder and admiration curling his lip and softening his eyes.

It was a portrait this time, a full-length drawing of a girl. She was dressed in a quaint costume, a picturesque combination, though he was not aware of it, of a peasant-dress from the plains of Vladimir, adorned with some bright-colored touches of a warmer and more Southern type. It was the drawing of a young, energetic figure, of a soft, dusky countenance, full of expression in eyes, and lips, and brow. Framing the portrait in a warm background, the scenery was curious and characteristic. Rich shadows, deep and broad, fell behind her, throwing up the figure into bold relief; and across a vast, wide plain, a low, level sunset came straight upon her, flooding its rich, luminous glow upon her face. "The Sun-maid," with several lines of poetry, was scribbled in the English language below.

"I did not paint that either," she said, presently, with a low laugh. "An American did it, a friend of my guardian's, who staid with us a long time in Vladimir once, years ago. That was the rough sketch, and he gave it to me. He made a large picture from it, which he exhibited, I believe, under that name in his own country the following spring. He wrote the lines too. They are quoted from one of his American poets:

"'I grant you fond, I grant you fair,
Ye North-lands; and I grant you truth,
And faith as fix'd as any star,
And years as beautiful as youth.
But in the North-lands there are none
Of these bright daughters of the Sun.
Like winter night, like glittering star,
The shadowy eyes of these Sun-maids are.'"

Gilbert read the lines aloud in answer to her words. "The Sun-maid!" he repeated, softly. "What a pretty idea, and what a pretty name!"

"The painter said the lines were not correctly quoted—only adapted, to suit his picture. I have often looked for them in English and American books, but I have never come upon them anywhere. The name pleased my guardian, however, and he used to call me so for a long time, except when he preferred his other name for me, which I dare say in my old *sauvage* days was the most appropriate, after all."

"And that was— ?" said Gilbert, dreamily.

"'The Tsiganie,'" said Madame Zophée, as if musing over the recollection, half to herself, half addressing him, and a little laugh broke from her.

"The what?" said Gilbert, astonished, the word was so unfamiliar and so strange.

"'The Tsiganie,'" she answered again, in a low voice, with a deep flush covering her cheek for a moment as she realized what she had said, and as she glanced up, and the words dropped almost unbidden from her lips. "My mother was a native of these Southern lands. She lived and died there. When my father and I came to the Pyrenees, we left her beneath the palm-trees by that Persian Sea. They used to say in Russia that she had been a gypsy of Cis-Caucasia, a Tsiganie; so my father's was a poet's marriage and a poet's history in every respect, you see."

"The Sun-maid, indeed!" repeated Gilbert, still in an absent, wandering tone, as if he found in the term explanation harmonious and reconcilable of all the strange revelations she had been drawn out so curiously to make to him.

"So they used to call me," she said, lightly this time, and with a sudden vivid smile, as if to dissipate the influence of retrospection. "So they called me for many a day after I went to the chilly regions of Vladimir."

"Did you stay there then—always—" pursued Gilbert again, "until—until—"

"Until I married," was Madame Zophée's reply. "Until I married—yes, but it was not very long. These years were not very many; I married young."

"Madame Zophée," exclaimed Gilbert, suddenly, after an instant's pause, and turning to her as he spoke with the portrait still held eagerly in his hand, "how difficult it is for me to understand, or even to conceive, any thing really about your life!"

"I dare say," she said, smiling a little sadly in return, as she gathered up the sketches together.

"It has been all so wonderful, so different from any thing, from the history of any one, I have ever known before. It is like a bewitching story to me when I think of this—this portrait being you, with all that beautiful Southern life lying behind you, and that glorious country, and of all you must have seen and done. It is like a wonderful book to me. Indeed, indeed it is! Tell me more, tell me more," he went on.

"What can I tell you?" she said, turning away with sudden seriousness. "Of these old, bright days, I mean. I came, I went. From the far, far South up here, then to Vladimir, then hither and thither, always with the same sunny memories filling my heart; always with the shadow and the recollection of that Southern home, of my mother laid beneath the palm-trees, and of my poet father, with his wild dreams, and brilliant thoughts, and strange, vagrant ways. And then afterward, later, always—always," she continued, with sudden vehemence and pathos, as she turned from him toward the darkening window, and knit her fingers tightly together, "with one deep, powerful sentiment animating my whole being. It was gratitude, I tell you—a mighty gratitude; the utter devotion of my life to *another* life—to him who had been to me and mine, to my solitude and my orphanage, and, earlier, to my exiled father, our constant, untiring guardian, deliverer, friend. That is the keynote of my history," she added, still turning from him, with heaving breast and glittering, tearful eyes. "I have told you of my guardian. Ah! let me forget myself, and let me tell you much of him—of that noble, devoted soul; of that grand, unselfish life; of the stern, undivided sacrifice *he* has made to country, to people, and to that glorious future he sees for them in which personally he can bear no part. Ah! if I could make you know our country as he taught me to know it, make you read its history as he reads it, make you care for its people and its future as he has made me care with him for them, then you might understand indeed why, satisfied, I live to sacrifice my small happiness to his aims and his honor, my passing and useless years to his projects—all mapped out as they lie in their magnificence—*my* life in willing gratitude to him."

Memory had become too much for her. She seemed to have forgotten Gilbert, to have forgotten herself, to have lost her control for a moment, as she turned from him, as she stood there and spoke again, pouring out this time her words with rapid vehemence and passionate energy in accent and tone.

"You wonder, you wonder," she said, presently again, "all wonder, doubtless, over the history of my shadowed life; over the key to my strange, solitary ways here; over my secret, my retirement, my reserve; and, if I told you, could you understand it? If I unveiled the past to you, if I *described* that one sentiment that hurried on the crisis of my life, would you understand?"

"Madame Zophée, I beg your pardon. I have vexed and troubled you," he said.

"Can you understand," she went on—"you who are of that cold religion that knows nothing of self-sacrifice, nothing of what *we* mean by the voluntary immolation of a life—can you understand what it is to set one's self aside, one's whole existence, to live in utter negation of all that *is* one's self? To live, satisfied if now and then we meet in the great spirit of nature, in the consolations of art, in the contemplation of the divine and beautiful, some inner recognition of our soul's sacrifice, accepting *that* as being *all* fate, in reward or gladness, has in store for us. Such is my life; as such it lies before you," she continued. "Can you understand it? Does it bear any meaning for you now?"

"I see its sadness, I see its solitude," he exclaimed, catching for a moment an echo of the passionate energy of her tones. "But why? Madame Zophée, why?"

The question broke from him before he had time to realize the force with which he put it, or to stay (in recollection of Morton's warning) the forbidden words.

"Why?" she exclaimed. "That is what I must not tell you. That is my secret. That is the key-note of the immolation of my life. *I have promised.* Can you not understand it? If gratitude demanded, if devotion required, could you not do it? could you not be silent? could you not be submissive? could you not live solitary as I do—unloved, unloving, silent, and alone? Ah, Sir Gilbert, why have you done this?" she added, in a suddenly changed tone, turning to him again with something of her usu-

al composure and self-control. "Why have you roused up all these memories? I was quiet, I was resigned; why do you come to me with questionings that pierce my heart? For to none of them can I give reply."

"I beg your pardon," he said again; for realization of his own persistent curiosity seemed to come to him at her words, and her changed and softened tone.

Suddenly the recollection of Morton's warning and injunctions came back to his mind; he rose and held out his hand. "I beg your pardon," he repeated again.

"Nay, do not distress yourself," she said, letting him take her hand and retain it for a moment, as they stood face to face. "You have not pained me really. Perhaps it has done me good. But I dislike to feel excitement. I cling to my self-control. You have disturbed it this evening. But—it will come again."

"How good you are!" he said. "And how tiresome and how stupid I have been!"

"*Au contraire*," she answered, gently. "You have been kind to listen with interest to these wearisome reminiscences of mine. I thank you, monsieur. You have been kind and sympathizing, and to me sympathy is very tempting and very sweet. You have bored yourself, though, for a long time."

"I have been very happy," he murmured, holding her hand, still softly, as he looked with melting eyes into her face. "I have been so happy! But, Madame Zophée, say you forgive me, and I will go."

She remained silent then for an instant, as she looked at him, and made no answer to his pleading request. But a curious, anxious shadow came into her eyes suddenly, as they met his—a new expression of perplexity which he could not read. Her cheek paled, and she drew her hand away as she murmured, "Good-bye."

"Have I annoyed you?" he said then, eagerly. "I hope not. Will you not forgive me all my rude curiosity? And will you continue to be my friend, Madame Zophée," he went on, changing his tone, and smiling once more, in his frank, sunny way upon her, "if I promise, and I do promise, never, never to pain you with such questionings again? Will you be my friend of the present, and let me help you, if only sometimes, if only for a little while, to forget the past?"

She looked up at him once more then, searching his countenance as he stood by her, with an answering smile on her lips at his eagerness, and yet with an anxious look still lingering in her eyes.

"I will promise," he repeated, taking up the portrait for a moment and then laying it down again. "I will promise. And will you enter the compact with me, and agree to be my friend?"

"Friends of the present," she said, with a curious, sweet sadness in her voice, "forgetful of the shadowy past."

"Just so," he answered. "Forgive me, and we will forget it indeed."

"It is not that," she said, presently, in a low, tremulous tone. "I did not mind. I liked telling you—only—yes—I should like, indeed I should like—oh, how I *wish* that I *could* tell you more!"

He paused.

"Yes," she began, hesitatingly, and in a low, quivering tone, again; "I did not mind your asking me. I do not know why, but I did not mind it. Of course—yes—I did marry," she continued slowly, her face drooping, and her voice sinking almost to a whisper, as she spoke; and then her emotion seemed to choke her, and she paused again.

"Will you forgive me?" he broke in eagerly again, "and I will go away."

Then she controlled herself, and once more she looked up at him, and for a moment her troubled eyes met full and fair the frank, shadowless expression in his. Bright, kindly, eager only because vexed that he should have disturbed her, and concerned only to wish her a friendly farewell. And as she looked up, and his hand clasped hers again in a frank, cordial pressure, and she answered, unresisting, his genial smile, words trembled on her lips—three or four words she wished and longed to say to him, to say even already then—but they trembled on her lips only, and were stayed. There was nothing in his voice or manner to draw them forth, nothing to nerve her, in defiance of all promises, to say them. They remained unsaid. She smiled only, and strove to still the quiver of her lips and to answer him, as he repeated again, in earnest, self-condemnatory appeal, "I beg your pardon for having troubled you; indeed, indeed I do. Good-bye."

Then he left her, and went up through the woods to St. Hilaire, sauntering slowly sometimes, with eyes fixed on the ground, and again looking up toward the glow of sunset, as it fell through the trees, with a flush on his cheek, and a changeful, glittering light in his eyes. Thoughts seemed to crowd upon him, and new sensibilities and sentiments seemed to quiver and waken in the hitherto narrow sphere of his inner being. Not love for her, such as many men would have felt then, springing up fervent and eager under the power of her uncommon beauty, beneath the glance of her shadowy eyes and the flash of her fleeting smile—not love altogether, but a strong tenderness stirred for her within his heart.

He did not understand her; how could he? but she touched him—to-night his sensibilities and sympathies, as last night his intellect, his curiosity, his interest, his dormant artistic sense. All had waked up into quick vitality under her influence, with experience that was to him as pleasant as it was unexpected and new. The sympathetic tenderness with which she had touched him this evening, in all its strong, chivalrous unselfishness of sentiment, was, moreover, most characteristic of him. Pity for her awoke, as he thought of her left standing there alone, facing her life with its deep shadows, and veiled futurity, and hidden past; facing it in dreary solitude, nerved by some secret purpose, some single, noble motive for self-devotion—to him unknown. And wonder and admiration died out before that sympathy in his heart; and as he walked along the shadowy road, a sudden resolve came to him that he would, as he said, *befriend her*—reflect her mysterious self-devotion with devotion from his side as unselfish, as regardless of reward.

In her solitude, in her sadness, he told himself he would cheer and brighten her, would help her to bury memory, and to live in all the sunshine which gilded her present life. How young she was, how desolate, and yet how noble and re-

signed! And he—how much he might do for her, perhaps; how much he might lighten, while he staid here, the daily burden of her life! So he would do for *her*, he thought; and she for him. He did not consider how it might affect him at all that evening, not even sufficiently to realize how far he had already drifted from the moorings of his practical external existence, how far he had floated away across those tossing waves of the mystic sea that wash the shadowy shores of dream-land. He was far adrift, far on to them already; but he was quite unconscious, and for himself quite unconcerned.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE ALLÉE DE MORLAAS.

So began their sweet "Platonic friendship," and, once begun, it proceeded rapidly; for after that they met many times, in the easy unsought-for manner in which people meet and glide toward intimacy in those foreign lands.

Madame la Marquise had many teas, with croquet and garden saunterings. There were little dinners and several picnics, and each gave rise to many errands between the château and the chalet to and fro. Madame Zophée joined some of their gayeties, and declined others. Some days she would seem eager to be with them, lighting up the party, as she joined them, with the radiance of her spirits and the playful brightness of her variable mood. But other (and many days) she would refuse, with an air of weariness and depression, and be quite proof against Gilbert's efforts to persuade her to come. But, through all this coming and going, the intimacy of intercourse between the château and the chalet increased far beyond the limits of former years, and no one could tell how it came about.

Nobody quite realized that it was a characteristic of Gilbert's, brought about by him, unsought for by Madame Zophée, unsuspected by any one else; that it sprung simply from the exercise of the habit, on his side, of natural and easy intercourse with every body he had ever known. The chalet stood at the park-gates of the château, as the vicarage stood on the village green at home. Some daily requirement of life made the excuse that drew him constantly to one house, as it had always done in the old days to the other. His aunt was the sender here, as his mother was at Erle's Lynn. What difference need it make in his coming and going that, while the inmates of the vicarage on Lynn Green were an obese old clergyman and his appropriate spouse, the inhabitant of the chalet here on the Pyrenean côteau was young, interesting, and endowed with attractions as unusual and unfamiliar to him as her old euphonious designations of the Sun-maid or the Tsiganie? No difference, he told himself, for he was her friend. Thus, full of his purpose of cheering and enlivening her, he strode over the garden, and vaulted the railing, and plunged through the wood toward Madame Zophée's little house day by day, charged with errands and suggestions from the marquise, just as he used to stroll across the park at home, smoking his morning cigar, to match a skein of Berlin wool with the vicar's wife for his moher, or change a tract for her, before he went off shooting for the day. And Madame Zophée after a time became used to him, and did not prevent him, for she liked to see him come. The difference in their intercourse from all other acquaintances she had formed on the Pyrenees was as natural to her as it seemed to him. He was so different. He was always bright and unconscious, full ever of the idea or suggestion with which he had rushed down to her; so uncomplimentary, as many women would have called him, in his perfect self-possession and ease; so simple and straightforward in his expressions, so completely satisfied with the enjoyment of his present life, so utterly without evidence of sentiment or susceptibility or romance, that Madame Zophée gave up all efforts to ward off their intimacy, and took him as simply for granted as he took her.

He was very happy all this time, and that was the only thing of which he was conscious—very happy; he was not at all sure, as he often thought over his evening Manila, that he had ever been quite so happy before. Life was thoroughly satisfactory; and that being sensibly the case, it was not in Gilbert's nature to speculate, to question, or to ask for more.

Such was the history of these autumn weeks, and gradually, quite irresistibly, Madame Zophée drifted into it—into that pleasant intercourse, and into that winning friendship. She let herself join the happy party at the château, as weeks went on, again and again: struggled out of it sometimes, truly, with curious, painful expressions shadowing her eyes and quivering on her lip, as she persisted in her refusal; but going again on the morrow, because it *was* so sunny and so sweet to her, and years had been long and lonely, and that merry laugh was very musical to her saddened ear, and that changeful smile very pleasant. The kindly glance in his blue eyes thrilled warmly to her heart, and the simple, cordial, boyish friendliness he poured out for her was like a fresh spring of water in a desert and a sun-parched land; for such had life been for her these many years. True to his resolution also, Gilbert Erle, a thorough gentleman to his deepest heart's core, obeyed his courteous instincts, and shrunk from all semblance of confidential converse after that day when he "had gone too far," as he told himself, and had pained her by piercing beneath the shield of her self-control, and by pressing on saddening recollections while they turned over the pictures together. And now, as he had resolved that evening, in his walk to St. Hilaire, when her mood was shadowy, he sought to brighten her; when her spirit seemed turning toward that past (so unknown to him), he would strive instantly to draw her back, by some merry speech or bit of sparkling fun, to the present again; and she, echoing softly his laugh, answering his smile, and yielding to the sympathetic sweetness of his voice and manner, let herself drift on, and obeyed him.

And so the autumn weeks passed, and December came at length; the move for the winter was arranged; and the Pau season began really to set in. People were arriving by scores, the marquis said, as he drove back every day from the club; and the hotels were nearly full, and the houses all taken, and the Place Royale a gay scene now every afternoon. Gilbert went little to town, however. His unconscious attraction lay on the côteaux slopes; and, besides, the coun-

try was delightful to him, and long rides with Morton and Jeanne, and with every body, filled up each cheerful day.

It was about this time that he gave up talking of his projected and extended tour; and he said nothing further, moreover, about returning for the present to Erle's Lynn. Partridge-shooting in England was over long ago, and he was but dimly conscious of who, this year, had shot his partridges for him. Cub-hunting was well through, and the serious business of the winter setting in at home. Five days a week the packs were throwing off within reasonable distance of his park-gates, and his string of hunters were led out daily, in prime condition for the season's work, over the soft turf edges of the avenues; and much wonder was arising in the minds of his old groom and of the whip of the Lynn hunt at the non-appearance of Sir Gilbert.

Still more wonder, expressed, too, with some asperity, was smoldering in the mind of Lady Anna, as October and November sped fast away; the frosty mornings of December set in, and still no word reached her of her son's return. He wrote constantly, and wrote long, merry letters that would have gladdened most mothers' hearts with their glow of exuberant happiness and youth. "The fact was, he had become quite at home with them all," he wrote, "with French hours, and French ways, and French people. And this land of mountains had developed for him an extraordinary charm." In writing to his mother, he forbore absolutely to analyze this charm; and, indeed, he would have found it difficult to decide whether it lay in the bright sunshine, or the lovely scenery, or the kindliness of every body about him, or in some new curious faculty for enjoyment sprung up under all these influences suddenly within himself; but somehow it all suited him. Scene, surroundings, chalet, and château were all equally and collectively delightful and harmonious. He analyzed nothing, but went on unquestioning, accepting the new enjoyments of each returning day.

With the arrival of winter, plans were settled and dates were fixed. Madame la Marquise was to take possession, for five months, of the house in the Rue de Lycée on December 15th. Madame Zophée had rented a suite of rooms on the Rez de Chaussée of the great Hôtel de France for the same period—a pretty set of apartments, with low windows opening on to a broad balcony that hung over the terrace and faced the glorious view of the Pyrenees. The De Veuils were coming to their little town villa; old Keffel had secured minute apartments in the Rue St. Louis, near both the French and the English clubs; and Morton had found a couple of nice cheerful rooms between the Hôtel St. Hilaire and the corner of the Place Royale, commanding the view, and with plenty of sunshine, into which Gilbert was to be settled as soon as the move took place. He would live always with his aunt and uncle, they said, and dine with them every day; but they had no room for him in the first floor of the old house in the court-yard, and the ground-floor was let off satisfactorily to an English family, large in number as in purse.

The first hunting-meet of the season was a few days before they all left St. Hilaire. The marquis drove Morton and Gilbert over in his mail-phaeton, and Joe went on early with Brenda, to be ridden by Morton, and big-boned Mike, destined to be Gilbert's mount. It was to Gilbert, from first to last, one of these "white-stone days" to which memory looks back through all future life with a sense of enjoyment, that 5th of December, the day of the first hunting-meet at Pau.

There was the slightest possible touch of frost in the air as they started down the côteaux in the early morning, and nothing could be more lovely than the view over mountain and valley and Gave, as they drove through the crisp, clear, exhilarating air, and bowled over the lanes between the russet hedge-rows. Gilbert had felt in radiant spirits from the first moment when he emerged, cap-a-pie in top-boots and breeches, upon the gravel at the front door at St. Hilaire to light his cigarette, as he watched the mail-phaeton and his aunt's barouche driving slowly round. Madame Zophée had dined at the château the night before, and, as he put her into her carriage, he had almost extracted from her a laughing promise that even she would go to the meet and see them "throw off" to-day. And though she had shaken her head, and said, "I never go to such scenes of publicity and dissipation, you know, Sir Gilbert," she had smiled as she said it, half wistfully, half relenting; and he had an instinctive, buoyant sort of feeling of certainty that he should see her this morning somewhere along the Jurançon road. When she drove, she always went out early, very early, long before the ordinary fashionable world; so much he knew; and her driving to-day was at least probable.

Thus he was scarcely surprised when, as they turned a sharp corner beyond the village of Gelos, they saw, along the white, straight road between the poplar-trees, her low-hung victoria, drawn by Volga and Vazuza, whose sleek black sides and arched necks shone in the sunlight as they trotted along. Ivan held them in to a sober pace, and Volga, doubtless approving, assisted him to restrain the fiery ardor of Vazuza's youth; and so the marquis, by touching up his chestnuts sharply on the flank, and giving them rein suddenly, soon brought up the phaeton at a quick trot to Madame Zophée's side. Then he reined in the chestnuts as Ivan stopped the victoria, and Madame Zophée leaned forward to greet them.

"Ah! I am so glad," she said, "I have just caught you on your way. What a lovely morning you have for your hunt, messieurs! I hope you will enjoy yourselves very much."

"But you are coming on, Madame Zophée?" cried Gilbert. "You are coming to the meet?"

"I do not know; it is too far, I think," she answered.

"It is quite close," said Morton; "just on the other side the town—quite close; do come! Ivan knows the Route de Morlaas, for he has often been there of a morning with Joe and the horses. Do come! Jeanne is to be there, and all of them, and my mother is coming just behind."

"But we shall be late—all we ladies—shall we not?"

"No, no. I won't let Graham throw off till my mother and you arrive. Come, do! You will like to see a meet, Madame Zophée; you have never been to one yet—and it is so pretty!"

"I should like it," she answered, laughing, as she looked up from her seat in her low carriage to meet the glance of Gilbert's eager, pleading eyes. "Indeed, I should like it."

"Then come. I will look out for you," said Morton, "and keep a place for your carriage, where you shall see every thing. Do come!"

"Go on, then," said Madame Zophée; "do not let me keep you, at all events. Your chestnuts go faster than Ivan will let Volga and Vazuza trot, marquis," she continued; "but we will follow as fast as we can."

And on they went, Gilbert looking back, as the carriage moved, to raise his hat, to smile once more into the dark, dreamy eyes turned upward to him, and to watch as far as he could Volga and Vazuza trotting steadily, and the low victoria bowling smoothly along.

"I think," he said, presently, as they turned a corner and shot rapidly out of sight, "a victoria is the prettiest carriage a lady can possibly drive in. I will get one for my mother when I go home."

Every body, ladies and gentlemen alike, were going to the meet to-day. It was the first of the season, and in fact a sort of show-meet; a turnout, as it were, of the forces; a parade of the prospects, social and equestrian, English and foreign, cavaliers and amazons, assembled for the season to come. It was in the Allée de Morlaas, between a long row of chestnut-trees that fringe the double roadway about two miles from Pau.

Thus drawn by the marquis's frisky chestnuts, toiling rapidly through the town, up the Place Grammont and along the Porte Neuve, they in the mail-phaeton came quickly upon the gathering huntsmen and the rows of carriages assembled near the scene of the meet.

And a very picturesque and pretty scene, in that sunny winter morning, it was. Far in the distance, seen in outline across the plain, rose the mountains, white and silvery, with soft clouds and blue, vapory mists curling round their shadowy summits. On each side the Allée de Morlaas stretched fields where the crisp and short grass looked tempting for a gallop, and where the low hedge-rows promised many a good test for equestrian prowess, but offered small difficulty or impediment to the mind of a man from "the shires."

In the Route de Morlaas, under the glancing sunlight, the crowd was varied and gay. Red coats and ladies' habits mingled numerously together, and laughter, and talk, and flirtation, and merriment still superseded the serious business of the day. There were huntsmen, stout and slim, some well mounted and booted, looking ready for work; a few whose wavering seats, outturned toes, tight waists, lilac gloves, and gorgeous button-holes, recalled Joe's description of the sorrows of the chase.

The pack, the whip, the Scotch M. F. H., sitting, stern and determined-looking, on his broad-backed steed, were all like those of any hunting-meet to be seen in every corner of Merry England on any crisp December day. And yet the gathering was most exceptional and characteristic. Its internationalism was the feature that struck you first. It would be difficult to mention a European nation which had not there its representative, each attired in as near an imitation as possible of the British hunting costume, and all eager to join in the transplanted British sport; and from far beyond Europe came others who swelled the gay throng.

There were many Americans—men whose keen, sharp glances, shooting rapidly hither and thither over the scene, expressed enough of courage to suggest going defiantly, even if recklessly, to the end. These generally rode good horses, and they reined them firmly and sat them well.

Although all were very English for the occasion, in dress, in accoutrements, in seat, in style, the true Briton was still easily discernible; and as Gilbert reached the scene, and glanced over it from the box of the phaeton, his compatriots and his acquaintances among them seemed peppered over the crowd, standing out in some cases in a quaint contrast to their surroundings. There was Captain Hanleigh on a huge, powerful-looking horse; there was Bébé Beresford in a trim jacket, reining in a pretty bay mare, by the side of a young amazon in a short skirt that looked like business. She was mounted on a clever little chestnut that, as Gilbert remarked to Morton, "might go like a bird."

"And so she does," said Morton, in answer. "That is Miss Flora Netley the Bébé has in charge—the American heiress, a very nice girl, they tell me, and a wonderful rider, as you will see; and there is the Duchesse de Toledo, Gilbert, in that large carriage with the beautiful gray horses. She promises to be an historical character, in virtue of her husband Don Pedro. And that is the Spanish Infanta with the black mules in her carriage; and there on that sorrel is the young Comte de Gari, once heir of a Southern crown; and here comes Madame la Préfète. Ah! her husband is going to ride. And here is Joe with our horses. What do you say, Gilbert? Shall we mount them now?"

"Do, do!" exclaimed the marquis, who had guided his chestnuts carefully into a convenient position among the carriages, and was quite exhausted with his efforts at universal salutation with hat and finger-tips from side to side. "Do get down; get on your horses. I will drive round to converse with Madame la Préfète, on the other side."

Once on Mike's back, Gilbert felt quite at home. He followed Morton as he rode slowly through the crowd, raising his hat when Morton raised his, as from one carriage after another they were greeted with many bows and smiles; and into many a pretty face did Gilbert glance admiringly, as they threaded their way—faces fair and dark, English and foreign, grave and gay. Nearly all gay, however; for the scene was so bright and amusing, and the sun shone so cheerily upon them all, and the men bowed and complimented unlimitedly from side to side, and ladies laughed and answered with many a repartee and playful sally; and the chatter of voices, and the echo of laughter, and the rolling of wheels, and the champing of bits, and the ring of horses' hoofs, and the impatient baying of the fox-hounds, made a strange jargon of noise and gayety and excitement, as they all crowded together in the radiant sunshine, pleased with each other, delighted with themselves, full of anticipation of the season that was before them, and all enchanted that morning meets of the Pau fox-hounds, with all the balls, picnics,

band-days, and other enjoyments, had once more begun.

Pau had grown accustomed to Madame Zophée and her black Orloffs, as people called them. Pau had nearly finished wondering over her, speculating upon her, and talking about her. She had lived in their neighborhood so long now, and had lived so quietly, so unobtrusively, and in every respect so entirely without giving cause for excitement on her account, that curiosity and speculation for want of food had died. So, though she came seldom among them, it caused little more from each carriage than a passing remark when the low victoria and the trotting Orloffs came slowly round the corner from the Route de Tarbes at the rear of the crowd, and drew up under the shadow of a broad tree.

Gilbert had followed Morton's lead into the centre of the carriages. He was reining Mike by the side of the M. F. H., and was undergoing a formal presentation, when he caught sight of the victoria standing on the fringe of the crowd of drivers and riders some distance away. His aunt had just driven slowly past it. Madame Zophée had sat upright in her carriage to exchange a smile and a few words and a touch of her finger-tips with her kind old friend; but now, as Gilbert suddenly saw her, she was alone again, leaning back, and watching the gay crowd.

Even from there he could see that the expression on her pale face was very grave and quiet. She had come into this crowd because they had begged her to come; but, now she was there, she was wishing herself, as he well knew, in her loneliness, away.

Gilbert bowed himself off from the master as soon as possible, and, threading his way through the carriages, again leaving Morton to struggle somehow to the side of Madame de Veuil's britzska, and passing Bébé with a nod, he succeeded, with some difficulty and much careful guiding of Mike's restless steps, in reaching the outer rim of the crowd, and arrived at Madame Zophée's side.

"What a gay scene!" he exclaimed, as he drew Mike up close to her wheel, and bent down toward her, raising his hat.

"Is it not? But not a new one to you, Sir Gilbert—a meet of fox-hounds—is it?"

"Not as regards the hunt, but the people, the surroundings, the scenery — every thing is as new as it could be. I never saw any thing the least like it in my life."

"It is a pretty scene," she said, "and very varied. I think you have your whole society for the winter nearly all assembled here. I see most of my few acquaintances and a great many people quite unknown to me besides."

"Yes, there are the Carlisles, in that pony phaeton; and there is Hanleigh, on that big bay," said Gilbert, sitting upright in his saddle, and pointing from side to side with his hunting-whip.

"And there are the De Veuils," answered Madame Zophée, "and little Jeanne, looking lovely with that bunch of azaleas in her hat; they just match the rose-tint in her cheeks, now that Monsieur Morton is speaking to her."

"There are quantities of people I do not know," said Gilbert. "I should feel quite lost in all this crowd, if you had not come to talk to me, Madame Zophée."

"Ah, you will soon know every body! Look! there is the handsome Madame Philistaire just getting out of her phaeton to mount her horse."

"Ah, that is the lady they chaff Bébé about," said Gilbert, laughing.

"Do they? I do not know. Chaff? You mean laugh at him because he admires her. Why, every body must do that, she is so very handsome. Do you not think so, Sir Gilbert?"

"She is not my taste," said Gilbert, "nor, apparently, Bébé's to-day. He has never gone near her once; and a lot of French fellows are helping her on to her horse."

"Ah, he is occupied with pretty Miss Netley. They look very happy together, do they not? Monsieur Morton says she rides so beautifully."

"Yes, so he told me. An American, is she not? Why, there are people here from every corner of the earth!"

"So there are, very nearly, only no countrymen of mine. They come seldom, for the last few years, to Pau. There is a group of Spaniards. I wonder how they can ride. And I think these are Irish, that party of sisters coming this way with many cavaliers. Ah me, Sir Gilbert! what a confusion of people and horses and carriages! What are you all going to do? when are you going to start?"

"Immediately, I fancy. Mike looks like going, Madame Zophée, does he not?"

"He is very handsome," she answered, looking up from her low seat at him—at him as well as at his horse.

They seemed a part of each other, indeed; she took them in together in her glance, the rider and the steed. Gilbert looked his very best on horseback, and in his trim hunting-dress. His brown hair, curling under his hat, glistened in the sunlight; his eyes were sparkling with fun and enjoyment; his seat was firm and erect, his shoulders square; and as Mike champed the bit and pawed the ground, impatient to be gone, and Gilbert reined him in with a firm, light hand, Madame Zophée's glance softened as it rested upon him for a moment, and a keen, irrepressible sense of pleasure thrilled her too, of admiration of his strength and his brightness, and of his vigorous, sunny youth.

Suddenly there was a movement in the crowd, a backing of the carriages, a blast from the huntsman's horn, a loud yelping of the hounds, and the ring of the master's voice sounded above the din. They were starting — two minutes more, and they would be gone.

"You are off," said Madame Zophée, as Gilbert started suddenly, and, reining in Mike with a quick hand, glanced eagerly around.

"Yes, by Jove! I believe we are."

"Well, take care of yourself; enjoy yourself very much, Sir Gilbert. Good-bye."

"Good-bye!" he exclaimed, and he turned Mike suddenly and bent once more over her carriage. "Good-bye."

He raised his hat as he murmured the words, and he stooped close to his saddle-bow. Their eyes met, in the laughing excitement of the moment, in one glance of bright, soft farewell.

"I wish you good fortune," she said, smiling, as he still bent toward her. "Prastchite, prastchite," she repeated, slipping unconsciously into her own euphonious tongue; and then, as he still lingered, still bent toward her, still said his

parting words, still reluctant to go, she plucked from her dress the blushing rose-bud, to which his eyes had half unconsciously wandered, and murmuring once more, "Good fortune!" she placed it, suddenly and impulsively, in his hand. He smiled again, raised himself upright in his saddle, and put it into his button-hole with a happy and triumphant air.

Then there was more confused movement among the carriages, more shouting and haranguing from the whip and the M. F. H., more blasts from the horn, and more yelping of hounds and gathering of huntsmen, and Gilbert glanced from side to side for a moment while the color rushed over his cheek, and the excitement of the hunting fever flashed suddenly in his eyes.

Then, with a loud, unexpected cry of "View—halloo!" they were gone. The hounds had found already, in the little quiet wood that fringed one corner of the field, the foxes, and they were gone. The pack, let loose, stretched over the grass in an instant; horses of all varieties of spirit and power, given rein, followed as they best could; the whip and the huntsman led, one through the hedge, the other over it. The crowd scattered; the carriages, in a long string, their inmates eager to see as much as possible, were driven rapidly along the road; and Gilbert, gathering Mike firmly together, glanced once more back toward the victoria, paused as he saw the hounds, the whip, and the M. F. H. scattered beyond the hedge in one direction, and hunters scrambling confusedly in every other; and then, quick as thought, he turned his horse's head straight upon the thorny hedge and paling, and lifting him with a touch of the spur and a twist of his hand, before the exclamation Madame Zophée uttered had left her lips, he had cleared it safely, and was galloping close upon the heels of the retreating fox-hounds far over the field.

"A famous run!" So Gilbert always declared it in the face of all defamers of the Pau hunt. Stretching far over field and moor and fallow their course lay, through all that crisp winter's day; topping many a thorny hedge, scrambling over low, crumbling walls, clearing wide, shallow streams, facing turfy banks, with sunken fences beyond them that settled the fate of many a huntsman's hour, and running their fox to ground in the shadow of the early twilight far over the Landes toward Bordes.

In the triumphant satisfaction of this last achievement, only Gilbert, Miss Netley, and Vicomte Alto de Montilago were present to partake. To the Spaniard and the Englishman was the glory; to the American young lady not the glory only, but the brush! They tell the tale still by the smoking-room fires on the côteaux, and at the Cercles at Pau: of the run of that day; of Gilbert, as he still led the hunt, when the shadows fell, upon Morton's big Irish steed, canonizing Mike in the annals of the year; of Miss Netley, on her wiry bay, coming close behind him, following his lead with unswerving pluck after Bébé fell out some miles behind; of the Vicomte Alto, riding firm on his rat-tailed, keen-looking horse, his hawk eye following sharply every turn of the Englishman, noting enviously the strength of Mike's long, rapid stride, watching eagerly for a chance just "to lead," if only for one last half-hour, in this splendid day. In vain; Gilbert came in victorious; and to him was the honor of handing Miss Netley the brush.

"I would have given ten pounds to have done it!" said poor little Bébé, wistfully, as he met the triumphant trio riding slowly home together an hour or two later at the entrance of the Porte Neuve.

"Thanks a thousand times!" said Morton, whom they encountered a few paces farther on. "You have added a hundred guineas to the value of Mike for me!"

At the English Club they found Joe and the mail-phaeton and the marquis. With much pride and satisfaction the former took possession of the horse, and complimented his rider on the feats which had already reached his ears; and Gilbert, amidst expressions of delight and congratulation from his uncle, sprung into the carriage. Then away they went, in the gathering dusk of the evening, toward the crimson mountains that glowed in the rich light of the autumn sunset; away they drove toward home.

"Say what you like about the Pau hounds," exclaimed Gilbert, "I do not think I ever enjoyed a day's hunting so much in my life."

CHAPTER XII.

ARE YOU IN LOVE?

It was a few days later. The preparations for the move to Pau from the côteaux were almost complete, and the last evening of that pleasant autumn season came. Madame la Marquise took the prospect very quietly, though one by one her familiar domestic surroundings were carried away from her, to be packed up carefully by old Baptiste or her devoted Angélique, and conveyed to town. She took it quietly, but the marquis was very much excited indeed. He trotted about; he gave orders that were hopelessly confusing, and always directly in opposition to each other; he worried Morton terribly over his elaborate arrangements for the transfer of Joe and all his precious charges to the court-yard of the Rue de Lycée hotel; and altogether so hot and uncomfortable did the marquis make life at the château for these last two days, that it was little wonder Gilbert was glad to escape occasionally to an atmosphere of repose.

He might have found this under the chestnut upon the croquet-lawn, according to his aunt's thinking, for there she established herself daily (and finally, on the last day, for the last time) at the ceremony of "English tea," as her friends called her afternoon repast. She assembled on that last afternoon with her usual circle: Madame de Veuil, the Comtesse de Beaulieu, and Baron Keffel; each seated upon a straight wicker chair, each resting the points of their toes on the edge of a square of bright-colored carpet that, outstretched between them, protected their feet from the dangers of autumnal damp. There Gilbert found them, as, escaping from his uncle and Morton, he lighted a cigar, and sauntered through the garden toward the croquet-ground in a dreamy, uncertain state of resolution as to the point to which his desultory footsteps would

ultimately tend. He came upon them unexpectedly: upon Baron Keffel talking tremendously in a high tone; upon the Comtesse and Madame de Veuil sipping daintily their hot tea, their toes resting on the carpet-rim; upon his aunt, who had forgotten the autumnal chill, carpets, and damp, and every thing, and was holding forth, with many gesticulations of fan and finger, vehemently controverting the baron's remarks. As usual, the little coterie were respectively enjoying themselves in their own particular way.

"Ah, Gilbert," called the marquise, as he appeared in sight. "Here you are! Come, my dear child, come here. What are you doing?"

"I am having a quiet cigar," said Gilbert, and he advanced hat in hand, and bowing low in response to the French ladies' greetings according to the orthodox French fashion, copied carefully for such occasions from Morton.

"A quiet cigar! Come and have it here, then."

"Would it be a quiet one if I obeyed?" said Gilbert, saucily, glancing with a merry look from his aunt to the baron.

"You rude boy! What do you want? Where are you going?"

"Nowhere," said Gilbert. "Where should I be going?"

His aunt paused and scrutinized his face for a moment. She had done so often lately, knowing that her scrutiny had been quite lost upon Gilbert, who had never in the least observed it. Quite as unconscious, moreover, had he been of the train of thought that was running through her mind at that moment, and, indeed, had occupied it for some time past. She was glad to see him come then, for she had something to say to him, but yet puzzled, because she was wary and prudent; and this was scarcely the company in which to relieve herself of what she had to say. Without delay, however, then and there, that very moment, she felt she wished to say it. She looked up at her nephew, she tapped her fan thoughtfully for a moment upon her left hand, and she glanced at the baron and the two French ladies in silence. Then she rose.

"Madame, you leave us?" cried the baron, aghast, springing up at the same moment as she did, and nearly upsetting his tea-cup over his snowy and spotless pantaloons.

"No; I will return," she answered, loftily, waving him to his seat again. "I will take my nephew's arm for a moment. I will give him a direction about some flowers—a commission upon which I would send him that must be arranged before to-morrow. Sit still, baron; amuse the comtesse and Madame de Veuil for a little while, and I will return."

The baron obeyed her. Fractious, contradictory, unpleasant as he chose to evince himself at most times, he was still practically her slave. He obeyed her, took refuge in his tea-cup, prepared a series of acidulated speeches for the ladies left in his charge, and looked curiously after the tall, retreating figures of Gilbert and the marquise, as they moved slowly down the slope away from the croquet-lawn.

The marquise leaned lightly on her nephew's arm and walked silently beside him for a short distance, while he sent his cigar-smoke curling into the soft air, and looked down upon her with a smile, pleased that she should have risen to accompany him, and a little curious as to what she might have to say. He was quite unconscious, not in the least impatient, delighted to walk with her if she wished it, ready to stay with her as long as she liked.

"Have you had a *serious* quarrel with Baron Keffel?" he said, presently, as he observed she still looked a little perplexed and grave.

"No, my dear child. The baron is not much more tiresome than usual; he is cross—yes, very cross—but a capital companion. I call his a thoroughly bracing mind."

"Then why desert him? Have you really any thing you want to say to me—any thing you want me to do for you, aunt? If so, I shall be delighted. Or have you only come away to torment the old baron into a fever—eh?"

"No, Gilbert. I have come because I torment myself; and I am going to torment you, dear child, as probably you will exclaim. Yes, I have something to say to you. Dear, dear! you stupid big boys—what trouble you give us! What mischief are you going to get into now, I wonder? Do you like being lectured, Gilbert? May I do it? Will you be angry? You English sons are not like our French boys, you know. May I scold? May I peer into what you think and feel? May I question you? Will you tell me, Gilbert? Will you, my dear child?"

She stopped on the pathway as she uttered the last words hurriedly, turned toward him, and clasped both hands impulsively upon his arm.

"My dear aunt, what can you mean? What is the matter? Of course, I will tell you any thing. Ask me what you please."

The marquise put her hands upon his shoulders now, and looked with tenderly glistening eyes into his face.

"I believe you will," she said. "You are a good, honest, warm-hearted boy—you are. Will you tell me, Gilbert? May I ask you? May I, indeed?"

"Ask me! My dear aunt, yes—what you will," he said.

"Then—are you—are you, Gilbert," she continued, with strong, passionate emphasis upon her words, "are you falling in love with our little neighbor, Gilbert? with the Solava—with the mignonne Zophée? Are you? are you? Oh, tell me, my dear boy! Tell me the truth."

A soft, low laugh from Gilbert stopped the pleading pathos of her words. He put his arm round her as she stood by him trembling with eagerness, and he looked down into her pretty, old face, all quivering as it was with tenderness for him, and with anxiety on his account, and his eyes re-assured her; they were merry and twinkling less with sentiment than with fun.

"Falling in love! I am sure I do not know," he answered. "Do you think I am?"

"I think, I fear, I dread it, my dear child."

"But why," said Gilbert, "if I were? But am I? I do not know. I never fell in love, aunt. I never saw any one I cared for the least bit in the world in that kind of way; and now—no, I do not think so. I do not think merely being happy is falling in love."

"I am so glad you are happy, dear child; so glad that we have been able to make you so, and that you care to be with us, and that we have

prevailed to keep you here. But, Gilbert, I think if I realized *that* were true, I would send you away from us, as far as I could too, and without delay."

He laughed again. "My dear aunt, pray do not be so tragical. I am sure I am much too happy to be in love. I think Madame Zophée is delightful, and you think so, don't you, too? And I think St. Hilaire is delightful, and all of you—every body. Indeed I do, and I am as jolly as I can be; but, then, I am jolly almost everywhere; and, of course, Madame Zophée *is* the nicest person I ever knew. But in love! I in love! Aunt, how can you trouble your head with such ridiculous ideas?"

He looked so amused, and so unblushingly self-possessed, as he thus addressed her, that she almost felt assured; still she lingered, her hand still resting on his shoulder, her eyes still searching his face.

"Where are you going now?" she said.

"Why, I was," he began, hesitatingly—"I was only, you know, going down, as usual, just to stroll round, aunt, to smoke my cigarette, and to see—well, if you like—I was going by the road round the outside of Madame Zophée's garden, but I do not expect to see her. I think it was only to look at the view."

"Gilbert!" answered the marquise, suddenly, speaking again as if from a quick resolve. "It is just this—we know *nothing* about her, absolutely, positively nothing. We love her; and that she is lovable, very lovable, Gilbert, is almost all we know. She has a secret, she has had a history—so far she has told us. If she has a husband, or has never had one, we are even ignorant of that."

"Ah!" said Gilbert, sagaciously. "Then, that I know, at all events. She has had one, for she told me so herself."

"Did she? Well, dear boy, then that is more than she has ever told to me."

"But, then, we are friends, you see, aunt," he continued; "really and truly, very great friends. She has told me lots of things—about her home and her young days, and her father, and her pretty name in her old country—I told you, did I not?—'The Sun-maid,' and how she thinks her mother was a Tsiganie."

"She has told you much, my dear boy, that I never ventured to ask her; perhaps she will tell you more; she should not stop there, Gilbert. Knowing you as she now knows you, seeing you as she often sees you, she should tell you what—we all most want to hear. She should tell you more, Gilbert; she should tell you more."

"But, then, I never ask her. Ah, aunt, it would not be fair," he answered, in earnest tone, "would it now—to draw her out, I mean. I never let her even talk of old days if I can help it—of her past life and that kind of thing. I did once. I was so awfully curious, I wanted so much to know, and I drew her on over a lot of pictures she showed me, till at last I saw what a brute I was and what pain I was giving her—how much effort it cost her, you know, to speak calmly of her own life—to tell me what I asked her, or perhaps to conceal what she did not wish to tell. I never questioned her again, and I never let her talk of her old days now."

"There is one, just one thing she ought to tell you, Gilbert. Ask her, dear boy—if *you* will not do so, and you stay among us, I will ask her myself—"

"And that, aunt, is—?"

"That is," she answered, interrupting him in a trembling, eager voice—"that is, Gilbert, a most important question; that is, how and where her husband died?"

"My dear aunt!" he exclaimed, horrified, "pray do not hint at such a thing—pray do not. Promise me, if only to please me—promise me, do *not* speak to her of her husband, of her past at all. Why, she would think I had told you all she has ever said to me, and I know she would never more be my friend."

"But, Gilbert, Gilbert—"

"My dear aunt, please do not. Promise me, promise me. And as for being in love! Nonsense! Do I look like a man in love? I am only very jolly indeed. Why, I feel simply that Madame Zophée is a part of all of you, of every thing that is so delightful here: of the scenery, and the mountains, and the sunshine, and all this pleasant, bright, new life."

"Ah-ha!" she said, smiling once more at him, pleased with his warm, enthusiastic words, and almost assured by the merry, unconscious expression in his voice and eyes. "Ah, I hope, dear child, we shall not find she has been the real sunshine that has gilded all the rest of us for you."

"Nonsense, aunt, nonsense! Now go back to the baron and make him happy again, and I will go and finish my cigar and my stroll. I should like to see that view of Bigorre from the gate of the chalet just once more, and you know we are all off to-morrow."

"Well," soliloquized the marquise, as Gilbert left her, and she turned away—"well, I have given my warning and made my remonstrance, and that is surely about all that I can do; but I can not help wondering what sort of woman Anna has turned out by this time, and I wish I could get her here to look after her own boy. Ah, and here is mine."

The last remark was to Morton, whom she came upon at the moment round the corner of a path on his way from the stable. He paused, astonished to meet her alone.

"I have just parted with Gilbert," she said.

"So I hear," said Morton, for at that moment a ringing whistle came to them, echoing merrily through the woods, growing more and more distant as Gilbert went his way. The marquise listened and smiled, and a pleased, complacent look came into her eyes.

"What a happy boy it is!" she said. "Morton, what do you think? Is he likely to fall in love?"

Morton glanced at her curiously, and burst into a merry peal.

"Gilbert? Gilbert in love? Is that what you are troubling yourself about, little mother? Who—is it the Solava? Gilbert—what fun! what an idea! Why, I do not think he has a thought of such a thing. It is not in him. Why, maman, have you never seen a man in love? and you talk of Gilbert!"

"I have seen you, if you mean that, you silly, romantic boy. I have seen you tearing your hair and sighing your heart out, and that (though I won't tell Jeanne so) many a time. But you are half a Frenchman, my dear Morton; and

Gilbert will take it in English fashion, whenever or in whatever way it comes."

"And if it does come, may I be there to see!" said Morton, laughing. "Gilbert holding—any thing—how does your English poet put it, mother?—'somewhat nearer than his dog, a little dearer than his horse!' Impossible! Nothing is to him, I am quite certain (if you asked him really), half as near or dear as either of the two."

"But—the Solava, Morton. He likes to go to her. What do you make of it all?"

"Mother," said Morton, very seriously, "I was once in love with Madame Zophée—you know I was; and when I remember what I felt, when I know what she is to any one capable of being attracted by her, I can not have a moment's anxiety on Gilbert's account. Look at the cool manner in which he takes her. He comes home, and it amazes me, I can tell you, often to see him sitting down to eat his dinner complacently, after half an afternoon in her society, at a picnic or at croquet here. 'Very jolly' and 'capital fun' would be the outer limits of his enthusiasm, if you examined into his feeling for Madame Zophée or for any body else, or indeed for life in general. He is a dear good fellow, but it is not in him to fall in love, mother; no fear of him!"

The distant ring of Gilbert's whistle still reached them as they paused a minute and listened once more; and then the mother and son smiled re-assuredly to each other, and she took his arm and strolled back to the croquet-ground.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PRESENTATION.

The marquise meant well, but if there was any cause why Gilbert Erle should not fall in love with Madame Zophée Variazinka, his aunt certainly took a very dangerous course in her efforts to prevent his doing so. Almost any other man but Gilbert, as he smoked his cigar and strolled through the woods below St. Hilaire, after that conversation, if he had never before thought of falling in love with her, would have suddenly and instantly discovered, there and then, that he had done so. But to Gilbert it did not come in this way. He assured himself it was ridiculous; he was not in love. They were friends; theirs was a charming, very entrancing, but quite Platonic friendship; he was far too happy at present to think of any thing more. Being in love implied so much—his mother, the future, home; confusion and difficulty of every kind. And that home was a dreamy distance to him just then, and the future had no existence at all.

"So absurd!" he murmured to himself. "Why can not people be friends together without some one thinking immediately of *that* kind of thing?"

So he soliloquized as he passed out of the wood, as he reached the pathway by the stream, as he wound round the wall where the creepers hung low above him, as he neared the rustic gate which inclosed Madame Zophée's home. The roses were all gone now; there were bright-hued flowers lingering here and there, dotted like stars over beautiful late creepers and Southern shrubs, that clustered in the luxury of the garden; but the roses had shed all their petals, and the leaves from the old gnarled trees had fallen on the grass and gravel, and strewed both with a rich carpet of russet and crimson and gold. The scene was changed since he had first come there many weeks ago—more changed than he was! It was winter here: the chill blast had swept over mountain and valley, the leaves had fallen, the rich bloom was gone, the after-glow of the sunset was struggling already with the deep shadows of the night; but for him, as he stood there, his eyes glistening as he paused to look back and gaze over the glorious prospect—for him the year of life was still bright and beautiful. It was still all summer in his heart.

"Ah!" he turned suddenly to exclaim, for a voice reached his ear—the voice of some one coming down the garden toward the gate, but he paused with the exclamation; for a second voice arrested him, answering immediately the well-known tones; and as he turned and approached the gate-way, Madame Zophée, accompanied by another lady, came down the path. He stopped as they approached him, and raised his hat.

The tall figure of the lady who walked by Madame Zophée's side was unknown to him. She was dressed in black. Her head was somewhat turned from him, and she continued speaking, rapidly and low, to Madame Zophée as they drew near. He could not see her face, but there was something that arrested him in her aspect and in the soft fall of her voice as she came down the garden; something unusual in her mien and in the graceful dignity of her figure that commanded irresistible admiration and interest as she approached. Gilbert would have described her, if any one had asked him, as a woman "essentially high-bred," from the instant impression caught in that one glance at the pose of her head, at the firmness of her step upon the leaf-strewed turf, and at the beautiful hand which lay ungloved upon her black muff, delicately fair and small, and sparkling with jewels.

Madame Zophée looked a little flushed and excited as the two approached together, and the color deepened as she turned and perceived Gilbert across the gate. She glanced at her companion and then looked again at him, and her lips parted in a bright smile as the lady bent her head slightly, apparently in silent assent to some request understood though unspoken by Madame Zophée. Then she turned her glance upon Gilbert, who stood pausing, uncertain whether, as usual, to push open the gate. Madame Zophée laid one hand upon it and drew it open, and, still smiling, she stretched out the other hand, the left one, to him.

"Sir Gilbert," she said, "good-evening;" and then she looked shyly at her friend again. "Let me present you," she added, in a low voice, "let me present you to—the Princess."

Gilbert knew now to whose acquaintance he was in these words admitted. He bowed low, and then looked up, to meet the smile and to return courteously the gaze of surely the sweetest eyes that ever spoke truthfully the expression of a noble, a tender, and a sympathetic heart. The Princess looked curiously at him for a moment as she bowed and smiled, till Madame Zo-

phée added, "The nephew of Madame de St. Hilaire."

"Ah!" she said then, "I am very pleased to know you, Sir Gilbert. Your aunt has been hoping for a visit from you for a long time. I am glad you have come to her."

"Come, and going to stay too," said Madame Zophée. "Sir Gilbert is enchanted, Princess, with the life of the Pyrenees."

"Ah, indeed! I am glad. Pau is truly a 'Paradis terrestre.' I am sure every one must find it so."

"Pau I scarcely know yet," said Gilbert; "but I am enchanted with the Pyrenees."

"And you will love Pau too when you have staid there. We have the mountains still before us there, you know. You are coming to town, I hope, with your aunt?"

"I am," he answered. "To-morrow, Princess, we all move from St. Hilaire."

"And what day do you come in, chérie?" she continued, turning to lay her hand on Madame Zophée's. "I am so glad that clever Varlé has ordered you to leave the côteaux this year. I can not bear to think of you alone here in the winter."

"You are kind, Princess," said Madame Zophée, "but I am sorry to leave my mountain home. It is to be, however, and I go to town in a day or two like the rest."

"Ah! I am glad of it. That is well. The dear marquise will be so happy to have you with her. Will you give your aunt my love, Sir Gilbert? Will you tell her I will come and visit her immediately in the Rue de Lycée? Indeed, she would have seen me to-day, but I only arrived yesterday, and started to drive late this afternoon, so I had only time to come and see how my little Zophée has been all the while I have been away from her? Will you tell your aunt, Sir Gilbert?"

"I will, Princess," he answered. "She will be delighted to hear of you; only yesterday she was wondering whether you had arrived."

"And only yesterday I came. And the baronne has not arrived, Zophée," she continued, "so to-day I have come out to you quite alone. She comes to-night. But I must be going; it is getting late. Where is Ivan? Why do they delay with the carriage?"

"I hear it, Princess," said Madame Zophée. "See, it comes;" and Gilbert, as she spoke, stood aside as a large sociable, with a foreign-looking servant on the box, and Ivan walking by the horses' heads, drew slowly up to the gate.

Gilbert sprung forward to open the door. The Princess encircled Madame Zophée in a gentle, lingering embrace, murmured once more in a few soft words her delight at seeing her again, her pleasure at the prospect of their being neighbors for the winter in town; and then she turned with a gracious salutation to Gilbert, let him take her hand and assist her as he stood with uncovered head by the carriage, glanced at him again with those sweet, cordial eyes of hers, and in another moment he had closed the door of her carriage, and she had driven away.

"I feel more at home in the world," said Madame Zophée, softly, as they stood together on the gravel and watched the carriage go down the hill—"I feel more at home in this wide, wide world, now that the Princess has returned to Pau."

Gilbert smiled as he answered her, and they pursued the subject a little, he questioning hesitatingly, and she lingering, as she answered, over the pleasant recollections of her visitor with a loving intonation in accent and voice; then she said suddenly to him, as he still remained standing by her side,

"Have you brought any message for me this afternoon, Sir Gilbert? Any message from your aunt?"

"Only will you come to St. Hilaire this evening? Will you come back with me?"

"Did she send you to say so? I scarcely think it, for she was here and asked me, and I refused some hours ago. Did she send you to ask me again?"

"No," he said, laughing, "I do not think she did."

"And have you no other message?"

"None whatever," he answered, emphatically.

"Then—" She paused.

"Then why did I come? I did not come, Madame Zophée: I only found myself here; arrived somehow unconsciously; by a sort of instinct, I suppose. I think I wanted to see the view from here just once more. We are all going away, you know, to-morrow."

"Yes, alas!"

"Alas! I say too. I am sure I shall not like the life down in the town there half as much as I have liked St. Hilaire; but, at all events, I am glad you are coming also."

"I should be sorry if I were parting with you all, but I can not say I am glad to be going to live in town."

"But, Madame Zophée, you can not like being here alone, can you? when they are all gone from St. Hilaire, I mean. I can not imagine you here, then. How solitary, overpoweringly solitary, it must be!"

"That is just what it is—overpowering. I like it, but I dare say it is not good for me, as Varlé says."

"But—like it?"

"Can not you imagine it? You, Sir Gilbert, with your love of nature, and your feeling for the glories and the wildness of a mountain life?"

"Yes; I could enjoy it, but, then, I should shoot and hunt, and scramble about, and explore the mountains more than gaze at them; but for you—I am sure it must be much better to be in town."

"I suppose so. I was thinking of it just before the Princess came. They have packed my books and sent away my piano and my easel; in fact, deprived me of all my occupations, so I came out early in the afternoon here, and leaned upon the gate, and said good-bye to my view, and to my solitude, and to all my mountain thoughts."

They leaned upon the gate again, now side by side, and Madame Zophée looked away over the valley, and Gilbert turned his gaze upon her, waiting for her to speak again, and watching the dreamy, absent expression gathering over her averted face.

"The mountains have been so long my companions," she said, presently; "the only presence in my life, for many a day, that was powerful enough to take me out of myself."

She looked intensely sad for a moment, and he smiled with his usual effort to rouse her and draw her thoughts away from her memories, as he replied:

"We do not want you to *be* any thing but yourself, Madame Zophée, and so we are glad we are going to take you from the mountains, for they often threaten to take you from us."

"Ah, Sir Gilbert, I think it is the happiest symptom in your character that you have so little understanding of solitude, or what it means and brings."

"And yet I am often alone."

"And a cheerful companion to yourself you are always."

"When I am alone I have generally the dogs, you know, and my gun, or a horse which wants a great deal of thinking about, and these constitute society at any time."

"And I have my dogs and my flowers, and I find them society; but, then, I also have myself; and dogs and flowers, nay, even music and painting and books, are not sufficient for me, and I fall sometimes, as this afternoon, into fits of sadness, and find myself reveling in melancholy, recalling fruitlessly the past. Then it is that the mountains help me. I wish you understood Russian, Sir Gilbert. How I wish you knew one of Derzhavin's poems, for it does so exactly describe what I feel when I stand here and lose *myself* in the mountain prospect; it expresses the feeling which I seek when I rush away from myself out here. I do not mind the loss and waste of my one little life when I have once caught the spirit of his poem."

"Tell it to me," said Gilbert.

"Repeat it to you? Derzhavin's lines in my poor translation? Would you care to hear them? Shall I?"

"Yes, do," he said, for at that moment the feeling was strong within him that he cared little what she repeated to him so long as she went on talking, and did not send him away; and Madame Zophée, after pausing an instant, gazing over the mountains toward Bigorre, began, as he asked her, Derzhavin's long and beautiful poem. In soft, full-flowing tones she repeated it to him — an English translation — her own. His head bent as he listened in reverence, in admiration of the sentiments and sublime thoughts and magnificent imagery which she spoke to him straight from her own veiled heart and spirit in the language of a poet of her beloved land; and his eyes glistened with kindling emotion as her voice sunk low, while, with exquisite pathos and intonation, she murmured the last few lines:

"'O thoughts ineffable! O visions blest!
Though worthless my conceptions all of Thee,
Yet shall thy shadowed Image fill my breast,
And waft its homage to thy Deity.
God! thus alone my lowly thoughts can soar,
Thus seek thy presence. Being wise and good!
'Midst thy grand works admire, obey, adore;
And when the tongue is eloquent no more,
The soul shall speak through tears of gratitude.'"

Her eyes sparkled and her cheek flushed crimson again, as in soft, passionate accents she repeated, half to him, half to herself, these lines.

"But, Madame Zophée, it is very bad for you, I am certain," he said, suddenly, "to stand all alone in the solitude and storms of winter here and feel like that."

"But is it not beautiful?" she answered. "It is Derzhavin's poem on the Spirit of the Universe—on God. Did I never tell you about him — about Derzhavin, the young Guardsman of Caterina Seconda, who wrote 'The Ode to the Kirghiz Kaïssak Princess Feliza?' Did I never tell you of him—how he stood sentinel at the palace gate as Catherine passed to her coronation, and was fired by the glories of his czarina with the inspiration of his wonderful poem? Ah! he is one of my favorites. I will translate more for you, Sir Gilbert, and try to bring you to an acquaintance with him."

"But I do not like him if he teaches you to love your solitude, when we all want you so very much at St. Hilaire."

"He does not teach me; he only comes with expression, with language for my solitude when its sadness weights me sometimes into silence, leaving me, for myself, no speech. Then Derzhavin speaks for me, and draws down the cool dew of the solace of the mountains. Ah, Sir Gilbert! go back to St. Hilaire. And you must go without me; you would all find me a sad companion to-night."

He had failed to rouse or cheer her this evening; she turned from him completely, and leaned her arms on the gate and looked far away.

"Madame Zophée," he said, presently, "do you believe in Platonic friendship?"

She looked quickly round at him. "I do," she said, emphatically. "I hope, indeed, I do."

"It is a ridiculous term," he said, "but it is the only one that expresses exactly the sort of thing I want to say. It is just this: You know I have never in all my life before had the sort of friend that you are to me; any body, I mean, who took an interest in my ignorance, and tried to teach me something and to make me more of a fellow than I am; and I can not tell you in a right sort of way how much I feel for you, how dreadfully sorry I am when you get melancholy and sad, and how awfully bad I think it is for you to be lonely and silent, and to tell no one your trouble—it is very bad. And all I want to say is—of course, I do not wish to seem curious, or as if I were asking you questions, or trying to find things out—but, Madame Zophée, if it would be any comfort in the world to tell me the whole story of your life, you know it would be all safe with me, and I would just take it as a kind of mark of our friendship, and nothing in the world more."

He spoke in his usual matter-of-fact and cordial way, and his eyes, as she turned to him, were resting full upon her, expressing simply the kindly feeling and the warm friendship of his words. Her cheek grew very pale as she answered him.

"Sir Gilbert, if you only knew," she said, "that to tell you the whole story of my life is the very thing I most wish to do. If you only knew—how much—how much—I wish to do it—but, alas! it is the one thing impossible for me to do — quite impossible! You respect a promise, do you not? You think a promise should be really kept?"

"Certainly I do," he said.

"Well, then, as I told you once before, it is a promise—a promise that binds me here, that keeps me silent, that shuts me out from life and companionship, and from all of you; and now even, as I speak of that promise, and let you be my friend, I break it, I infringe upon its limits, I defy the wish of one," she continued, in low, broken tones, "of one to whom I owe every

thing, who was so much to me and mine through many a weary year; one who deserves so much of me, and of every one who has ever known him, or seen and watched his life; one to whom now the only grateful service *I* can render is this—my silence."

"Then be it so," he said, quietly. "You understand, though, Madame Zophée, what I meant? Not curiosity, but friendship, made me speak just now."

"And friendship for you, for myself, would make *me* speak, Sir Gilbert; but my lips are sealed. None but the mountains can hear my story; from none but the Spirit of Nature can I seek soothing sympathy and relief. Can you wonder, then, that I love my solitude and mourn to leave my companion hills?"

"Ah! but even with silence lying between us, Madame Zophée, you still say, do not you, that we may be friends?"

"The kindest friendship I can show toward you, toward any one, Sir Gilbert, is to bid you *go*."

"No, no; not that, at all events," he exclaimed, laughing.

"Go!" she went on, "away from me and from my saddened, shadowed life. Go away, Sir Gilbert, now, and I will remember with pleasure our friendship; nay, I will regard you, if you like, as my constant, kind, though ever-absent friend."

"But, Madame Zophée, I am not going," he said. "You must put up with me a little longer when we all get to Pau, even as a present friend. Come, do not let me leave you in a sad mood! Will you not come to St. Hilaire, or must I really go home without you? I declare the inexorable dinner-hour has arrived—fancy its being so late!—and my uncle is a monument of punctuality. I *must* go. Say good-night to me, Madame Zophée. Will you not let me feel before I leave you that there is a delightful winter before us all, and that whatever happens we shall still be friends?"

Why not, indeed, while he looked so unconscious and so self-possessed? Why not take that friendship which, as he went and came before her, was ever so pleasant and so sweet to her? Why not be friends?

"I will take your friendship," she said, slowly. "Only—"

Could she not finish the sentence? Could she not put it in any way? By any hint, by any word dropped as if unawares, could she not lift the veil from the present and yet preserve the sacred secret of the past? How could she say it? "I will take your *friendship* only—do not offer me *love*." This sentence almost formed itself upon her lips as she turned to him, and then again it was stayed; for why say it?

He did *not* proffer love. There was no approach to it in the smile, in the clear eyes, in the farewell words, or in the ringing voice in which he called a parting greeting to Lustoff, as, after clasping her hand lightly, he said his frank "good-night," and turned up the pathway to St. Hilaire once more. It was after many months and after many changes that he visited the chalet again.

CHAPTER XIV.

COTILLON BOUQUETS.

NEXT day they all went to town, and then there was a period of bustle and fuss in the process of settling down in the Rue de Lycée that, before the marquis had finally composed himself, threatened utter distraction to every body in the house. Baptiste, moreover, imitated his master closely in the excitement of the occasion. Together they tormented every soul of the household (excepting always the marquise) to the verge of despair; and when they had exhausted every sort of vituperation upon their neighbors, they acted, fortunately, as safety-valves for each other, and so by dint of time and trouble, upstairs and down, in kitchen and salon, the ménage settled down.

Then Gilbert was "arranged," as Baptiste expressed it, in his apartments; and his English groom and valet, with a couple of his hunters, arrived—a proof that he was going in for the winter seriously.

Then Madame Zophée came, and the rooms on the rez-de-chaussée in The France were fitted up, and looked quite "like herself," as Gilbert asserted when he escorted his aunt to visit her the day after she arrived. They looked warm and comfortable and curious, like a bit of the chalet from the côteaux, like a bit of romance in the midst of life practical and external, like a picture of foreign lands, and strange scenes, and quaint associations, in the midst of familiar things.

The windows were filled with rich exotics brought by Vasilie and Ivan from their carefully tended greenhouses on the côteaux. Her easel was set up, her books covered the tables, her ebony-cased piano traveled over the valley too; and numberless little curious ornaments and familiar objects had been gathered from the rooms at the chalet by Marfa, packed up and conveyed to town, to make the bare hotel salon more fitting, in her opinion, for the habitation of her "doushinka," her "galoupka," her little, dainty, tenderly guarded queen.

In due time all were comfortably settled down, and the winter fairly began. The usual coterie of St. Hilaire soon re-formed itself in the Rue de Lycée in Madame la Marquise's rooms: one or two were absent; but others, wanting on the Pyrenees, joined the pleasant circle here. The Princess was a visitor, constant and ever-welcome, and many others, whose acquaintance we may still make as we glide along. Once a day, at all events, as the twilight fell, the large glittering drawing-room, with the softly lighted violet boudoir opening from one side, was the scene of a gathering so sociable, so easy and attractive, as to leave many a pleasant memory lingering afterward for all who were admitted there. Madame Zophée was often present, and Gilbert, save when hunting was long and late, never failed to appear.

The week after they all arrived in town came the first great ball of the season, of which Bébé had spoken at the croquet-party at St. Hilaire many weeks ago—the ball given by the young bachelors of the English and French clubs, partly as a sort of introduction to the general festivities, and partly in honor of Morton de St. Hilaire, who was, on that occasion, president of the committee for the last time.

It was, also, partly in his honor, and to please them all, that Madame Zophée yielded to the pressure of persuasion and accompanied the Princess to this ball. She never appeared except twice at any scene of gayety at Pau. This was the first time, at the beginning of her story; and the second was—long after—near the end.

Gilbert had scarcely expected to see her. She had refused so often, and remained so firm, that he had left his aunt's drawing-room in the afternoon, where they were all assembled, and had gone out, much disappointed and somewhat disconsolate, to wander about the streets, feeling that he did dislike his town life, after all; and that the prospects of a ball—and, in fact, a round of balls—with a crowd of strangers, promised little interest to him. Thus it was a pleasant surprise to him, when waiting at the cloak-room door to conduct his aunt to her seat, to see the Princess emerge from the room and pass near him, Madame Zophée walking by her side. Close behind the Princess came the baronne, who had arrived a few evenings before, to take up her accustomed post for the winter. Ah! do we not all know her?—her bright smile, and twinkling eyes, and genial, kindly character.

Ah! how difficult to write on a page like this of scenes we know so well, and of those we love and remember, who have known these scenes along with us; and yet without them Pau would be itself no more.

Gilbert started forward as this party approached, for they had not observed him, and were passing along. "Good-evening," he said.

"Ah, good-evening, Sir Gilbert!" the Princess said, as he bowed low and paused when she turned to him. "So we have succeeded, after all, you see; we have brought her."

"Yes, here I am," said Madame Zophée, looking up at him with a sweet but rather saddened smile. "Here I am; and I feel a great barbarian, I assure you—not at all at home, and not in the least suited for so gay a scene."

"You *look* very much suited to it, at all events," said Gilbert, and an expression of admiration crept irrepressibly into his frank gaze, for indeed she did look lovely—lovely in her own peculiar and uncommon way; lovely with that harmony of soft shade and unusual coloring that were so entirely her own. Her dress, made of some pliant material, was of ivory hue: soft and indescribable, as he felt it, in tone and color, it was marvelously becoming to the *blanc-mat* of her clear skin. From under their shadowy lashes her dark, dreamy eyes shone with an intense lustre that reflected the glow of brilliant light in which she stood. She wore rich, curious ornaments of dim woven gold coiled in her dusky hair, in plain, broad bands clasped round her neck, inclosing her long, flowing dress at the waist, and encircling her white arms. She looked as lovely, as curious, as unlike any one else as usual. "The Sun-maid" spoke in the lustrous expression of her eyes; but you thought of the Tsiganie as you noted the ornaments, simple and strange-looking, and yet so rich and costly, and as you recognized the curious taste that had directed the whole attire. It was very captivating, at all events, and she looked charming.

"'No dress' was the last excuse made; but we repudiated that difficulty. Do you not think we were right?" asked the Princess, smiling triumphantly as she turned from Gilbert to take the arm of the old Duc de Montifero, who was waiting to conduct her.

"I think so, indeed. What a pretty costume!" he said. "I wish I could accompany you into the ball-room, but I am waiting for my aunt. Morton and the marquis have gone off to do the honors at the entrance-door—to receive people, you know. But, ah! I declare, here she is! and, hurra! that is capital—Comte de Beaulieu has taken possession of her, and now I may escort you in."

"My dear Gilbert," the marquise was just beginning to say, "I have kept you waiting—" but she had no time for more. The Comte de Beaulieu rushed forward to protrude a chivalrous arm, and Gilbert, nodding with a contented smile at her desertion, gave his to Madame Zophée; and they all went on through the crowd together.

And a dense crowd it was! This was going to be a great season at Pau. People had gathered *en masse* from all points of the compass—from all corners of the earth. There was every one of our old friends there, from the baron, resplendent in white waistcoat, with hair brushed straight on end, to Captain Hanleigh, of the Heavies, in the orthodox dress of the evening—the scarlet of the Pau hunt. There was little Jeanne de Venil, blushing and blissful as usual, carrying a snowy bouquet much larger than her own head, already sauntering through the glittering assembly, clinging to Morton's arm, and waiting for their first of many valses to begin. Morton had deserted all his duties as a committee-man, and had resigned himself to happiness and to little Jeanne, in utter disregard of the rosette at his button-hole, and all the responsibility it implied.

And there was Bébé, also in scarlet coat and with decorations both of gay rosette and stephanotis, appropriating Miss Netley in cool defiance of all comers from this side the Atlantic or the other. And as Gilbert, with Madame Zophée, followed the Princess and his aunt slowly up the brilliant, crowded room, he heard Bébé, with his usual nonchalance, announce that "it wasn't any good *any* fellows trying it on, for nearly all Miss Netley's valses and the cotillon were promised to him; only," exclaimed Bébé, touching Gilbert on the shoulder, as the pressure of the crowd stopped him near them—"only she has kept one waltz for one fellow, and I say, Erle, that is you; so you must come and claim it. I said I'd tell you. She says she must have a spin with you, because you rode that gray of St. Hilaire's so splendidly to hounds. So you are in luck, my boy."

"I am honored," said Gilbert. "All right, Bébé, but wait a bit; I will come back again. Dance!" he continued to Madame Zophée as they went on. "Waltz in this crowd! It is not my line, certainly; I do not feel much like it."

"Oh, of course you will dance! Every body does here; you have only got to begin, Sir Gilbert."

"Will you dance with me, then?" he said.

"I? No; it is certainly not in *my* line."

"Then I will not dance at all," he continued. "It certainly is not in mine. Ah! is this where you are going to sit—all of you, every body, in a row?"

"The thrones of State," said Madame Zophée, laughing, as they paused a little behind his aunt and the Princess; they had joined a group of French ladies round Madame la Préfète, and were all saying civil things to each other, with many bows and gesticulations, before they sat down.

Just beyond them, at the head of the long room, was a row of large chairs and sofas reserved for the lady chaperons of various rank and degree. Festooned flags, clusters of evergreens, folds of colored muslin, hung above their heads and adorned the walls on all sides around them; and a cleverly devised impromptu orchestra, covered with green foliage and bright bunches of flowers, hid old Kunst and his staff of assistant musicians at one end.

The variety and internationalism of the mingling crowd were as curious here as at the meet of the fox-hounds. Soft-eyed Spaniards and sparkling Frenchwomen were there in abundance. Plenty of bright-cheeked girls from Irish and English homes stood in pretty, vari-colored groups round their mothers and chaperons—all busy filling up their cards of engagements with *danseurs* of every possible race. There were many keen-faced Americans—men whose quick wits and ready speech lighted up the versatile conversation of that pleasant society as much as the showy beauty of the ladies of their nation and their costumes from Worth and Laferrière astonished and adorned it. A wonderful brilliancy and variety of coloring characterized the scene, for even the usually sombre dressing of the gentlemen was this evening exchanged for the red hunting-coat.

The floor was perfect, for dancing was a serious business at Pau, the affair of the moment; and every one danced—no one could help it, indeed—for while Kunst chose to play to them it was quite impossible to stand still.

This well-known and most distinguished personage was pausing at that moment and peering over the crowd, his gray head and bright, hawk-like eyes visible above the edge of his green inclosure. He was waiting for the arrival of the great ladies, and watching till they were ready, for the ball seriously to begin; and accordingly, in a few minutes, the Princess moved with the Duc de Renada to the head of the room. A buzz of arrangement took place; a rushing for partners; some scrambling for *vis-à-vis* and places; and then Kunst struck the chords of his opening bar with encouraging vehemence, and dashed with rousing energy into the strains of "La Belle Hélène." With much dignity in some directions, and with very considerable hilarity in others, the quadrille was immediately started, and the first ball of the season began.

Gilbert watched the dance forming, and then took a seat which a lady had left vacant by Madame Zophée's side.

"You naughty boy!" called his aunt to him, shaking her fan. "As usual, lazy, lazy, you prefer to sit still."

"Certainly I do, at present," he said, laughing, "unless you will dance with me, ma tante," he added, saucily, using the native designation for her, quoted from sundry young French nephews of her husband, whose repeated and infantine reiteration of the term always amused him enormously.

"Nonsense," she said. "Lazy boy!"

"That is very jolly music, though," he exclaimed, presently. "One can scarcely sit still."

"Isn't it?" said Madame Zophée. "Why do you *not* dance, then?"

"I would if," he replied, hesitatingly, "I knew how to make *you* dance with me."

"Ah, you will not find that secret out easily," she said, laughing.

"Yes, I will," he answered. "I am just thinking how I am to manage. Never mind, by-and-by—wait a while. Before the evening is over, you shall see I will succeed."

"I should be very much surprised to see it," she said again, laughing at his resolute face. "You are a very determined young personage, Sir Gilbert, but that is impossible even for you. I assure you I have not danced for years."

"And I have danced about once a year ever since I was sixteen," said Gilbert, "at the county ball, you know. It comes off in the town near us, and they always put me on the committee, so I am bound to go. But I have learned to dance, though, I can tell you, Madame Zophée; you need not utterly doubt my powers."

"I do not doubt them in the least; on the contrary, I am longing to see them exercised. I wish you would engage some one for the next waltz."

"Only you," he said, calmly. "With any strange young lady I should be afraid. You see, I am not great at the accomplishment—not so much at home at it as on the hunting-field. I never really had any teacher but one little cousin, who came for Christmas to Erle's Lynn once: she taught me; and, by-the-bye, my mother, in consequence of our unseemly and frivolous performances, never would ask her again. Ah, the quadrille is over; I must give up my seat."

Very reluctantly he had, indeed, to give it up; for back came a whole bevy of ladies, whose years did *absolutely* exclude them from any achievement more energetic than a quadrille. They all sat down in a long row, now closing in Madame Zophée, who was one seat behind them; and Gilbert, after standing disconsolate for a few minutes, looking from side to side, was obliged to move away.

Then the ball went on with full vigor; and save from the infinite varieties of national characteristics in dancing, in dress, in tongue, it was much like any other ball up to a certain point. One swinging, undulating valse, perfectly played and splendidly danced, followed another; mazurkas breaking the routine with variety here and there—mazurkas which in England we are apt to think a dull dance, until we have seen one danced by Spaniards, Russians, Poles, or Americans at Pau; by the Marquis de Sotonaga dancing with Miss Nadine Scruga, perhaps, to the music of the "Lilian," played by Kunst; after which we realize what the grace, the verve, the swing, and altogether the fascination of the mazurka *can* be, and we never think it dull again! Occasional quadrilles came too, danced—even they—with a certain cheerful piquancy of performance which we learn there can be rendered the characteristic even of a quadrille! And the ball went on thus, with all these successive changes of floating valses, rousing mazurkas, and vigorous quadrilles, until the climax came, when,

with a renewed glow of energy, enthusiasm, and excitement, every one rushed to find seats for the cotillon.

"What on earth are they all about?" exclaimed Gilbert, in astonishment.

He had been leaning, not in the best of spirits all this time, against a midway door that led from the dancing to the tea-room. He could not get near Madame Zophée. Morton and Jeanne, Bébé and Miss Netley, and many other of his usual companions seemed quite absorbed with each other, and he had found himself rather desolate after a while; for he still persisted in his resolution against dancing, and every body else seemed to think there was for the moment nothing else to be done. The supper-room had been opened at last, and he had tried to reach Madame Zophée, but, to his horror, she was seized by Baron Keffel, and carried off. Then he had looked for his aunt, and found her only in time to see her led away in procession, after the Princess, by Le Comte de Beaulieu. He had then just escaped being introduced by his uncle to a middle-aged "madame" who spoke no English, but who, by virtue of his baronetage, the committee thought might be properly allotted to him; he just escaped this, and his uncle took her himself, forgetful of his own destined portion—an elderly comtesse, who happily, however, at the moment was performing wonders of agility with a Polish officer in a galop. Then Gilbert had wandered alone into the supper-room, obliged to content himself with assisting the baron's attentions to Madame Zophée on the other side, and later he followed them back again, and remained leaning against the doorway during the last few dances before people arranged themselves for the cotillon. Here he, however, had not been quite alone; he had made an acquaintance. As the crowd returned in troops from the supper-room, and rushed again, couple after couple, madly into the festive fray; and as Gilbert had stood up to let one after another pass him, he heard himself addressed by somebody close at his side—addressed in courteous and mellow tones. He turned to find an elderly Englishman—a fresh, rosy-cheeked, blooming, and most dignified personage, in snowy choker and extensive waistcoat—bowing gravely to him, and uttering his name.

"Sir Gilbert Erle, I believe."

Gilbert, a little astonished, made his obeisance in return.

"You seem a stranger, sir?" said the old gentleman, in distinct, clear-cut accents. "You seem a stranger, Sir Gilbert, in this gay crowd?"

"And I am a stranger, sir, to a certain extent."

The gentleman answered with a polite smile. "But surely you remain so only by choice? A few words of introduction would, I have no doubt, make Sir Gilbert Erle the accepted and favored partner of the fairest *danseuse* in the room. Do you wish to dance, sir? I know every one. Will you allow me to present you to a partner for this valse they are beginning now?"

"Thank you, no. You are very kind; but I am not a dancer. I know a few partners, if I wished to perform. It is very tempting, certainly, but this evening I do not think I shall join. I am quite sufficiently amused for one occasion in looking on."

"Ah, then, let me be your cicerone to an acquaintance with our society generally. At all events, by sight and name I know every one; but, with your permission, sir, let me first present myself." And the old gentleman bowed with extreme dignity, and Gilbert returned the salutation again with perfect gravity and much inward amusement, as he continued: "Mr. Antrobus Jeffereys, sir, at your service," he said, solemnly. "The oldest English inhabitant of the town of Pau. I have been thirty-two years resident here. I know every creature in the place."

"Ah, really, I am delighted to make your acquaintance," said Gilbert, obeying his usual impulse, and holding out his hand. "In fact, it is capital. I was just wondering who every body was; will you really tell me? Who is that young lady in green, for instance? I have been trying to make out her nationality for the last ten minutes, and I can not; for every time she passes me, it is with a fresh partner, and she is talking a different tongue."

"Ah!" responded Mr. Jeffereys, putting up his eyeglass with much importance. "Now, yes, I can just tell you; that is—" and then he went on.

He told Gilbert every thing about them all. In ten minutes he was conversant with nearly every *on dit* and with the entire *chronique scandaleuse* of the place. He had his curiosity satisfied on the biography of every body sufficiently remarkable to attract his attention, and of a great many others besides. He had pointed out to him, with much disapproval in the description, the "rapids" of the American set—men whose pale faces and keen, excitable eyes spoke of many late nights and much money dropped over baccarat at the club.

The frisky matrons were delicately indicated, from pretty Mrs. Ronningsby, who, with her golden locks and natural-looking roses, was flirting with the Count de Ferré, to the beautiful Madame de Vesni and the handsome and dangerous Mrs. Philistaire.

The amount of Miss Netley's fortune, with Bébé's chances of acquiring it, were calculated to a nicety for him; and so were the probabilities of the length and limits to which "that fast and very doubtful little woman," Madame Aronal, did or did *not* go.

Then Madame de Questonali was pointed out to him, with her bevy of very charming daughters, whom "he really ought to know;" and Lord Lidscombe, who, with the Earl of Erresscourt, made up, with their respective families, the valuable contributions which the British peerage had made that year to Pau.

The Ladies Courtleigh were "handsome, aristocratic, cold-looking," Mr. Jeffereys said; but "the Honorable Miss Coninghams, that snowy flock who had floated in behind Lady Lidscombe, did justice, in beauty and in that air distingué you would have expected of them, to the noble Irish line from which they sprung." And so Mr. Jeffereys went on; and Gilbert became acquainted with as much of the vices and virtues, attractions and demerits, of Pau society as had still been left unrevealed to him after that dinner at St. Hilaire.

"A lot of very nice people, no doubt," as he soliloquized, "if they did not go on so oddly about each other!"

Mr. Jeffereys amused him extremely; and there they were still standing together, when Kunst paused in his performance, peered once more over his green inclosure, and watched while the rush and scramble indicative of the cotillon began.

"What on earth are they all doing?" repeated Gilbert.

"Ah, they are going to dance the cotillon now."

"The cotillon! Dance it on chairs! How odd! Why, they are all sitting down."

"Of course. What! have you never seen one? Oh, you will understand it directly. See, Mr. Huntley, the American, is going to lead—ah, with handsome Mrs. Vere. That is it; now they are off."

"What an odd dance!" repeated Gilbert, still looking on with astonishment as the whole assembly ranged themselves with wonderful dexterity in a huge double oval round the room.

Ladies and gentlemen all sat together, each next the partner of their most particular choice; Kunst, with his green orchestra, filled up one end, the other being left open in front of "the thrones of state," as Madame Zophée had called them, where sat the Princess and Madame de Frontignac, Lady Lidscombe, Lady Errescourt, Madame de St. Hilaire, and many other distinguished personages besides. Just behind the Princess, Gilbert could still see Madame Zophée's quiet face, her eyes sparkling with eagerness and amusement as she talked over the Princess's shoulder, and watched the gay scene. Kunst struck up the dear old tune, that quaint rococo air peculiar to himself, to which, it always seems to us, our grandmothers may have danced their prim cotillons in the old dignified days. Round the room in a smooth, swift valse spin the leaders for a moment; then they pause; a few rapid signals pass, which all the clever and the initiated understand; one chosen lady after another rises and glides quickly to her place; *danseurs* are fast elected for each expectant post. The figure is formed; they join hands, dance round, change partners and places, and return again, with a curious swimming movement, in time to the continuous valse music, that is very graceful and peculiar. All the national characteristics then come curiously out. The Spanish girls dance with a graceful, floating *abandon* of movement that recalls the bolero and mandola of their Southern land. The English girls, just transplanted to this world of sunshine and cotillons, glide stiffly round with much diffidence and with some little awkwardness, that will soon wear away. They require coaching to-night from their leaders, and assistance from their partners and friends, but—they enjoy it. The cotillon, danced here in all its perfection, is to them as fascinating and delightful as it is new. The Americans throw themselves into it with admirable verve and energy; and the pretty piquant French girls, with little Jeanne and her bright-eyed sisters among them, *valse* and *poussette* and do *pas de basque* and *chasser* swiftly, daintily to and fro with a grace and coquetry that are bewitching.

On went the cotillon: an infinite variety of figures came, and it must be told of Gilbert, that even he was fired with the fever of action, and longed to join in with them all. The fascination came on very gradually, in steady, irresistible degrees. He had stood, laughing, in ecstasies of amusement and enjoyment through the pretty scarf figure, the kneeling quadrille, and the *moulin;* but it was the rosette figure and Miss Netley that finally set him agoing.

"I can't abide him any more, standing sulking against that door," the young lady had said to Bébé in the course of the evening, adding, "Wait a bit; I'll have him spinning around before long."

And she had tried accordingly, first inviting him to walk round with her and Bébé, and *be* a flower, or a horse, or something, and so be guessed by any young lady to whom she pleased to conduct him; but he had resisted this. Then she had held out her pretty gloved hand in invitation to him to be her conductor through the mysteries of the lady's chain, but he had shaken his head, and she had stamped her foot with irritation as she turned away; but at last, as she knew beforehand, her moment came.

"What are they going to do with all those ribbons?" he had asked his faithful companion, Mr. Jeffereys, as, after making way for clouds of many-colored scarfs, for flags, toys, and other implements of mysterious purpose, to be carried forward and back again, they had to turn round once more, and admit Bébé, bearing aloft a huge, gayly decorated, open basket filled high with rosettes of ribbon of every possible hue. "What are they going to do with these now?" he said.

"You will soon see," said Mr. Jeffereys.

"What! distribute them among the ladies? Yes, by Jove, I declare!" and he paused and laughed aloud again with amusement and astonishment. The *danseurs* remained for a moment still, and the ladies—from pretty blushing Jeanne, who tripped shyly across to Morton, to the inevitable and irrepressible Miss Netley, who came straight over to Gilbert—each went up to the gentleman of her selection, pinned the rosette on his shoulder, and claimed him her partner in the dance. In two minutes the floor was once more covered with swimming couples, and Kunst's music burst forth above their heads with renewed vigor, in a peal of delicious and irresistible strain.

"Come along," said Miss Netley, as Gilbert started back dismayed. "Yes, you are in for it now. Come, you can not say no—can he, Mr. Jeffereys? Come you along; never fear, I will get you around."

And so certainly she did.

"Come along, then," said Gilbert. "I suppose I *am* in for it; shut your eyes and ride hard."

Little Cousin Annette's teaching came faithfully and invaluably to his recollection then. He encircled his determined little partner firmly; he caught the echo of that floating music; he found his balance in a moment, his foot as steady as his ear was true. He was just conscious of the amused smile in Madame Zophée's eyes as they passed her, and of the ring of the American girl's voice as she said, "Capital! here we go!" and then up came to his assistance all the courage of a rider accustomed to five-barred gates and to sunk fences, and away they went, and he enjoyed it. Miss Netley was a famous partner. The pace was tremendous, and in a rushing American *deuxtemps* they got splen-

didly round. He was sorry, in fact, when the clapping of the leader's hands resounding through the room told them that they must stop, for their turn was over. She let go his hand, touched him lightly on the shoulder, and brought him dexterously up with a last swing just in front of Bébé, who stood expectant at her own chair. Gilbert must find his way back again across the room to Mr. Jeffereys by himself.

"Must we stop? Must I go?" he said, as she sat down. "I am sorry."

"Yes, you must; but—that is right; never mind!" said Miss Netley. "We shall have another turn. I'll give you another bow."

And so she did, in spite of Bébé's remonstrance, and they went off in that flying *deux-temps* once more. Then others followed her example, seeing that Gilbert, after all, did not refuse to dance. Jeanne's sister came up with a blush and a pretty smile, her head turned with a pretended coyness on one side as she held up her rosette, and he went off with her—delighted again. And then the Comtesse de Beaulieu's young married daughter chose him, and one after another all his fair friends from the hills, till he was gayly decorated with many a bright-colored bow all over his coat-flaps, and was very pleased with them too. Finally little Jeanne herself came, Morton bringing her and sticking on the rosette unceremoniously for her upon Gilbert's coat, which she was much too shy to do for herself, and then they two had a charming valse, while Morton waited, looking on with much approval, until Gilbert brought back his little "lady of the bright eyes," and he appropriated her for himself again. And through it all Gilbert's spirits rose, and his cheeks flushed, and his eyes sparkled, and he thought to himself decidedly "that a ball, and, above all, a cotillon, was a very jolly thing."

Then the scene changed. The ladies sat down. The gentlemen looked impatiently round. What was coming? The last figure, and the prettiest and most graceful, surely, of all. Gilbert had to make way again, having been put by his last partner into the only corner left for him—his door-way. He had to make way, for in came the attendants once more, bearing not one but many baskets, all filled to overflowing with lovely sweet-scented flowers. The gentlemen rushed at them, but the leader waved them back. The bouquets were carried round and distributed, every *danseur* securing as many as he possibly could, and the room seemed suddenly filled and permeated with the delicious scent. Parma violets, snowy hot-house lilac, roses, stephanotis, gardenias, were carried and distributed into every corner; and Gilbert looked on an instant, wondering, delighted, surprised. Then, as the baskets passed them, he suddenly realized the position of things; the use and destiny of those lovely bouquets became apparent to him. Morton was proffering his, with a bright smile, to Jeanne, and she had taken it, touched her rosy lips to the flowers in reply to his glance, and they were valsing round merrily together, while Gilbert stood astonished still. Bébé had proffered his on bended knee to Miss Netley; Captain Hanleigh was struggling across the room to lay his at the feet of the English heiress, Miss Carlisle; and every cavalier had rushed with his fragrant offering to secure first the special lady of his love. In two minutes once again the floor was crowded, all were valsing swiftly round, each lady bearing aloft, proud and delighted, her lovely trophy of flowers.

"Ah!" exclaimed Gilbert to himself, with a sudden long-drawn breath, as the position broke upon him. "Ah! now—hurra! I understand!" and he sprung forward, rushed to the nearest basket he could get hold of, and claimed a bouquet in his turn.

"Oh, do you want one? Yes—certainly," said the leader, who stood near. "I beg your pardon, I thought you were not dancing. Here is a beauty—about the best of the lot."

"Thanks," said Gilbert, and he turned away with his treasure, a little glance of triumph sparkling in his eyes and his color deepening as he bent over it for a moment, and paused. Then he looked round. Every body was dancing; the room was quite crowded, but little he cared. He plunged right into the middle of the vortex, canoned violently against Bébé and Miss Netley, and rebounded hard against Monsieur de Veuil, who, with mouth wide open and hair on end, was making some stout lady dance. On went Gilbert, disregarding all exclamations, and made his way straight to Madame Zophée's seat. He held out his bouquet; she was still in her place behind the Princess, who smiled and turned, amused, to her, as Gilbert stood and waited, his bouquet still extended in his hand. Madame Zophée shook her head.

"You must," he said, determinedly. "You can not help it now—you must."

"Ah no, Sir Gilbert. Thank you, I never dance."

"But *I* never do either, and I had to, as you saw. So come; you must, you know you must."

"No, no, I can not!" she repeated.

But her eyes softened and looked wistfully at him as he stood pleading there. She was very young still—poor little Zophée—and the music and the gay scene, and the crowd of dancers floating past her had made her pulses beat and her cheek glow for the last hour. She loved dancing as Southerners do love it. She had danced through many a day of that far-away past, as they dance in the Sun-lands, as they dance among the Sun-maids, as her mother and her grandmother had danced, perhaps, before her, with the old wild race, with the Tsiganie; and her eyes softened and sparkled brightly again as she tried to say, "No, no, I can not," once more.

"Ah, but you must!" said the Princess, at last, turning to her with her gentle, persuasive way. "You must!" she repeated again, laying her hand upon Zophée's, and speaking, as she always did to her, in winning tones of tenderness, gently combining entreaty with soft but irresistible command. "In the cotillon you must when you have a bouquet, you know, Zophée; you can not refuse."

"Ah me!" said Zophée, murmuring softly to herself in Russian. "Ah me! Have I no strength of resistance? Why did I come to a ball? That music! Sir Gilbert, I thank you, you are so kind. Must I, then? Well, just one turn."

She rose, and the Princess made room for her; and she came out to him, and he placed the bouquet in her hand.

"I am sure you can dance, dear," said the Princess, as she paused, hesitating a moment by Gilbert's side. "I am sure you will valse to perfection."

"Dance!" said Madame Zophée, with sparkling eyes. "Why do you make me? You forget I am a Tsiganie."

"At all events, *I* can keep time," said Gilbert, "and that is about all," he added; and then he encircled her gold-spanned waist, and she put her hand lightly upon his shoulder, and Métra's "La Rose" came floating softly from behind the green orchestra, and almost before he was aware of it they had begun.

"Wonderfully jolly!" was Gilbert's descriptive epithet, which he had applied in inward soliloquy to all the former dances of this evening; and, but for this dance, *that* would probably have been always his commentary on, and impression of, valsing in general, as he merrily joined it, and went rushing round. But while valsing, taken widely, is a pleasant pastime or an active exercise, there are some valses, danced here and there, which remain lingering upon the memory like a lovely poem. And so it seemed to Gilbert, as now he did not rush off vehemently, as he had done before, carrying his partner vigorously along with him, with energetic action strongly contradictory to the poetry of "La Rose;" but he seemed to pause as he encircled Madame Zophée's waist, and then *she* floated away with him into a wonderful musical dreamland. He seemed carried away as they went smoothly, quietly, gliding over the room; she gently steadying and guiding him, by her hand lying so lightly yet so firmly in its place; he supporting her, and yet entirely led by her, carried on by that curious, mesmeric power of a beautiful dancer—a power that made the strains of "La Rose" seem, then and ever after, to him as the echo of a delicious dream.

"You valse well, Sir Gilbert," she said, as they paused after three times sweeping the wide round of the room.

"I never knew it before," he answered. "And you—"

"Ah! I—it is an old forgotten vice, my love of it. But dancing has always seemed as the poetry of movement to me."

"It is perfect. May we go on again?"

"No—well, once more. The cotillon is over. I see the leader has himself started now. Ah, every body is rushing for one turn. Are you afraid? No? Come, then; just once more round."

Once more just round the room they went, and she stopped him by the Princess's side.

"I could soon make you a charming valser," she said, as he turned to smile, with sparkling eyes, into her face.

"I wish you would!" he exclaimed, and she laughed in answer. Her cheeks were bright with her unwonted exertion, and her dark eyes were glistening with a wonderful brilliancy of life. She looked so young as she stood for a moment, all lighted up with that transitory gleam, glowing with the warmth of her momentary self-abandonment to the bright, soft enjoyment of her lost youth. Gilbert's face reflected her look of happiness, his eyes glanced in a bright answer to hers. Suddenly she paled, and the cloud fell.

"I must not do it again!" she exclaimed, plaintively, clasping her hands with a passionate gesture. "Why did I come? Why did I do it, after I said I would never again?"

She turned from him before he could answer her, and sunk back upon a vacant seat.

"Have I tired you too much?" he said. "I am very sorry."

"No, no!" and she gave him her left hand for an instant, as if to re-assure him. "It is not you; never mind; only do not ask me to do it—do not ask me again."

"Why? why?"—the one eager word that rose ever to his lips as he talked to her. It came quivering to them again, but was crushed back in time—the one word he had forbidden to himself.

"You are tired?" said the Princess, suddenly observing her. "You are tired, dear. You went very quick and long," she added, turning to clasp her friend's hand. "You are pale, Zophée; you are not accustomed, as we are, to the heat and the fatigue."

Gilbert stood up and looked round in perplexity for a moment. Was there any thing he could do for her? He knew all her changeful moods so well: often before, as they had talked together, she had thus paled suddenly, and lost her self-control. His one thought was what he could do to quiet and soothe her now.

As he turned, several Frenchmen drew near—Monsieur de Varmont, the Comte de Soier, Monsieur de Crêle, and others: they had all come with the same question, all pursuing the same object. Madame Variazinka had danced with "Sare Geelbert;" would she not dance with them? This invasion seemed, curiously enough, to rouse Madame Zophée, and to restore to her her self-control. No, she would dance with none of them; she was tired, she was going home; and Gilbert stood by with a pleased feeling of triumphant superiority as, one by one, she waved them back from her, and turned at last wearily away.

"Do you really wish to go home?" he said, bending toward her, and speaking in low, earnest tones.

"I do very much. I should never have come. Can I go away? See, the Princess has gone to dance. What can I do? Oh, I would go away! Oh yes, I would go home; indeed, indeed, I would."

"Will you let me take you, then?" said Gilbert. "To your carriage, I mean. I will tell the Princess—I will say you were tired; I will tell her any thing you like—but will you let me take you?"

"Do you think the carriage is there?"

"I am sure it is. I will go and see, if you like, Madame Zophée; but it would take so long coming back to you all up the room. Will you not come now? And while you put your cloak on I will call up your carriage."

"Very well; I should like to go," she said; and she rose and took his arm.

They threaded their way through the crowd, the excited flush of the dance having passed from both of them; their wonted quiet manner of intercourse having taken its place. He led her along silently, with a pleasant feeling thrilling him of appropriation of her—appropriation, as he told himself pleasingly, by her allowed. She

acknowledged it among all that crowd as *his* part to care for her, to lead her out as he had brought her into the room. His strange, sweet friend—he was full only of concern for her now, saddened in the midst of this gay scene, because her glance had saddened, sorry because her cheek had paled.

"I will look for Ivan and the carriage," he said, as he left her at the cloak-room door; and then away he went out into the dark, still night, among the crowd of waiting carriages, to where the long row of horses were drawn up, all champing restlessly at their bits; and he called for Ivan, but in vain. No Ivan replied, no Ivan was forthcoming, although again and again he sent emissaries, and called the name himself loudly along the line. No Ivan was there; some mistake had occurred, evidently; Ivan's orders had not been understood, and Gilbert came back to Madame Zophée in dismay.

"Not there? You do not say so! How extraordinary of Ivan! And Vasilie, is he not among the servants in the hall?"

"Neither of them. I have called up and down the whole line; there is not a sign of them anywhere."

"And I—I can not get home!" exclaimed Madame Zophée, in despair, realizing suddenly the full force of the situation.

"I am so sorry!" he repeated. "What can be done? Will you mind waiting? or will you have some one else's carriage? Let me see—of course I will call up my aunt's."

"It is of no use, Sir Gilbert; it is only two o'clock, and I know hers was not ordered till half-past three. Monsieur Morton would not have it a moment earlier, and, ah me! I ordered mine at one—and it has not come for me. Vasilie mistook what I said to him. What is to be done?"

"Will you have some one else's carriage?" he said.

"No, no! I can not take away the carriage of somebody I do not know, or any one's, indeed, without permission; and they are all, all dancing still—what can I do? Sir Gilbert, go back, and do not mind me."

"As if I would!" he said, resolutely, with the dim consciousness within him that it was a very great deal pleasanter standing here, even in the cold and draughty entrance to the cloak-room, looking consolingly into Madame Zophée's fair, quiet face, than it could possibly be dancing in the ball-room with Miss Netley or any other laughing-eyed partner, of whatever clime.

"Madame Zophée," he said, presently, in his frank, straightforward, matter-of-fact way, "you really ought to go home. You do look tired. That delicious valse we had together was too much for you, and it was all my fault."

"It was not the valse, Sir Gilbert; no—do not say that. Do not mind me—it is my way, you know; it is the old story," she added, smiling up at him, but with a sad look in her eyes that contradicted the smile. "It was not the valse, you know, but the thoughts that came with it; and now—yes, that and every thing has made me very tired."

"If I could only get you home," he continued, earnestly; "would you come with me? Will you walk, I mean? It is such a little way, and it is such a glorious night. It is mild and delicious, and there is brilliant starlight; will you not walk?"

"Shall I?" she said, eagerly. "I should so like to get home."

"Come, then;" and he drew her hand within his arm. "Are you well wrapped up? Are you warm enough in your queer head-dress—are you quite sure? Come, then;" and she let him lead her out.

Out from the heated, exciting ball-room they went—out on to the terrace that led along to her hotel—out into the clear, beautiful, silver radiance that lighted up the soft darkness of the night; and along the terrace they went, pausing a moment, instinctively, unconsciously, to gaze, as they stood side by side, upon that wondrously bewitching view; to watch the clouds roll over the mountains, that rose away across the valley, looming in the mystic light, far, far away; to feel their hearts thrill, as they stood, silent and awe-struck, with the majesty of the mighty nature-world before them, overpowering their souls in all its lofty and sublime composure, in its intense and stirring contrast to that scene of human life—fraught with excitement and frivolous vanity—in which they had mingled so unthinkingly, and from which they had come away.

"Let me go home," said Madame Zophée, presently, and he led her across the terrace to her hotel—led her almost in silence, and left her with scarcely another word. For he understood her changed mood; his heart answered the deep thrill of sentiment, soul-stirring and passionately devotional, which he knew that view, her mountains, the realized contrast, had awakened in her; and by word or look he would not disturb the saddened tranquillity of her spirit, for he understood her—and was he not her tender, her considerate, and most chivalrous friend?

CHAPTER XV.

BAND-DAY IN THE BASSE PLANTE.

A LITTLE of the lassitude of reaction hung about the whole party in the Rue de Lycée next day; not unnatural, certainly, after the unwonted excitement of the first ball. It was not a hunting-day, so there was nothing to make any one turn out earlier than he pleased; and after a late *déjeûner* with his aunt and cousin, Gilbert found the afternoon hours left upon his hands. It was his own fault, certainly. The marquise had innumerable visits to pay, and to perform this duty she warmly invited Gilbert to accompany her, not feeling much astonishment, however, when he declined. Morton had made an important engagement with Jeanne, and he also expressed his desire that Gilbert should join the party at La Villette. But neither did this suggestion suit him. Indeed, as his aunt at last asserted, Gilbert was fidgety to-day. No suggestion seemed to fall in with his ideas, and his kind friends finally realized that they must leave him to dispose of himself. With this result he seemed satisfied.

"To tell the truth, aunt," he elaborately explained, "I have not half explored the town yet; there are lots of interesting corners, I have no doubt, that I have still to see."

"But—how?" exclaimed the marquis, looking severely at Morton. "Have you not been conducted—has Morton not had the politeness,

my dear nephew, to be your guide? Certainly —certainly there are many most interesting objects for you to visit, and many scenes of famous historic association which, without fail, you must be conducted to see."

"Oh, thank you, thank you a thousand times, uncle!" exclaimed Gilbert, hastily, seized indeed with a sudden horror that the marquis might himself offer to be his cicerone for the afternoon. "Indeed, we have done all that part of the sight-seeing thoroughly; have we not, Morton? We went into it in a regular business-like way yesterday and the day before."

"Yes; do not reproach me, father," said Morton, "for I have done my part. If Gilbert is not completely au fait with Jeanne d'Albret, Le bon Roi, Gabrielle d'Estrées, Bernadotte, and all the rest of it, it is not my fault. I have taken him everywhere. He has been all over the château, and he has seen the tortoise-shell cradle, and the trophy of flags, and the statue, and every thing; and I only hope that it has all made a due impression upon his mind."

"I like every thing about that jolly old fellow, Henri IV.," said Gilbert. "Before I came here, indeed, I associated Pau and the Béarnais chiefly with Morton and him."

"Ah, then—that is well," said the marquis, somewhat pacified, and turning his attention to his luncheon again.

"Have a glass of Jurançon, Gilbert," said Morton, "for it is, after all, I think, about my pleasantest association with Henri IV."

"Do," said the marquise, "and give *me* a little, Morton, as well; it is so fortifying. Gilbert, fill up your glass."

"And think," said Morton, solemnly, "as you imbibe, of that imposing moment. Scene," he went on with melodramatic pathos—"Scene—The Tour de Mazère. Moment—The birth-time of Henri of Navarre. Present—The Infant, plus his grandfather and a bottle of Jurançon wine. Action—An ounce of garlic eaten by the royal stranger, and half a pint of the silvery liquid imbibed, to the astonishment of his attendants, the fortifying of his constitution, the satisfaction of his grandparent, and the future glory of France."

"What are you saying, Morton?" said the marquis, in an irritated tone, for he had only half followed the meaning of his son's eloquent rodomontade, and the levity of his tones displeased him. "You do talk a continual persiflage!" he continued. "What do you say?"

"I am merely pursuing my instructions to my cousin," Morton continued; "my causeries on the history of our capital of Béarn, and illustrating my discourse as I go along by practical experiments on the merits of Jurançon wine. But I have done, father. Gilbert is not a hopeful pupil, so I have done. Farewell, every body—à tantôt, mon cousin—now I am off to Jeanne."

Then they separated, and for the rest of the afternoon all went their respective ways, the marquise to pay her visits, and to spend some very pleasant hours in hearing often repeated the truly sincere expressions of her friends' delight at her return to town.

The marquis repaired soon and successively to the two clubs, whiling away very agreeably the time, first in a local gossip with sundry white-headed compatriots at the "Cercle Henri," below the theatre, beyond Lafontaine's shop; and then changing the scene into the English Club on the Place Royale, from the window of which admirable institution a most cheerful view of life could be taken any fine afternoon, and where much lively converse, and many good rubbers of whist, and not a few excellent stories, might be enjoyed.

Gilbert saw his aunt enter her carriage, taking his hat off with a smile to her as he stood lingering on the doorstep; and she, kissing her finger-tips and shaking her snowy curls at him, drove out of the court. Then he went off by himself. He had made no plan for his own occupation during the afternoon. He had no secret project in his mind, prompting his steady refusal of all suggestions for his amusement from his friends.

He was conscious merely of a wish to be left alone, a sort of dim idea that he would trust to fate rather than to project to bring something pleasant in his way. He was in a curious, tired, and dreamy frame of mind that suggested idleness, so he turned his footsteps along the Rue de Lycée without any clear realization of where he wished or meant to go. He passed his own house, rejecting promptly a suggestion of conscience that he might very properly go up to his room and pass this idle afternoon in writing his home letters. An epistle to his mother was certainly due about this time, and a whole budget of business papers lay, unnoticed and unanswered, on his table besides. But he was in no mood for them to-day.

He turned the corner of the club, and came out upon the Place at last. It was about three o'clock, and a glorious winter day, and the Place, with its grand background of mountains rising at the far end in the distant view, looked a tempting lounging-place in which to smoke a quiet Manila, and pass in pleasant *dolce far niente* an afternoon.

There were very few people visible there at this hour of the day. Every body was driving, riding, visiting each other, or still resting away fatigue. He wandered down the Place between the rows of leafless trees; he passed the gateway and walked just under the windows of the Hôtel de France; and when he reached the parapet he leaned on it for a moment, looked across the valley, gazed at the mountain-tops without feeling that he saw them, and then he turned suddenly round. He was facing the huge hotel now, on its southern side. The range of windows opposite him looked every one of them straight over Gave and côteaux and the valleys toward the *pics* and mountain ranges in full face of the Spanish sun; and the stone balcony on the rez-de-chaussée (that was, as he looked up, just on the level above his eyes) commanded, in the glory of the midday, or in the sweetness of the moonlight, the whole grand prospect of the Pyrenees. The two low French windows opening on to it, at the west corner close to him, stood wide open this afternoon, and by moving a little forward and raising himself to his full height he could see almost right in—quite sufficiently so, at all events, to realize that the room was empty. Madame Zophée was evidently not at home.

"Not a soul to be found!" he exclaimed to himself, in a vexed tone, at last. "There does not seem to me to be a creature awake in the whole place. Where has every body gone to, I

wonder? and what is to become of me? I do wonder where Madame Zophée is; gone out walking, I fancy; or, more likely, as it is just three o'clock, she has gone off for a drive."

No use lingering there, at all events. There was, evidently, no chance of her appearing at the window, as he had half consciously been hoping that he should see her do. No use lingering there; there was no one to be seen. So he turned his footsteps westward along the terrace, lighting his cigar, and walking slowly, the grand view pleasing and the soft air soothing him unconsciously as he went, but his mind remaining still restless. His promenade, in all its solitude, did not promise him so much enjoyment as he had assured his aunt and Morton he should find therein.

He passed along the boulevard and the terrace under the castle wall. He looked up at the old Tour de Mazère, and thought drowsily of Margaret de Valois and Jeanne d'Albret, and Morton's dissertation upon the Jurançon wine; and then he wound round by the bastions into the lower ground, that had been once the garden of the castle in the grand old days of the Viscounts of Béarn.

He came upon Triquetti's graceful statue of Gaston Phœbus, Comte de Foix, and he stood puffing his cigar for some minutes here, admiring the agile-looking figure, the princely, graceful posture, the eager, energetic face, and then suddenly, as he lingered, music burst upon his ear. He strolled on and found himself presently in the Basse Plante, on the fringe of a crowd of people, and in full view and hearing of a military band.

"Band-day at the Basse Plante" it was indeed, and a scene of festivity he found there, quite unexpected. He had heard of the band-days on the Place Royale, and Morton's and Bébé's description of that assembly of loveliness and fashion had made him a little bit curious and eager in anticipation for the first day to arrive. But nobody had told him of the music here; and the reason soon revealed itself, as he lingered and criticised the crowd, observing immediately that of fashion and beauty there was little or none.

The band-day in the Basse Plante, from some freak of fashion, like the Serpentine drive in Hyde Park, had ceased to be *à la mode*. "Nobody" came to it—that is, "nobody" according to the language of the ball-rooms of Pau. No English, except nurses and children; no French or Americans of such as wore costumes of Felix and Laferrière.

Yet the scene was both curious and picturesque. The company was chiefly native—of "the people"—almost all bourgeois from the near neighborhood or from the town of Pau. There were crowds of neat, busy-looking women, stout mothers of families with groups of little quaintly dressed children, brought out with them to hear the music, to dance in the sunshine, to lie about on the grass in happy idleness, and generally to enjoy themselves and make "fête."

All these good personages had set themselves down in circles, and sat packed closely together, each resting her feet on the edge of her neighbor's chair. Their husbands and husbands' friends sat round and among them, looking very happy and sociable, smoking much potent tobacco, and holding much noisy discourse. The men smoked and chattered, and the women clicked their knitting-pins, and shouted often and vociferously to their mob-capped babies, who were prone persistently to stray far afield, and they and their surroundings altogether made a curious and lively picture.

The château closed in the view on one side, and the park stretched away on the other, and here in the Basse Plante the tall leafless trees grew in stiff, prim rows, recalling ever the quaint taste that had laid out these pleasure-grounds, and the strange old scenes of its royal and early times. Across the tall stems fell the winter sunshine, deepening already to a ruddy glow as the early twilight crept on. The Basse Plante and the valley even at this hour were covered with the soft floating mist that heralded the darkness.

Among the black-stemmed trees, glittering in the sun-rays, stood the circle of soldiers—their red pantaloons and blue frocks giving glow and color to the picture, and their brass instruments flashing back reflections of the light. And through the still, wintry branches and the gathering mists rose sweet, stirring music, softened where Gilbert stood by a little distance, and waking exquisite thrills of recollection as the strain reached him, for it was the full floating echo, familiar and delicious, of Métra's "La Rose." Like the rise and fall of the rhythm of a beautiful poem the strains reached him, bringing a flush of soft excitement to his cheek and a glitter of unwonted feeling to his eyes. He listened delighted, and leaned for some time against a tree, smoking his cigarette, watching the curious, bright-colored crowd, and enjoying the soft stillness of the air as the sunlight glowed every instant to a richer and warmer hue and the shadows deepened under the tall-stemmed trees.

Along the stiff alleys of the Basse Plante he could see the slowly moving figures of people sauntering to and fro in *tête-à-tête* a little away from the circle round the band. And, farther still, far into the brown shadows of the park, he saw solitary figures dotted here and there: an unsociable man like himself appeared on one side, smoking a misanthropical cigar; a priest emerged from the sylvan shade, paced the avenue toward the château, and disappeared; one quaint, characteristic figure after another caught Gilbert's attention and amused him. And so he stood for a long while, lingering and looking, and listening to the music there.

Suddenly he sprnng upright from his lounging position and gazed eagerly down one long row of trees. It was a stiff avenue, leading under the ramparts of the castle toward the entrance near the Haute Plante. The sun-glow was flooding there, scattering the silvery gathering mists on its way, and between the dark and tall-stemmed trees there was coming toward him some one he thought he knew. It was too far off to recognize any thing but the sweep of the dress, the step, the *tournure* of the figure, and the verve and grace and lightness of the walk; but still he sprung forward, for there was no mistaking these. It was Madame Zophée. She had got out of her carriage at the upper entrance to the Basse Plante, and had sent it away from there, and she was now walking home by herself through the trees, and the rich sunset, and the soft sweetness of the air.

"Madame Zophée!" Gilbert exclaimed, and he raised his hat and flung his cigar away, as he drew near her. "I am so glad I have found you," he went on. "I have been alone the whole afternoon, and I have been so desolate and so bored."

"Alone and bored!" she said, in an amused tone, as she gave him her hand. "Where are all your friends, Sir Gilbert? Why have they deserted you?"

"It was my own fault," he said. "I was cantankerous at luncheon, and would not do any thing that was suggested for me to do."

"How very unpleasant of you!"

"Was it not? But the fact is, I knew I wanted to do *something*, and I could not quite discover what it was. I know now, however," he added, with a bright, pleased smile.

"Well?" she answered, looking up at him inquiringly, as he said nothing more. "Well, and what was that?"

She paused for his reply before she moved on.

"Take a walk in the park with you," he said, quietly, turning round by her side. "That is quite the pleasantest thing I could possibly have conceived for myself this afternoon, and happy fate has brought it in my way."

She laughed merrily, and turned also and walked slowly down the path.

"Ha, ha!" she said; "but you have counted your fortune too quickly, Sir Gilbert, for I am sorry to say it is impossible. I am going straight home."

"But why? Oh, do, Madame Zophée! come just a little way. Will you not be my guide? I have never yet explored the park, and it is such a lovely evening. Ah! will you not come?"

"Impossible," she said, decidedly. "It is lovely, Sir Gilbert; but, unfortunately, it is just the loveliness that constitutes the impossibility. This is at once, as you will soon find out here, the most picturesque and most dangerous hour of the day."

"But why? Ah! do not go homeward. Look, the sun is not nearly set."

"But in a few moments it will be, and then —I must *be* at home. See that beautiful effect among the trees and over the valley there, of the struggle between mist and sunlight, day and darkness, heat and chill. In half an hour the chill will have conquered, and all this glow will be gone. I must go at once, Sir Gilbert; but do not let me interrupt your walk, do not let me take you away from the music, from this gay scene."

"I am tired of it," he said, "very tired of it all by myself here. May I not accompany you to the hotel?"

"Well, then, if you are so kind; it is not very far," she said, "and it will not take you out of your way."

And then they turned together eastward, toward the château and across the bridge.

It was very delicious to stroll quietly on, to saunter through that soft, sweet air, in view of that glorious prospect, along that quaint, stiff terrace, beneath the shadow of these stern old walls. Pleasant to feel the picturesqueness of the situation, to feel its influence unconsciously as Gilbert did, as they went on, and as he looked up to where the point of the Tour de Gaston, still glowing in the ruddy sunlight, stood out finely drawn against the winter sky, as he watched the shadows creeping down the mountain-side, and the *pics* still standing forth delicate and clear. A soft rose-flush glowed on the snowy crowns of the Pics de Bigorre and d'Ossau, and little fleecy clouds of crimson, amber, and purple hue curled round their summits, or lay in straight lines across the deepening skies. The mist lay dense and vapory, rising from the hot earth in the valley now, heralding the darkness as they rose, and chasing upward the bright hues of the receding sun. Evening seemed falling round them, soft and tranquil and silent, soothing the spirit and hushing almost to a murmur, as they talked together, their answering tones. Under the ramparts of the château they wound their way, then on past the new Hôtel Gassion, below the towers of St. Martin, and along the terrace, until they reached the corner of the Place Royale again, and were opposite the windows of Madame Zophée's rooms. Here they were arrested.

The scene on the boulevard had changed since Gilbert had sauntered there in solitude a couple of hours before. It was solitary no longer. Groups of people stood, talking and laughing audibly together, round the statue of King Henry and along the terrace facing the view. Men had strolled out from the club, and were beguiling an hour before whist-time in hearing from their lady friends all the news of the day. Ladies had come home from driving, and were doing a little bit of constitutional exercise and society before going home to tea, and all the little flirtations of the night before were being picked up just where the links had been broken by daylight at the ball that morning, and were setting to work merrily again! Society had collected for a short time, to enjoy themselves, each other, and the mountains before the sun quite set.

Upon this scene came Madame Zophée and Gilbert, he pausing to greet Morton and the De Veuils; she being interrupted in her project of crossing the Place directly to her hotel by the voice of the Princess, who was standing by the parapet with a group of French and Spanish ladies, and had observed her pass.

"You are out late, Zophée chérie," she said, advancing to take her little friend warmly by the hand.

"I am, Princess," Madame Zophée answered. "But I am on my way home."

"Ah! you are right. I will not detain you. You should go in. See how the mist rises so quickly, and in two minutes more the sun will be gone. Adieu, dear, adieu. I do not like to lose you, but you are right to go in."

And she let Madame Zophée go. Gilbert glanced round and would fain have followed, at least to her hotel door. But Madame de Veuil had detained him for a moment, and when he looked toward Madame Zophée again she was waving a "good-evening" to him, and then turned without waiting to exchange words. She disappeared between the big gates of the hotel yard, and in another moment Marfa appeared, closing her windows with much vehement energy, and for that day at least she felt to him quite shut away. He lingered with his cousin on the Place after that for a while, and then, at Bébé Beresford's invitation, turned into the English Club.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GOLDEN CHAI.

After the peculiar and subtle charm with which music in the Basse Plante was ever henceforth invested in Gilbert's sphere of association and memory, the first band-day in the Place Royale rather disappointed him; and this notwithstanding that the brilliancy of the scene exceeded all that Bébé had led him to expect. The crowd was great; the toilets were beautiful; the row of carriages on the boulevard was long, and, as Bébé had promised, from their inmates came many bewitching glances of "blue eyes and gray eyes, black eyes and brown," the two last being, if any thing, predominant; for the number of pretty Spaniards assembled that gay winter at Pau was very large. Gilbert's various friends were nearly all there—sitting in knots and groups and circles round the statue and the trees, walking up and down along the boulevard in *quartettes* and *trios* and *tête-à-têtes;* while the sun shone bright as usual, and the band played cheerily on its wooden daïs, and the view was glorious, and every body seemed delighted with each other and with themselves.

But still Gilbert was disappointed, for Madame Zophée would not be persuaded to appear. He would like to have sauntered up and down between the trees with her, as Bébé was doing with Miss Netley, and Morton with Jeanne, and Captain Hanleigh with Miss Carlisle, and every body else with his especial friend; or he would have been so happy if she would have joined that group around Henri's pedestal where sat the Princess and all the coterie of his aunt—indeed, he did not care to join them without her, though he did not exactly make that confession to himself.

He was restless; he wandered about unsettled, saying a word to every one, coming to anchor by none; and the whole thing failed to amuse him, though it boasted so much beauty and toilet, so many "fair women and brave men," so much glitter of foreign uniforms and sparkling of bright eyes, though there was music, and bouquet girls, and Spanish merchants, and every thing to make the scene wonderfully effective and picturesque.

It was quite late in the afternoon, the music was nearly over, and he was tired of watching the groups of smartly dressed children at play, and of interrupting other people's converse by inserting occasional restless words of his own; and he had paused at last a long time behind his aunt's chair, looking listlessly about him, and not attending to any conversation at all, when the Princess suddenly, with her soft, foreign accentuation, called him by name.

"Sir Gilbert, is not that the little Zophée," she said, "standing on the balcony in her window there behind her flowers?"

"Yes, of course it is," he answered, quickly, looking immediately round with a suddenly brightened glance in the direction to which the Princess had turned. "She is listening to the band, I suppose, from there."

"Why does she not come out to us?"

"She will not, Princess," he answered. "I went with my aunt to ask her quite early in the afternoon. She says she never does come on the band-days."

"No; she has never come before, certainly; but, then, till now, she had so far to drive to the music: she was not in town. Ah! she does not like it, I suppose, the dear little Zophée. She never will come in a crowd."

"That is just what she said, Princess," said Gilbert, ruefully. "It is no good—she will not come."

"And has she been alone, I wonder, all the afternoon? Dear me—that is too bad! And I know she did not even go for her drive. Ah, she sees us!" added the Princess, kissing her finger-tips. "She can see us from her window as we sit here. Look! she is waving her hand to us. Shall we go and talk to her, Sir Gilbert? If she would come to the edge of the balcony she could hear us speak."

"Capital! Do let us go!" exclaimed Gilbert; and he pulled the chairs back and made way for the Princess, who smiled and added her explanations to her friends, pointing to Madame Zophée at the window; and then she walked away across the Place with Gilbert.

Madame Zophée came out to them as she saw them coming, and stood leaning on the stone balustrade above them as they approached. A soft shawl was wrapped close round her neck and shoulders, her fair quiet face was radiant in the sun-glow and in the light of its own sweet welcoming smile.

"Ah! we have brought you out, you see, after all," exclaimed Gilbert.

"We have come to visit you," said the Princess, "and see what you do in there alone all the afternoon."

"It was kind of you to remember me!" she said, softly, for the two countenances below touched her strangely for a moment, as they looked up toward her—one so gentle and full of tenderness and cordiality, the other so winning, and so young and bright.

"Do not stand there, Princess; do not let me keep you away from your friends," she added, presently.

"No; on the contrary," said the Princess, "I shall not be kept away from them, for see, they are all coming to visit you too;" and she turned round laughing, as Gilbert's aunt escorted by old Keffel, and the marquis conducting Madame Beaulieu, rose *en masse* from their chairs under the pedestal, and came also across the Place.

"Ah! little Solava—galoupka moja!" cried Baron Keffel, waving his hand with energy toward the balcony. "What do you do there by yourself alone? Why do you not come down, you naughty one, to your pining friends?"

"What do I do?" said Madame Zophée, brightly, smiling down with pleasure and much amusement upon them all. "I am just having my tea, if you want to know, baron. The samovar is fizzing vigorously in the window here at my back."

"The samovar! Ah, you wicked one!" exclaimed the baron, shaking his fist up at her with a furious mien. "Where is your promise of how long? so long ago—your broken promise—to give me a glass of tea?"

"A glass of tea! How uncomfortable it sounds!" said the marquise. "Zophée dear, I hope you have something in there cozier than that?"

"Monsieur le Baron knows what he is talking about, marquise," said Zophée. "A glass of golden chai, with plenty of sugar and citron, is

a very nice thing, baron, is it not? not to be despised."

"*De, lee, shuss!*" ejaculated the baron, enthusiastically. "But never more, I see, faithless little Solava, to be enjoyed by me."

"Why not?" she answered. "Dear baron, come up and partake with me when you will. Marfa will feel it high honor to prepare for you. Come and drink chai with me, I beg of you, any afternoon."

"Zophée!" said the Princess, suddenly, "shall we *all* come up and have tea with you now? Why should we not? Will you admit us? May we come in?"

"And a thousand times welcome, dear Princess," she said. "I am honored and delighted indeed."

"Then we will all come?" continued the Princess, turning with energetic resolution to her friends. "All of us—really, Zophée, you say?"

"As many as you please; if many, the more welcome, Princess," she replied.

"Charming!" cried the marquise.

"Brava! brava!" exclaimed old Keffel.

"Enchantée," muttered Madame de Beaulieu.

"A veery most excellent idea!" added the marquis.

"I too? I may come?" said Gilbert, stopping Zophée for a moment as she turned away.

"If you care to come, yes; most certainly," she said. "I can not leave you out in the cold, can I?"

"*In the cold* indeed it would be," he replied, laughing with pleasure at the prospect. "No, I do not think you could be quite so cruel as that."

Then he hastened after the rest of the party, and in another moment they all presented themselves at Madame Zophée's door.

The room looked quiet and shadowy and warmly fire-lit as they entered. The sun had crept away, and the evening was falling quickly, but the glow of the big burning logs in the open chimney was ruddy and filled the room pleasantly with changeful color and light. The shadows were soft in the corners and in the embrasures of the heavy curtain-folds; the air was sweet with the odors of flowers; and over all pervaded a sense of comfort, home-like and inviting, and that air of artistic refinement with which Madame Zophée ever invested her surroundings, here as in the chalet on the Pyrenees. The samovar fizzed, as she had said, on a table near the fire-place; and Marfa, with many glasses, was there already at her call. Her easel was set up by the window, a half-finished picture resting upon it; and palette, paints, and brushes were scattered round. The piano was open, and on its desk was a volume of the "Songs of the Russian People," showing that Madame Zophée's thoughts that day had been wandering far. Books lay about on the table; low arm-chairs, also transplanted from the chalet, were grouped near the window and fire-place, and close to one of these—lately occupied perhaps, for an open book had been left on a table near—lay Lustoff: his huge limbs were stretched out on a soft rug in the full glow of the warm fire, and he was sunk deep in an absolute perfection of slumber and repose.

"How charming you look!" said the Princess, as she came in, Madame Zophée meeting her with a welcoming smile on the threshold of the door. "How sweet and comfortable and quiet you look, dear!" she went on, bending to kiss her little friend softly on both cheeks. "Do we disturb you very much?" she added, caressingly. "See, we have all, every one of us, come."

"And I am so glad!" Madame Zophée answered—"delighted. Indeed, I was very tired of being alone. How kind of you, Princess; and dear marquise—ah! I am so enchanted: and Madame de Beaulieu, you do me great honor. Come in, mesdames and messieurs, I beg of you to come in. Sir Gilbert—ah!" she continued, giving him her left hand with a soft answer of welcome in her glance to his smile of satisfaction, "here you are too!"

"Yes, here we are, all of us! And there is the samovar!" cried Baron Keffel, making a hasty entry, forgetting in his delight to finish his salutation or his bow, but continuing, "Now I am happy, now at last I will have it. From your own fair fingers, galoupka moja, I will take a glass of chai."

"You shall certainly," said Madame Zophée, who was still busying herself with Gilbert's assistance in seating her lady friends. "You must all drink chai with me, and eat, besides, my bread and salt."

Then there surely never was a pleasanter tea-party. So Gilbert thought—except one, perhaps, when he had himself on another occasion eaten the bread from her hand, and taken the salt from the little chased casket she had held out to him, and had sipped the golden chai. Zophée remembered this, and gave him no bread and salt this time, as he had eaten it before; but she let him help her to pour out the fragrant liquid into the tall thin glasses, and to put the sugar and the citron slices in, and he did it willingly, so very willingly, though almost in silence, for she had visitors in such numbers to entertain that afternoon, and they were mostly all visitors who liked each on his own account a fair share in the discourse. So there was a deal of talking, and no want of laughter, noise, and merriment unlimited, in Madame Zophée's salon for at least an hour. They all felt it was a pleasant hour; a new way, too—which was in itself a great thing—a new way of spending this sunset period after the band was gone; and as the Princess rose, and the other ladies with her, to bid their little hostess adieu, they said the afternoon had been so pleasant that it must be repeated, and Zophée found herself agreeing to receive them to chai and wafers at sunset on (as people there expressed it) "every Thursday of the band."

"You will not come down to us, you know," said the Princess, as they left her, "so we must come up to you."

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT THEN?

MUCH as these first days at Pau had slipped away fast for Gilbert and for every one, so many other days glided after them.

"Hunting-days," "off-days," "band-days," and some days when nothing particular happened, but which often managed to turn out the pleasantest days of all; and the season sped on, Gilbert always enjoying it. He enjoyed the balls, taking to dancing very kindly after the

first plunge, even though Madame Zophée never valsed with him to "La Rose" again. He enjoyed the hunting, never grumbling if the runs were mediocre, accustomed though he had been —all his hunting days—to something different in "the shires." It was not in his nature to grumble; he left that to Captain Hanleigh and his imitators; he himself, if the run was poor, always finding what he called "a make-up"—sometimes much more than "a make-up" in a few minutes' converse with his friend as he overtook her victoria on his way to the meet or on his return; or, another day, it was a pleasant ride home with Miss Netley perhaps, or some gay little Amazon equally lively and kind, or a cheery meeting with some old hunting acquaintance from other and distant fields; or if none of these came his way, the beauty of the ride itself always pleased him, and was enough to bring him home in that good humor and in those bright spirits which never failed.

"Come in, my dear boy, come in; you are like a sunbeam to me," his aunt often said, as he opened her drawing-room door of an afternoon at tea-time, radiant in his hunting-coat and fresh from the air. "Come in—come in, and give us all the news of the day;" and he would go in and sit down, and amuse her and her little group of assembled friends by his anecdotes of the adventures of the hunt, all told in a merry, humorous way that would keep them laughing and cheerful over the tea-tray through the twilight hours of many winter afternoons.

He and old Keffel became great friends through all this, and found in each other's society an attraction that was a mystery to most people, and to his aunt a most special delight. Their repartee—or "chaff," as Gilbert taught the baron correctly to term their style of converse—lighted up with a new and sparkling element the little gatherings of the marquise's coterie in the Rue de Lycée; and it was certainly owing very much to Gilbert's constant presence that a light and happy vein ran through the *causeries*—whether literary, artistic, musical, or political—of the marquise's evenings and afternoons, causing that winter, indeed, to linger in the memory of the little circle as one of the pleasantest ever passed at the Hôtel St. Hilaire.

The coterie of the marquise was in these days the choice kernel of Pau society—a glowing centre to which every thing that was worth attracting in the vastly heterogeneous elements of the general crowd gravitated, insensibly drawn by the magnetism of sympathetic tastes. The marquise had that special and most valuable perceptive gift of quickly recognizing, among the crowds of every conceivable nation—who assembled, all new and unfamiliar, each returning year—the special units that would suit herself; and as the season opened she would flit to and fro across the bright-flowering garden of Pau society, and cull rapidly the social bouquet with which she adorned her room.

She often found her rarest flowers blooming in shady corners, "wasting their sweetness," unappreciated and unknown; or, to speak in plainer words, it was not only in the glittering ball-rooms or on the band-days on the Place that she sought and often found her choicest friends, but in other scenes, lingering perhaps in sick-rooms, banished from the gay world by incapacity either of health or purse; sometimes lonely, friendless, and unnoticed in all that busy whirl till discovered by her. Thus she found in the course of investigation during that winter an Austrian violinist, hanging sadly over a sick and failing wife; a Danish poet, who was wandering very helpless and very friendless to and fro; a young Swedish singer, whose failing voice was already returning, in that soft atmosphere, to what, Madame Zophée said, were tones of the Solava indeed.

The marquise visited and comforted and helped them all, and drew them one by one into the magic circle of the Rue de Lycée. Then she picked up by the wayside, in a drive one day, an artist, clever in landscape, but still more in caricature. He was soon installed among them; and every day, and all day, he drew the members of the coterie under every possible circumstance, and with every variety of mien. Baron Keffel with his nose inquisitively poked before him and very high in the air; the marquise at her embroidery-frame; the Princess sitting near her, Chartellier offering her a cup of tea; Madame Zophée standing at her easel in a window all festooned with foliage and set in a background of the mountain view; Gilbert in his hunting-dress; the marquis with his snuff-box; Morton bending at the piano behind pretty Jeanne; the poet, with an inspiration, tearing his hair; the violinist playing a Stradivarius much larger than himself—all were immortalized on little scraps of card and paper that lay in profusion throughout the winter in the salon and the violet boudoir, raising many a laugh from the victims and from their friends.

Indeed, gay though the balls were, and capital the hunting, with the pleasant rides to and from the meet; cheery the whist hours at the club; bright the crowded gatherings on the Place or on the cricket-field; beyond all these Gilbert placed first in his heart and estimation the enjoyment of those "little evenings," as his aunt termed them, with the coterie at her house.

A three-cornered note would reach him often just before dinner, at the whist hour, worded something in this way:

"Dearest G——,—Morton says you dine with 'fellows' at the club to-night; but as there is nothing doing afterward, do, like a dear boy, come in about nine to me. Yours,

"Violette de St. H——."

And he answered cordially with an assent, for he would feel certain that a number of these little notes had been showered about like a snowfall by Baptiste during the afternoon, and that one had been dropped without fail at Madame Zophée's door. He would finish his whist then in good spirits, whether he won his money or not; for a pleasant evening was before him, of which the thought "cooed" like an echo of soft music for the next three hours in his heart.

In his aunt's softly lighted luxuriant drawing-room, to which he would repair accordingly about nine o'clock, his brightest hopes of enjoyment rarely failed to be realized. He would enter to find the English tea-table set out cozily on one side, lights glowing at the piano, a huge pile of logs burning brightly on the hearth. His uncle, with both hands folded, and feet stretched forth comfortably toward the blaze, generally sunk in

deepest slumber, occupied always the rug at one side; and, however noisy the company, he never seemed to feel disturbed. The marquise he would find at her embroidery-frame, putting finishing touches to the shepherd in her gay-colored wools, sitting behind the pink-shaded lamp, as on the first night when he beheld her at St. Hilaire. The Princess, talking softly to Madame Zophée, sat always in her especial seat, and round her and the marquise gronped the Beaulieus, the De Veuils, and Keffel, with many others equally welcome and familiar, all accustomed frequenters of the Hôtel St. Hilaire. Morton and Chartellier generally handed the tea; Gilbert, after a feint of assisting them, finding his way always to a chair near Madame Zophée's side. There he would linger, perfectly happy, and curiously pleased with himself and his society, through the whole evening, often without moving again.

Every body chatted and laughed in that assembly unceasingly, and sometimes they played a game—poetry games, and geographical and fanciful games, involving much power of imagery, and of knowledge both of localities and flowers: curious and ingenious feats of intellectual dexterity, from which Gilbert carefully refrained, sheltering himself behind his ignorance of language from such efforts.

Sometimes their poet read to them or recited with much dramatic power and success; or Hermannricht, the violinist, played and Zophée accompanied him; or the young Swedish artiste chanted deliciously for an hour together, in return for which Madame Zophée would be persuaded to sing one of her quaint Russian melodies or her wild Southern, perhaps Tsiganie, songs. So the time would slip away till the chime of midnight would remind them of its passing; and then (after some slight refreshment of red wine, sherry and seltzer, *eau sucrée*, lemonade, or *chocolat glacé*, partaken of by the guests according to their respective nations and tastes) they would all depart together. and in the court-yard separate and turn in different directions, and walk home through the beautiful, soft night. Gilbert at such times gained often a pleasant moment, all the sweeter, perhaps, because so short and fleeting, when Madame Zophée allowed him to take that bit of moonlight walk with *her*, just from the gate-way of the Maison St. Hilaire to the corner of the Place Royale and the door of the Hôtel de France.

Of such evenings many and many, as the winter sped on, came again and again, and to Gilbert they were the centre of all the happy experience that flowed over that period of his life—the centre where *the stone fell* which caused all the circling and eddying and rippling of sensible felicity within and around him. The circles were many, they were varied, and they stretched out wide and far; but here lay that centre which, indeed, though often unrecognized, we find always does exist in happiness, and is to human happiness the life-giving heart. He recognized this so far, after a little while, as he acknowledged to himself, that these evenings in his aunt's salon—the one time and place where Madame Zophée was always certain to be found—were pleasanter, to his thinking, than all the ball-going of Pau put together; but beyond this, he seemed farther away even than he had been on the côteaux at St. Hilaire from realizing any more. Life here in town was so busy and so exciting, and his time was so filled up from morning till night, that his mind was ever actively engaged. There were few, indeed no opportunities of serious converse in these days between him and his friend; and finding themselves *tête-à-tête*, even for a short time, was exceedingly rare. And then when they did meet, there was so much to talk about, so many subjects for light, surface discussion and controversy about present and surrounding people and events and scenes, that their friendship remained quite on the surface all through that period, and their intercourse, though continuous, was not characterized by any evidence of sentiment upon either side.

"Le petit comité de persiflage" was what Baron Keffel called the assemblage in the Rue de Lycée, often in venomous condemnation of the frothiness of their habitual talk; and this characteristic, springing, as before said, very much from the effect of Gilbert's presence among them, entered largely into the elements of the intercourse at this time between Madame Zophée and himself.

So life rolled on—spontaneously, brightly, and merrily as the ring of sleigh-bells jingling over the sunlit snow, and the friendship between Gilbert and Zophée flowed on as brightly and easily as every thing else. No one disturbed them either with rousing observation or remark, for Pau, as we have said, was accustomed to Madame Zophée; and be it confessed, Pau was accustomed to Platonic friendships, and even to flirtations as well. In these Southern scenes, beneath these radiant skies, in the lands of flowers, and in these perpetual summers, where people flock in numbers and linger the long months through, and meet often, more than daily—morning, noon, and night—on the hunting-field or in the ball-room, at the twilight teas or on the Place; meet again and again and again—mutual interests will arise, individualities of taste will assert themselves, and friendships will spring up—pleasant, heart-felt, and cordial friendships—because fleeting, perhaps none the less sweet. Pau was accustomed to these things, and so Madame Zophée and Gilbert were left quite undisturbed.

On his side, his aunt and Morton had forgotten him, or rather had become familiar with his appearance lingering unfailingly by their little Russian guest. The marquise was busy with her friends, and full of engagements; she had cautioned Gilbert at St. Hilaire, and he had reassured her. Now she was simply glad that he was happy and staid so long with them, and quite complacently, all the winter-time, she left him alone. Morton's marriage was fixed, too, for the early spring, and he, with numberless consequent considerations in his head, had not one thought to spare for any body. So no one noticed Gilbert, and no one knew Madame Zophée well enough to venture upon the subject with her, except, indeed, one friend—the Princess; and, after long delay and much cogitation, she spoke.

It was late in the winter, when the Russian teas upon the band-days and evening meetings in the Rue de Lycée had gone on for a long time, that one day she was sitting with Madame Zophée, talking quietly with her, while the latter finished a view of the Pic of Bigorre, the village

of Gans lying in the foreground, and the mist curling down the valley across the Gave. They had been talking for a time, and had been quite undisturbed until, just as the twilight began to creep over the view, some one knocked at the door, and, at Madame Zophée's call of "Come in!" Gilbert entered the room.

He had come with a message from the marquise, with some suggestion for the evening, some invitation or special reason for Madame Zophée to join the circle on that particular night: and he gave his message, after he had greeted the Princess, in his usual cheerful, vigorous tones, with the easy, unconscious manner which was always natural to him.

There was a touch of additional warmth and a softened intonation in his voice, perhaps, which the Princess noted critically, as he bent toward Madame Zophée, and his manner to her was a combination of graceful familiarity, sprung from prolonged intercourse, with the chivalrous courtesy which distinguished him as an Englishman and as her respectful friend.

But as he stood by the easel and looked over her picture, and then looked from it back to the artist again, and let his glance rest inquiringly upon *her* rather than on her work, which she would exhibit to him, there was a sweet light in his blue eyes that quivered and changed quite involuntarily and quite unconsciously to himself as she bent over her canvas; and thus resting his eyes on her, he lingered a few minutes by her side.

There was something that touched the Princess in the very brightness of his glance. He looked so young and graceful as he stood there, so happy, so unconscious of every thing in life save its sunshine, so unsuspicious of any thing that life might have in store for him. And the Princess's kind eyes had suffused and glistened as they rested upon him, and her voice had trembled as she bid him "good-bye." When he was gone, she rose and came close to Zophée, and put her white, sparkling fingers upon her little friend's arm.

"That English boy will love you, Zophée," she said, softly.

Madame Zophée's hands were both filled with brush and palette, but she laid the latter down instantly and turned to the Princess.

"No, no—not so! You mistake, dear Princess, you mistake indeed," were the words she said in answer; but her cheek grew deadly pale as she uttered them, and she looked up with a look in her eyes that contradicted the assurance of her speech.

"I do not think I mistake," continued the Princess, quietly. "If you do not wish it, Zophée, you must not deceive yourself, my dear, and think it will not be."

Madame Zophée turned away then. She seemed uncertain for a moment what further to say; but her eyes wandered far away, across the mountain-tops to the still sweetness of the sky, and a strange quivering light of pain shot from them as they were averted; she drew her breath quickly, with a gesture that spoke an inward struggle, a strong self-restraint, a quick effort to summon instant self-control. But the pain was there still when she turned them again upon the Princess, the quivering expression of a heart pierced with a silent anguish, and as she spoke again she struggled for her lost composure in vain. Her voice rang with a strange echo of suffering in her tones, her lip trembled; she could scarcely steady it to form the words.

"I hope indeed it is not so, Princess," she said. "I think it is not so. Watch him, listen to him, hear his laughing voice, and see his boyish, unconscious ways. Oh, Princess, may I not believe that all is well? May I not be happy? May I not feel that it need *not* be so; that it is not his way; that it is not in his nature; that—he at least is safe?"

"Zophée! Zophée! my poor little one," answered the Princess, "why talk like this? Why that sad, sad look in those sweet eyes? And if he did love you," she continued, in a hesitating and lowered tone, "well, must you be always lonely, always mourning a sorrowful past? Zophée dearest, do not fear me!" she added, hastily, as the other averted her face again, and put out her hand in eager depreciation. "Do not fear; I am not going to infringe upon our compact, on the limits of our confidence as agreed between us so long ago. Your secret shall remain, all untroubled, your own, now, as it has been; but must it be so forever, my Zophée? May there never be one—just that right *one*—who may hear all your story, and give you once again the comfort of confidence and strength and love? May it never be so? Is yours always to be thus a lonely and a shadowed life?"

Then, as the Princess's voice trembled and vibrated with the tenderness of her solicitude, Madame Zophée laid her arm upon the easel-desk in front of her, and her head bent low upon it till her face was quite hidden from view; and she put out the other hand and clasped the Princess's for a moment, with an eager and feverish pressure that spoke a passionate emotion too strong for words. For a moment complete silence reigned between them, the Princess speaking her sympathy only by caressing the trembling hand she held between both her own. Then, as Madame Zophée still spoke not, and again and again a quiver of agitation seemed to vibrate through her whole frame, the Princess bent and kissed her softly, put her arm gently round her shoulder, and—

"Forgive me," she murmured. "I would not pain you. Forgive me, forgive me, Zophée!" she repeated again.

Then Zophée looked up at last. She took both the Princess's hands in her own; she gazed eagerly, earnestly into her face, her dark eyes still laden with agitation and with pain.

"Dear and best and tenderest friend," she said, "can *you* forgive *me* my silence, my reticence, my want of confidence, as it must seem to you? Can you forgive me? All confidence indeed richly you deserve of me, and how scantily have I repaid! When I think of the years that have been—of how you have received me, and believed in me, and cared for me, you and many others, but, above all, *you*—sweet friend, most loved and most revered, can I withhold any secret from you? How can I? How can I? And yet I *must*."

"Dear one," urged the Princess, "do not distress yourself. As it has been, Zophée, so let it be. As it has been between us for these five years, so let it be, if it please God, for five times as many more."

"I have told you, you know, Princess," continued Zophée, with a wistful, pleading pathos, "I have told you, long, long ago, how—it is—a promise—a sacred trust that I hold; a secret in my keeping—that I honor for the sake of one I love. I have told you that *he* is my guardian and my adopted father, and that I owe him—owe him fully all I give him when I give my life."

"Hush, hush, Zophée!" the Princess murmured. "I ask no more, and I seek nothing. You have told me, I know you have told me, what you can. I am satisfied to build up my faith and affection, *not* upon my knowledge of your story, but of *you*. But, dearest," she added again, earnestly, as she rose to leave, "one little word I must speak once more. The English boy, Zophée—will you ask your conscience, you knowing all that I do not know — ask it, dearest, ask the question bravely, frankly of yourself, and resolve to have a reply—if he loves you, what then?"

A sweet, strange light shot quickly from Zophée's eyes at these last words of the Princess, and for an instant a bright, soft smile curled her lip.

"If he love me, what then?" she whispered.

But like a lightning flash it was gone, that gleam of soft light, and the darkness fell once more. She turned restlessly away, as the Princess dropped her hand.

"Good-bye," Zophée murmured. "Thank you, thank you many times, dear friend. Indeed I will think—I mean I *have* thought—indeed I try — I try to do right. But what *is* right? That is what I ask myself again and again; and yet—but, nay—I will think once more, strongly, sternly, because you have spoken to me; and I will again resolve I will do something—something to save him—if needs be, and *you* think indeed it needs must be—something to save *him*, I promise you, Princess, I will do. Thank you, thank you, let me say again. Trust me—indeed you may."

"To save him," repeated the Princess, softly, coming back once more to encircle Madame Zophée with her arm. "Does he need it? We will hope not, if loving you, little Zophée, is a peril from which he must be saved. But even if it be not so, may I say yet another word? Do you ever think, my dear one, of any danger to yourself?"

Then again Zophée hid her face away—this time on the shoulder of her kind friend—and she stood silent a moment, while the Princess bent and smoothed softly the dusky waves of her hair.

"To myself," she murmured, presently, looking up again with a clear, composed look now in her dark eyes. "For myself, I am so used, Princess, to expect pain, separation, self-effacement, and loss, that I have come to take it quietly as my lot—the portion life has in store for me; to take it calmly, with resignation, ever ready, ever expecting, ever prepared."

"Hush! hush!" murmured her friend again, with tender solicitude, as Zophée's face sunk once more to veil her emotion when she had uttered these last words. "Hush! do not talk so sadly of your young life. Be hopeful, my Zophée. There are no clouds, believe me, across our whole life's horizon—no clouds which will not some day rise."

"Mine was not a cloud," whispered Zophée. "It was the sun darkened while it was still scarce risen on my life. And the night fell before," she added, softly, "long before I knew even what it was, or what it might be, to live in sunshine and day."

After that conversation, Zophée one day spoke to Gilbert—tried hard to draw him out, and to reach those under-currents which the Princess insisted must lie beneath the surface of his heart. And she came upon nothing, as deeper and deeper she carefully felt her way—upon nothing but more and more of that same glittering, rushing, shallow stream which described, from the fringe of its outer edge to the very spring at its deepest fountain, the under-currents of Gilbert's sentiments, hopes, and aspirations at that time, as far as he knew them himself. And then (being a woman, and aware that there was a well of different feeling springing up and giving forth its deep reflection within her own heart) she retained still the opinion that she had formed very early in their acquaintance, and felt that if there was danger in all this happy intercourse between her and, as she called him in her own mind, "this sunny-hearted boy," the danger was to her own solitary and desolate self, and not at all to him.

"It is not in him," she said, as she came back to her own room, and to her own habitual loneliness that evening, after the conversation between them, in which she had tried to discover warily if there was any reason on his side for the Princess's fears. "It is not in him," she murmured; and as she did so she sighed. "For, besides," she soliloquized, "my youth is past; all attractions of that kind, if I ever had any, have gone from me, worn away by solitude and dreariness, and long, long years; and he is all hopefulness and youth. In me there is nothing to waken a deeper feeling than kindly friendship in such a one as he is. His glance will be as bright into many a fair face, younger and far happier than mine, before it lights on the *one* that will kindle in his own heart any thing that may be lasting or strong. It is a happy life, a radiant, fresh young spirit; and as a pleasing, charming, and courteous friend he will come and go. I know I am right," she thought on. "Ah, by my own heart surely I know it. How frank and unshadowed his glance was, as he answered mine to-night! How light the pressure of his hand, as he clasped mine in farewell! How ready and eager were all his words, springing to his lips in quick sentences, all thoughtless and unconscious! There is not the least danger, certainly, for him: and for me? Ah!" she murmured on,

"'Thou, in whose presence I forget to smile,
Counting the moments that too quickly flee,
Oh hide, oh hide my fearful eyes awhile
From that dark future where thou wilt not be!'

"Is it so indeed—with me? Bright young being! what a sunshine he has been to me! What a summer he has flooded suddenly across my gray life! And is this even wrong—for me? Is this *love*, that I try to call friendship? Is this *sin*, that I am trying to excuse to myself? God knows—I can not tell. It is sweetness; it is like chords of music, like the rhythm of a poem echoing through my days; but is it love? I can not help it, I can not flee it. I can not leave here—not now, at all events; and I can not

drive him from me even if I would. But would I? Must I? Ought I? What is my judgment before the tribunals of God and man? God knows; God understands. My life is before him—all its difficulty, its entanglement, its fears. And he knows to what I have vowed it. He knows, as none here know, the promises and the weight of duty that lie so heavy upon my heart and head. Am I right that I live thus?" So her thoughts sped on that evening. "Am I right that I thus lay down, in sacrifice and solitude, my brightest years? Right to die—for surely it *is* death in life; to die—for what? for a past, for a shadow, for a name!"

She was looking from her window, as she had been murmuring to herself these words, over the valley, all lighted up with moonlight, toward the glories of the nature-world, from which came her ceaseless consolation, toward the mountains she so dearly loved; but at the point when her head sunk and her heart quivered with these self-questioning doubts, she turned suddenly and passed out of her salon into her bedroom, as if she would seek still further comfort from something she knew was there. The room, as she entered, was softly illumined by a glowing light that burned constant in one corner before her "Rhiza," and also by a small alabaster lamp standing upon a sort of bureau that lined the wall on one side. It was to this bureau that Madame Zophée turned. It was covered with old, curious-looking books and manuscripts, with a little writing-case in Russian leather, with some much-worn furnishings of a writing-table, quaintly decorated with precious Siberian stones, and with various curious odds and ends, foreign-looking and unfamiliar, in the midst of which burned the small alabaster lamp, shedding a soft and tempered glow. Madame Zophée leaned upon this bureau and looked upward: two portraits hung just above her head.

One was of a young man, very dark and handsome, with restless eyes, a noble forehead, straight-drawn brow, and a curling, sensitive lip very like her own. The expression of the eyes, as they looked out from the picture full of fire, full of energy, full of thought, was like her eyes too—not in her softer, composed, and dreamy moods, perhaps, but in her moments of enthusiasm, when some excitement roused her and made her glance flash forth sometimes like the lightning in a wintry sky.

"Father—my father!" she murmured, in Russian, as she gazed up. "How many and many a year there was for thee and me when life held nothing for either save each other! How many a day when thy savior was to me as a god to be worshiped, as a king to be served, and to the heart's blood obeyed! And are these days forgotten? No, no! They still live; they still are. And now, father, the heart's blood is shed. I serve, as I promised thee; I worship, and I obey. And is he not worthy?" she continued, passionately, turning then to the other picture, which was a portrait of a stern-looking and much older man. "Is he not worthy, now as then, of the sacrifice—the little sacrifice of my father's daughter's life? Worthy—worthy? Yes; worthy ten thousand times. He saved thy life, and the debt is paid, being daily, hourly paid—with my years I pay it. Yes, for he saved thy life, my father, and I—save his name. And name is dearer than life; and honor is more than happiness; and career and success and great aims achieved, and great thoughts all realized, are more than liberty or love. And so the debt is paid, my father, in my sacrifice, for I give him these."

"Since our country, our God, O, my sire,
Demand that thy daughter expire;
Since thy triumph was bought by thy vow—
Strike the bosom that's bared for thee now!
* * * * * *
If the hand that I love lay me low,
There can not be pain in the blow!
* * * * * *
I have won the great battle for thee,
And my father and country are free."

I do not know that these lines exactly occurred to Madame Zophée's mind, but they express more forcibly than any other words could do the feeling with which she raised her arms from their resting-place on the bureau, and, with one deep sigh of renewed self-discipline and resolution, turned slowly away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AWAKENING.

"I ENVY any one," said a friend of mine lately, who had seen most places and things worthy of admiration in Europe—"I envy any one who sees a spring at Pau."

If the winter has been fine, and not too often broken in upon by deluges of mountain rain, *it* has been delightful, no doubt, every day of it, and like a gay, glittering dream it has flitted rapidly away. It is gone as soon as it seems here; and it would be regretted, if spring were not so very beautiful, coming freshly on us in its turn. It comes so suddenly. We have a few days of rain, perhaps, with the mists lying low in the valley and on the côteaux, and despair filling the hearts of all society at Pau, as if the sun never *had* shone or never would shine again; and then the sky breaks, the clouds lift from the summit of the mountains, rapidly and suddenly, as on that first night when Gilbert, wonderingly, beheld them—and, lo! the snow is nearly gone.

Winter has passed away in those sweet, refreshing showers at which we had grumbled so loudly, and spring breaks and beams upon us deliciously, filling our hearts with gladness and delight. It comes so early, too—weeks earlier, in that *Paradis terrestre* of the Pyrenees, than we think of it at home; and it comes with flowers, and rich, soft, sprouting verdure, over côteaux and sloping woods. It smiles to us from green banks where the violets spring, sweet and abundant, from fields starred with anemones and narcissus, and from vineyards where the dew-drops on the soft young leaves sparkle like diamonds in the sunlight, and where the scent of wild-brier and blossom fills the fresh mountain air.

Thus spring broke upon them in the Rue de Lycée while Gilbert still felt that the winter was scarcely begun. It had been a beautiful winter, and so it was really a very early spring. In the garden at St. Hilaire, before March had passed, he and Morton found, when they rode over of an afternoon, the camellias blooming rich and beautiful round the marquise's boudoir window and at the porch, and the roses at the chalet were

bursting into flower already long before the feast of the Russian Easter had come. The Place Royale was crowded now with flower-girls, selling sweet-scented violets, or standing with rows of potted plants in full bloom in the upper corner under the trees; and the cotillon bouquets at the great ball of *Mi-Carême*, or Mid-Lent, were so beautiful that year that they were talked of at Pau for many an after-day.

Picnics began to be suggested before Lent was well over that spring, and all sorts of projects were floating in the minds of Morton and Gilbert for mountain expeditions when the snow was quite gone—all to come off speedily, before Gilbert's return to England in April, or Morton's marriage, which was fixed for after Easter-week.

Madame Zophée began to talk of returning to the chalet; and Gilbert began to heave melancholy sighs, and to look very disconsolate at the prospect of the merry season drawing to a close. But his mind was still very happy and fully occupied, and he did not allow himself to realize any thing concerning the future or the general and quickly impending state of things.

Very different indeed was his frame of feelings just then from Madame Zophée's. Separation implied nothing to him. The word had never occurred to him. It had never been contemplated, experienced, or realized. Separation, to her, from every one close or very dear to her heart was so familiar, so clearly anticipated, so fully expected, and indeed already, in this case, long ago realized. She awaited it with resignation and composure—the end of this bright, quick-fleeting time, the loss of this sunny companion; his return to his own distant life, of which he spoke so often, to which he was so accustomed and attached; and her return to her home and to her mountains, and all her dumb associates, who alone shared with her the solitude of her life. And that friendship he talked of so often, what would it become? A memory to him, a sinking echo, lingering and dying away into the shadowy chaos of a past. And to her—what had love ever been to her but this? Something to be forgotten! What would friendship, as he called it, be to him but something he would soon forget? So they died always, she told herself—these quick-formed friendships, born of sunshine and gay intercourse, and of merriment and flowers. And so would flit away the story of this winter, for he would doubtless return to England shortly, and she would go back to the chalet again.

These days were drawing near when, late one afternoon, Gilbert, returning home from the hunt, suddenly remembered that his aunt had given him a little commission for Madame Zophée which he had forgotten to deliver to her as they talked together in the morning, when he had overtaken her victoria as he rode to the meet; so at the corner of the Rue de Lycée he turned his horse's head down the Place instead of toward his own abode, and he rode slowly below the club windows to the big gates of the Hôtel de France: there he dismounted. There were many people this fine afternoon sauntering up and down in the checkered shade and sunshine of the Place, and many of his acquaintances among them. He did not linger, however, to exchange words with any one, but merely raised his hat in return to various smiling salutations that reached him from between the rows of trees, and then, giving his rein to his groom, who stood there in waiting, he turned into the court-yard of the hotel.

He mounted the broad steps and passed into the hall, and there, at the door of Monsieur Gardère's office, he paused, and for a moment looked round surprised. The hall seemed crowded with people, and stuffed up on every side with luggage, with huge, queer, foreign-looking portmanteaus and cases, waiting to be carried upstairs. Porters were rushing about, and Monsieur Gardère himself was giving orders with much excitement and importance; several solemn-looking men-servants, dressed in a curious livery, moved about in different directions, superintending the arrangement of effects. Evidently a great arrival had taken place, and Gilbert recollected that since he went off hunting in the morning the Paris train had come in. He passed out of the hall with the mental observation that Monsieur Gardère looked far too busy at that moment to satisfy his curiosity, promising himself to make inquiries about the new arrivals as he came out again, and then he turned down the long corridor toward Madame Zophée's room.

There was a large window at the far end of the corridor some distance beyond the door of her salon; and at the window, as he trod the passage, he saw standing, a little to his surprise, her servant Ivan, in close, low-toned conversation with a grave-looking man in plain, dark attire. They were not conversing in French, Gilbert detected as he approached, notwithstanding the lowness of the suppressed tones, but in Ivan's own native tongue, of which the ring had grown familiar to Gilbert, though still not understood. He walked quickly down the passage, and the men heard him; they turned round, and Ivan sprung forward, just as Gilbert had touched with a low knock Madame Zophée's door. Ivan said something, put up his hand imploringly, came quickly toward Gilbert, tried to arrest him, but—too late. As he often had done before, as she always agreed to his doing, accustomed as she was to see him come and go, he knocked at the door, and simultaneously opened it, and before Ivan could arrest him he had entered the room.

Then indeed he paused of his own accord, and looked a moment in astonishment before he advanced to hold out his hand. The bright spring sunshine was flooding across the carpet through the open window, from which the *persiennes* had been flung back, and it dazzled and confused him for a moment; but then immediately, as he stood there, he saw full and clearly into her room, and, with a start of astonishment, he paused.

Madame Zophée was there. She sat on a low chair, pushed back into the shadow of the curtain, out of the glare of the sun, and near her, in a fauteuil low as her own and drawn close to her side, sat a personage whom he had never seen before—a handsome, dark-bearded man of imposing presence and very dignified mien. He was simply but curiously dressed in a loose-fitting traveling costume; a long kaftan, richly trimmed and lined with the costly silver-fox fur of Russia, hung on a chair near him; an embroidered traveling-cap lay on a little table by his side. He was bending toward Madame Zophée when Gilbert entered; he was sitting very near to her, his eyes fixed earnestly upon her face, and his

hand, which was large and very white, and glittering like a woman's with splendid jewels, lay upon hers with an eager pressure with which he seemed to emphasize his low, earnest words. He looked haughtily round as the door opened, an expression of surprise and indignation flitting over his face, and then he sat upright, paused in his conversation, and drew back his hand from where it had rested upon hers.

Gilbert paused too, but only for a moment; and then, with a slight bow to the stranger, and a murmur of "pardon" in the French tongue, which he took for granted would be understood, he advanced into the room, held out his hand as usual to Madame Zophée, and said in English, in his clear, frank tones, "Am I disturbing you? I beg your pardon. I did not know you had a visitor, but—"

And then he stopped again. There was something in her countenance so unusual, so perplexing to him, that he started, drew back his extended hand, and looked with astonishment and consternation from her to her unknown friend. The latter had drawn himself up stiffly, had glanced at Gilbert, and had then looked away, averting his eyes indifferently, looking over the mountain view from the window, and awaiting, with a haughty expression of impatience and surprise on his face, for this interruption to end.

Madame Zophée, when Gilbert turned to her, looked extremely embarrassed. She put out her hand with a deprecative gesture toward him, and stopped him instantly when he began to speak in his hasty, eager manner again. She rose, and a curious look of hesitation and perplexity came into her eyes. She glanced at the new-comer, and back again to her friend. Her cheeks were glowing, Gilbert saw now, as she stood up in the full light—glowing with a flush of intense excitement; and her eyes were sparkling and flashing with changeful lights; and a curious smile, very wistful and very sad, curled her lip for a moment as she looked up at Gilbert, standing there in his astonishment, and as she put up her hand to him with a silencing gesture again. "Hush!" her lips formed the word as she shook her head, and smiled with that wistful look into his face. He could not read the smile, he could not interpret her glance: it only puzzled him further; for how *could* he realize that it said—"Farewell?" It was for an instant that they two remained thus; and then she turned, still standing, to her visitor, and said with excessive courtesy, indeed almost with reverence, a few words in her own Russian tongue.

The stranger bowed stiffly in answer, and apparently in consent, for he turned to Gilbert then, and bent his head very slightly toward him with a haughty, condescending bow, while Madame Zophée said in French, "Sir Gilbert Erle—His Highness the Grand Duke George; permit me to present you to him;" and Gilbert bowed also at length, trying not to show how put out and indignant he felt.

The condescending salutation which greeted him was almost too much for his equanimity, however, at that point. It was almost in vain that he struggled to still the ruffled sense of irritation and perplexity within his mind, and to overcome the strong inclination he experienced to be as rude to Madame Zophée's visitor as he was bound to be polite. How he hated the man!—that was all he realized as yet—the proud, condescending, arrogant-looking fellow, who had sat so near to her when Gilbert entered, and who had dared to lay his hand upon hers. How he hated him! And yet he had to obey her lead, and to follow the direction of her imploring glance, and to bow low and gravely as the duke addressed him a few distant words in French. In truth, the grand-ducal personage was much and most justly irritated on his side, much disgusted at being interrupted, offended at the intrusion of a stranger during his visit, and not at all inclined to extend his acquaintance at that moment to this brusque young English huntsman who treated his presence with so little concern. He bowed to the young man, and (having addressed a few words to him) turned to Madame Zophée, made a sign with his hand, of half command, half-courteous request, that she would take her seat by him again; then, glancing at Gilbert with an expression that meant evident dismissal, he went on with his remarks in Russian to his hostess, and continued speaking as if Gilbert were not standing in a fume of indignation in the middle of the room.

Gilbert felt strangely angry and ruffled, and a good deal out of countenance besides. He was not at all clear as to how he should behave, and he felt upon an utterly unknown field. With a lady, were she empress or flower-girl, he could have quickly found his ground: chivalrous courtesy, native grace, would have come to his assistance, however unexpected and astonishing the position might be. But a man who did not shake him by the hand or express pleasure at his acquaintance, or give him an opening in any language for a single cordial speech, utterly nonplused him, and he drew himself up in his turn, looked away when he had made his salutation, and held out his hand to Madame Zophée with a proud and indignant air.

"Good-bye," he said, at the first pause in the grand duke's remarks. "I see I disturb you."

"Good-bye," she said, hastily, once more putting up her hand to silence him as he would speak again. "We will meet in the evening at your aunt's—yes, surely," she added, in a quick whisper in English, for she could not bear that he should be offended, and go away with that angry, hurt expression on his face.

"I do not know," he answered, almost roughly to her, as he turned away, for he was quite unreasonable just then. He could not gather himself at all together, understand what he saw, what had happened to him, or, above all, what it was he felt beating within his eager heart with a pulse so fierce and strange. He thought it was anger, as he left her, and broke away suddenly from the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DUCAL VISITOR.

Gilbert soon heard who had arrived, for Pau was full of it, and people were talking of nothing else upon the Place. By the Paris train at two o'clock—his arrival merely heralded by a telegraphic message, received a few hours previously, to secure his rooms—had come no less a person than the Grand Duke George-Serge-Nicolaïévitch, with suite of many servants, secretaries,

and supernumerary attendants, on a flying visit to the Béarnais capital, and to the côteaux of the Pyrenees.

Pau was in ecstasies of agitation and excitement when Gilbert found his way to the Place. The préfet was promenading there, awaiting his admission to an audience, which he had ceremoniously requested on the grand duke's arrival at the hotel; and, while he waited, mysterious whispered confidences were being exchanged between him and several of the most important residents and visitors as to the various entertainments and festivities that would be probably consequent on the grand duke's stay among them. The old Prince Edward of Fürst held the préfet tightly by one arm; Lord Charles Bentley, one of the oldest English inhabitants of much importance, clung eagerly to the other; and the three paced up and down upon the boulevard with hasty and excitable steps, absorbed in a conversation upon schemes and projects. Valuable fragments of their talk were wafted on the breeze to old Jeffereys and sundry other secondary luminaries who perambulated in the orbit of the préfet and the Prince of Fürst as closely as etiquette and courtesy allowed. They heard enough to make them welcome and important visitors at every tea-table in the community for the whole of that afternoon. The préfet had vast projects of doing honor to their august guest, and to their town. A banquet was talked of, and an official ball suggested at the Préfecture. A few private dinners, too, were to be given by magnates specially selected for this honor from among the visitors with due regard to their position and purse. In fact, Pau was alive all that afternoon with projects, consideration, and excitement; and a brilliant vista of renewed festivity and gala stretched before the delighted eyes of society.

Doomed, alas! were all these anticipations to utter and universal disappointment. The grand duke had not come to Pau for gayety, or to receive official entertainment, but apparently on some private mission of his own. He kept the préfet waiting a long time on the Place that first afternoon while he refreshed himself, as it was said, from the fatigue and dust of his journey; and it was only known to his own attendants and to one or two higher functionaries of the hotel, who were properly discreet and silent, and to Gilbert Erle, who said almost nothing on the subject—to these only it was known that the Grand Duke George spent that afternoon (while the préfet awaited his audience) in close conversation with Madame Zophée in her rez-de-chaussée salon in the hotel.

Gilbert said nothing indeed, except, "Oh yes, I have seen the fellow!" which remark he emitted in tones of great impatience and disgust, when Jeffereys had rushed up to him in much importance with the information. "I have seen him," he said, and then he had turned away.

And he went off to his rooms, and spent a very uncomfortable time, fuming and chafing and working himself up into excitement and indignation against Madame Zophée, who had "turned him up," as he expressed it to himself, "unexpectedly, and for so unknown and mysterious a cause, the moment any other fellow came on the scene." He had not the least idea what had really angered him. It never occurred to him how many "fellows" had been about all winter, and that, except himself, she had scarcely made acquaintance with any one among them all. No one, indeed, during all these months had interfered with him; no one had disturbed him in his tranquil, happy appropriation of Madame Zophée for himself. And this was now all that was the matter with him; at long last, some one had come between them, some one had stood before him in her consideration this afternoon—that stern-faced stranger, whose titles and position, and language and mien, were all so incomprehensible, so irritating, and perplexing to him; this tall, haughty man had thrown his presence, like a grim shadow, across the sunlit path between Gilbert and his friend.

This was what had happened to him, and he was very angry and very miserable indeed. He would not see any one that afternoon. What did he care, he said to himself, if Madame Zophée would not see him—for all these gabbling people on the Place down there? They all seemed to consider this confounded Russian duke as a beatific visitor from celestial spheres, to be received and worshiped with unparalleled glories; and he—he hated the very sound of his name. He would have nothing to say to it all. They might give their balls and their dinners and their banquets at the Préfecture, for all he cared, but they need not expect *him* to be among the guests. He was far too angry and sore, too hurt in his native dignity, to think of such a thing. He sat down finally at his window, after divesting himself of his hunting-coat, lighted a solitary pipe, and puffed huge volumes from his lips as a valve for his excitement, and execrated his Russian enemy in epithets of mental vituperation as unreasonable as they were undeserved. He was nearly as angry with Madame Zophée when he first came in as with the duke; but, as he sat and smoked there all alone, blowing his soft snowy clouds into the air, his anger for her cooled away somehow, and he thought of her a great deal, with a curious excitement stirring him, and with some feeling, very unfamiliar, throbbing in a strange fever in his heart. He ceased to be angry with her, and assured himself he was only vexed and irritated generally—with the grand duke, with the fuss people made about him, and with the way things had turned out that day. He would not go to his aunt's or anywhere else, he resolved, however, for he should hear of no one but that odious grand duke discussed unceasingly by every body from side to side.

He had to go out to get some dinner presently, and this he sought for himself at the club. There Jeffereys found him again, caught him by the button-hole, and told him, with much eloquent lament, that their hopes were blighted, that no balls or banquets or grand official dinners were coming off, after all, for the Duke George refused to be entertained.

"Shows his sense!" said Gilbert, with most reprehensible churlishness, as he abstracted himself promptly from Jeffereys's friendly hold. "The best thing I have heard about him yet," he added. "And now—I beg your pardon—I am going to dinner;" and then, in misanthropical solitude, he sat down at a little table in a corner, as far as possible away.

He had scarcely finished when a note reached him, brought by Baptiste to the club-door; one such as he had often had on previous evenings—

three-cornered, sweet-scented, and with the "Violette" monogram and coronet of his aunt. It was a small note, but crossed from end to end, and therefore lengthy. The contents ran:

"My dearest Boy,—What has become of you? Why have you not appeared for dinner? Wicked, dissipated child! You are, I have no doubt, enjoying yourself *immensely* at that horrid club. The ruin of you all, as I have told Morton at least fifty times; *the* thing that unfits you for domestic life! Come in, dear child, without fail after dinner *immediately*.

"I need not ask if you have heard the news, for le vieux Jeffereys tells me that you have *seen* the great man. When, how, my dear child, and where? Have you heard now that he refuses to be entertained officially, and that the préfet is in despair? I am sorry for poor dear Madame de Frontignac—it is, of course, a disappointment; but I do not wonder that S. A. I. prefers privacy and repose. I dare say he has little of either at St. Petersburg. But though society is disappointed, *we* have much to talk about; for in our own little coterie, in a very quiet and select way, the grand duke does not refuse to be amused. That sweet, dear woman, Madame Perigonde Zemidoff, whom I knew well in Paris, the daughter of the emperor's premier chambellan, has spoken to S. A. I. of Léon and me, and so he sent his card to us by his aid-de-camp on his arrival this afternoon. Léon has had an audience; he consents to come to us for the English luncheon to-morrow, and we have sundry little projects for his entertainment in view. Of course, to the Princess he has already paid a visit of ceremony and compliment, and she comes in this evening to consult with me as to what we shall all do.

"I have not seen dear Zophée yet, so I do not know if she heard of his arrival; but, as the brother of her emperor, his visit will doubtless interest even her composed little mind. I wonder if she has ever seen him! These great people in Russia, as I am told, do not run about (as they do with us in London) in the public streets. This evening, however, as Zophée is also coming, we shall discuss the matter fully, and compare notes of our impressions of the grand duke. I envy you your 'first view,' for he has gone to bed, I hear, already for this evening, and we shall none of us behold him till to-morrow. Come early, Gilberto mio, or I shall *never* forgive you. A toi,

"Violette de St. Hilaire."

So all Pau was disappointed, and Gilbert was very glad. He would not go to his aunt's, however; he had made up his mind to that. He felt a little better, now that he had eaten his dinner and had smoked a good deal, and consoled himself with the reflection that this horrid Russian was not going to torment him in the *rôle* of "hero for public worship" during the next three days; but still he would not go to the Hôtel St. Hilaire. Madame Zophée had *not* been nice to him, there was no doubt about it. She had been altered, stiff, cold, constrained, altogether—certainly, not at all what he considered "nice"—in the presence of her sovereign's brother, that afternoon. So he would not go to meet her at the Rue de Lycée; indeed, he did not seem to want to meet her just then at all.

He wanted to be alone still; to think and to dream back over the winter they had just spent together; to clear his mind, and to cool his throbbing heart, and to understand it all—what had befallen him, what he felt, what he desired.

So he went home, and in his own little sitting-room, where he had never yet spent a single evening since he had come to Pau, he speedily became extremely dull. He could not smoke any more, and soon he was tired after all his excitement and his anger and agitation, and he could not think any more at all. He became sad and depressed, and very lonely for want of companionship, and his evening hung heavy on his hands. He wanted sympathy too—some one with whom to talk about it all; he knew he could get hold of nobody, and he felt quite disconsolate.

Suddenly the idea seized him that it would be some comfort at least to write a letter—to scribble out upon paper all these curious conflicting feelings and memories and thoughts that were eddying with such confusion in his brain; and he sat down forthwith, opened his writing-book, and soon lost sense of time or loneliness or trouble, as in rapid writing he covered page after page.

He wrote, of course, to his only correspondent—to his mother. He wrote in a new and curious vein of description and reminiscence, making revelations which he had before concealed; making, indeed, confessions of which he was scarcely aware. He wrote, because he felt the need to write—of just one subject—of Madame Zophée, of their friendship, of her loneliness, of her veiled and mysterious history, of her interest and her charm. Very unconsciously he wrote it all, scarcely knowing that he was telling his mother any thing unrevealed before.

He was quite unconscious, when he inscribed his name, with much sense of relief in the whole achievement, at the corner of the last of many pages, that in all these glowing, hastily written lines there lay, full and clear, drawn in bright, forcible colors, the picture of his heart.

He did not send the letter that night, however, but left it unfolded between the leaves of his writing-book; and then he went off to bed.

CHAPTER XX.

REALIZATION.

The luncheon of which the grand duke consented to partake at the Hôtel St. Hilaire was of the most private description; only the Princess and the family of the marquis, and Monsieur and Madame de Frontignac, in their unofficial capacity, being requested to attend.

Gilbert avoided it, being extremely annoyed at an early hour of the day to find that Madame Zophée had gone out driving, no one knew where, but somebody reported, "to the chalet." He saw her returning late in the afternoon, her victoria swinging rapidly into the court-yard, as he prowled gloomily upon the boulevard; but before he could cross the Place to the hotel she had passed, without observing him, within the glass doors into the hall. Instinctive courtesy forbade him attempting to follow her through the crowd of porters and hotel attendants that stood round.

He went back disconsolately to the Place again, and saw Marfa close her window above him, thus taking away every chance of her appearing among her flowers on her balcony there. He was quite disgusted.

After sauntering half an hour backward and forward, taking his hat off with gloomy discouragement of conversation to many acquaintances, he resolved to penetrate her seclusion, and to trespass upon their habitual etiquette, by going to visit her, as he had once done at the chalet, without any sort of excuse.

And in he went, and along the corridor; but only to be disappointed and rendered more indignant than he had yet been. Ivan and the attendant of the grand duke were at the far window, as before; and this time—doubtless mindful of a sharp reprimand on account of yesterday's disturbance—the latter advanced without waiting for Ivan to interfere, and with much courtesy, but with equal determination, interrupted Gilbert's approach.

"His Highness the Grand Duke George-Sergeïevitch Nicolaïevitch pays Madame Zophia Petrovna Variazinka a visit," he said, gravely; adding, in rather peremptory tones, as Gilbert hesitated in his retreat, "No one is permitted to enter, monsieur, while His Highness is there."

With a smothered oath and an exclamation, in broad English, of anger and vexation, Gilbert conquered, somehow, his impulse to knock the man down, then turned on his heel suddenly, and walked away.

"The last time," he muttered to himself, in fuming indignation, "the very last time I will try to get in at that door!"

Ah! if he had known how true his words were, he would have spoken them, perhaps, in softer accents and with a different thought.

On his dressing-table, when he went home, he found a little note, addressed in a clear, delicate writing unknown to him.

He opened it, and to his surprise he found it was from the Princess. An invitation was contained in it—one that, he was well aware, could not with any courtesy be refused. The Princess asked him to spend the evening with her, quite *en petit comité*, to meet the grand duke and a few very familiar friends. Hermannricht was coming to play to them, she said, and their young Swedish friend would sing, and it would be quite friendly and sociable, just what the grand duke liked, and "would Sir Gilbert be so very amiable as to come?"

Of course he went; and at the very door his aunt greeted him with much excitement and delight. She was taking off her cloak and the soft light hood that had covered her head as she walked round from her own house, and she was being *débarrassée*, as she had learned to express it, by Baptiste of her over-shoes, when her nephew walked in, and she accosted him in the vestibule at once.

"You dear, naughty child! Where have you been? Not a sight have I seen of you all day, and you never came to luncheon; and, of course, you have not heard, and it is all so interesting, only I can not make any thing of it. Only fancy, the grand duke is one of our little Zophée's greatest friends, and has known her all her life, and knows *all* about her; only, of course, as he says nothing more, no one dares to ask him, and we are not much the wiser, my dear, after all: but still it is very interesting and satisfactory. And, then, the duke is so delighted with Pau, and he is such a charming man, dear child; and he talks of coming back next year for the whole winter, and of taking a villa; only then, of course, he will bring— Coming, coming, Léon. Yes, Baptiste has finished at last. Come along, Gilbert, come in with me. But no, not your arm; I must make a state entry, and take your uncle's. Come along;" and then in they went.

It was a pleasant evening, after all, too; though for a long while Gilbert cherished his ill-humor, and tried to dislike every body—to be stiff to Madame Zophée and odious to the grand duke. But that important personage (being, in fact, except when disturbed and irritated, a very amiable and agreeable man) got the better of Gilbert and his ill-temper, and drew him into conversation upon subjects, British and familiar, quite in spite of himself.

Madame Zophée was sitting near the duke, in an inner and special circle where Gilbert could not reach her; but she looked so lovely in her rich, curious dress, and smiled so sweetly, and, indeed, imploringly, into his clouded face, that he felt obliged to forgive her too.

He accepted the state of things with resignation for the moment, and made himself quite agreeable to the grand duke. His Highness, indeed, held him for a long time in conversation, inquiring for relations of his mother—Deninghams—who had been at the British embassy at St. Petersburg for many years, and asking with cordial interest whether Gilbert himself had no taste toward diplomatic life; and, while they talked thus, the feeling of irritation and soreness in Gilbert's heart seemed for the time being to wear away.

It fired up again, however, as the duke turned at length from him, and took his seat again by Madame Zophée's side. The Princess was occupied at another part of the room with her assembling guests, and so the duke began to converse with Madame Zophée in Russian, and in low and very friendly tones.

Then Hermannricht played, and all hushed their voices to listen; and Gilbert, finding a chair not very far from Madame Zophée's side, sat down and set himself just to look at her in silence, to try to control his irritation, to gather his mind together, to sift his sentiments and at long last to realize. For it was looking silently at her thus that evening that he did realize.

Feeling how his heart thrilled, and his cheek flushed, and his eyes suffused with sweet, intense emotion as he met her glance; feeling how desolate he was, now circumstances forbade him sitting by her side, and hearing her converse in low murmurs, under cover of the music and the laughing voices, throughout the whole evening only to him; feeling his misery without her, his eager craving to hear her voice address him, to speak her name once more; feeling the mad, bitter jealousy that filled him of any other man who dared absorb her in his stead; feeling all this, he realized, and watched her quietly, jealously, but very furtively now.

And he soon went away; it was of no use, he told himself. It was not, as he knew, her fault, but she could not speak to him, and he would have no opportunity to-night to speak to her;

so he went away, much more happy and contented now, for he had formed his resolution—formed it strongly, deeply, and quietly; he had reached at long last the kernel of his own sweet secret, and he had nothing more to realize about himself.

They would meet to-morrow—he had learned so much before he left the Princess's rooms. Many plans had been formed and arrangements made of which he had heard nothing in his misanthropical solitude of that whole day. His aunt and Morton had much to tell him of the projects for the remainder of the week. Madame Zophée was going back to the chalet early in the morning of the following day; and, after the French breakfast in the forenoon, they were all to join her there—to drive over with the Princess, and the grand duke, and all their usual coterie of selected friends. From the gate of the chalet they were to ride on ponies to the summit of one of the côteaux, from which the grand duke would enjoy a splendid mountain view. They were to partake of a picnic tea up there, as the guests of the Marquise de St. Hilaire; and then they would return by the chalet, to find their carriages again; and so by sunset, and in time for the Comte de Beaulieu's dinner, come home. Only Madame Zophée was to remain at the chalet, for which she had gone over to make arrangements in the morning, when Gilbert had missed her at the hotel; and then, on the day following the morrow, she was to receive the grand duke, in company with all her kind St. Hilaire friends, at a luncheon, that was to be as Russian in its characteristics as the combined efforts of Ivan and Marfa and Vasilie could succeed in making it. No part of this programme made much impression upon Gilbert's mind, except the fact that they were all to go over to the chalet to see Madame Zophée, and to ride with her to the Chapelle of P—— to-morrow. That one point took possession of him, and he fixed upon it as the occasion which he courted, the opportunity which would suit his purpose, the one central, supreme moment of his existence, for which, as he went home now, he resolved to wait.

Then, strange to say, as he strolled along the Rue de Lycée in the clear moonlight, and looked up into the deep intense blue of the southern sky, and as he turned into his own court-yard, and went upstairs slowly to his room, the thoughts that came to him with curious, sudden force were less of Madame Zophée than of his mother. The memory of her, in her stern, grim solitude, at Erle's Lynn came strongly across him, and the feeling rose quickly within his heart of her tenderness for him; that tenderness which, as he well knew, was the single affection of her strong, isolated heart—the utter devotion of a love quite undivided. How far his heart had gone from her, he suddenly realized, and she was so little aware! His conscience smote him, all woke up as were his keen feelings into sensitive and quivering life, and, as he went into his room, the resolution took him that he would now be so quick and ready with his frank confidence in her, that she would never have any real cause to upbraid him or to complain. He knew his secret himself only now, and not an hour would he conceal it from her.

He walked to his writing-table, and drew forth the letter which he had written yesterday evening. He gathered up the long loose sheets in his hand together, and read them from beginning to end. And as he did so, smiles flitted again and again over his face—smiles of intense sweetness, of happiness, of much amusement. He had written all this unconsciously last night; and now it all seemed so natural to him, only so very strange that he had never realized it before. One page remained uncovered on the last sheet, and he took his pen up quietly, when he had finished his perusal, smoothed the paper in front of him, and, after a moment's pause, he wrote:

"My dearest Mother,—Once more I resume. I have something yet to tell you—something for which, I think, from all that comes before, you will not be wholly unprepared. You are the first—the *very* first, believe me—to whom I tell my secret, and you must receive it with confidence in me strong enough to assure you of the full fitness of what I do. I feel for Madame Zophée Variazinka as I have never felt for any woman in this world before. I believe her to be better than any one I have ever known. Indeed, *all* that she is or does seems perfection to me; and as for you, she can not fail to satisfy you in every possible respect. So there is no more to say, mother, except that I hope this announcement will be a cause of happiness to you, for I love her with my whole heart and life and soul; and to-morrow I will ask her to be my wife. Your devoted son,

"Gilbert Erle."

CHAPTER XXI.

BRIGHT HOPE AND RUFFLED TEMPER.

It was a spring afternoon of peculiar loveliness and enchantment when the driving party reached the gate of the chalet at the top of the sloping côteaux the next day. The drive had been beautiful. The glare was softened by white flitting clouds, and the sun-rays had fallen pleasantly upon them as they drove across the Gave; past the oak groves of Jurançon; between the sloping vineyards above Gelos; up the hill-sides; through shady and well-wooded valleys; and between fields green as the emerald with the fresh vivid hues of the spring, and gemmed with innumerable flowers. Cowslips, violets, bluebells, scarlet anemones, and delicate narcissus were all blooming now with rich luxury in wonderful and beautiful profusion. The grand duke was in great good humor, and Gilbert's spirits were at their highest pitch. He had made up his mind completely, and he was troubled with no hesitation, little diffidence, and less doubt. He was the life of the party in his aunt's carriage, in which a place had been allotted to him, and he had evinced an exuberance of merriment during the drive that verged almost to excitement, and caused the marquise to glance once or twice at his flushed cheek and sparkling eyes with surprise. He was so ridiculously happy, as he would have himself described it, that he "really did not know what to do."

At the chalet they all dismounted. There was Madame Zophée ready to receive them; and there was a group of hardy little mountain po-

nies, collected from St. Hilaire, from the De Veuils, and by contribution from different neighbors—some fetched specially for the occasion from the Eaux-Bonnes. Besides these, there were two low wicker carriages, drawn by stout Spanish mules, ready to convey such members of the expedition as were disinclined to embark upon equestrian feats. Of these last were Madame de Beaulieu and the marquise herself. The marquis drove the first-named lady; and Baron Keffel, possessing himself of whip and reins, started, full of valorous enterprise, as the protector of the latter. The Princess preferred to ride; and when she had been fairly mounted by Gilbert and Morton, who both came forward to hold her stirrup and reins, the rest of the expedition arranged themselves, and in a few minutes they were all winding in a long column through "the flowering valley of St. Hilaire," beyond the first côteau, upward as if to reach the snow-clad *pic* that shot like a silver arrow, far above their heads, into the blue of the Spanish sky.

The view was glorious as they rode, the coloring rich and vivid, the glow warm and intense. The valleys and gentle slopes nestling in their garments of fresh verdure soon lay beneath them, and the country opened out grandly on every side. Verdant glades, flowery fields, and woody hollows stretched beneath their gaze; and beyond all, and looming ever in the vast prospect above all, towered the mountains—shoulder above shoulder, *pic* above *pic*, range beyond range—standing, clear-drawn, in snowy outline against the azure heavens. All delightful so far; weather perfect, scenery magnificent, the ponies excellent and willing, picking their way cheerily along, and all the right people there, in well-balanced numbers, sufficient both of Amazons and cavaliers—a thoroughly well-organized picnic, in fact, as all social arrangements infallibly turned out to be with which Madame la Marquise de St. Hilaire had any thing to do.

And yet, from the moment that they started from the chalet garden, Gilbert's exuberant spirits had undergone, suddenly and emphatically, a change. Nothing fell out, in fact, just as he wanted it. He had painted a certain bright vision in his imagination in prospect of this riding-party to the Chapelle de P——. A picture of himself winding up the slopes and through the valleys on foot (as for all the distance he had thought he would much prefer), walking by the side of Madame Zophée's pony, leading it carefully over the rough places of the way; he telling her, as they went, and as he skillfully moderated the pace of her steed to suit his ideas—telling her all the story of that newly discovered secret of his, and asking from her an answer to that question which had suddenly become of first, indeed single, importance in his heart.

And here he was, winding up the valley by the side of Miss Ida de Veuil, a very nice girl in her way certainly, but not in the least the person whom he wished for his companion on that particular day; and there was Madame Zophée riding far in front of him, the grand duke close by her bridle, both just behind Morton, who, in his character of host in the expedition, rode by the Princess, and acted as their guide.

The grand duke, Gilbert's inevitable bugbear at this particular time, had brought all this misarrangement about by inviting Madame Zophée, with a grave bow, as they left the chalet, to be his companion for the ride; and he had taken his place beside her, and moved on at once, conversing continuously in Russian, without taking any notice of Gilbert, whom he left standing by his pony in despair. "There was no help for it," so Madame Zophée had tried to say in a kind glance as she turned away to join the duke, deserting Gilbert, who had just gathered up and given her her rein. But "no help for it" did not reconcile him to his disappointment, and he rode by Mademoiselle de Veuil in a gloomy and suddenly clouded mood that was scarcely covered by her ceaseless and easy chatter. He was bitterly disappointed, for this was a reverse of fortune which it had never occurred to him to expect. As they rode on and the path narrowed, they dropped into single file, and Mademoiselle de Veuil, thinking "Sare Geelbert" curiously unpleasant to-day, betook herself to conversation with the cavalier in front of her, leaving Gilbert to his own reflections, and to recover his temper as best he could. The result was that he did not recover it, irritation, impatience, and disappointment getting more and more the better of him as he rode. Solitude was not the best cure for the anger and jealousy and passionate feeling of misery that gradually again filled his heart. He got worse and worse as he went along, until it all seemed too much for him, and was ready in any sort of way to overflow.

In this condition, at the end of an hour's riding, he reached, with the long column of explorers, the summit of the hill, and they all paused a moment before dismounting, and stood together in a group, admiring and gazing over the glorious prospect, each uttering (every one in his own tongue) loud exclamations of delight. Gilbert instantly threw himself from his pony, saying nothing in any way to echo the cries of admiration that surrounded him. He flung his reins to a servant of Morton's, who stood near in readiness, and he walked straight through the group of riders to Madame Zophée's side. She was still upon her pony, and close to her stood the grand duke, who had dismounted from his. The Princess was near also; and Morton, having slipped off duty and found his way to the background and to the neighborhood of his little Jeanne, the Princess sat now on her pony, a little apart for a moment and alone. The duke, observing this, just as Gilbert approached, turned toward her, and conversation began between them with some remarks in German upon the splendor of the view. Madame Zophée was therefore sitting silent in her saddle when Gilbert reached her pony's side. It was a moment, a single fleeting moment, which he seized to speak. He came close to her, he put his hand up and laid it eagerly on her pony's neck, and he turned toward her with the expression on his face which it had worn for the last hour, of impatience, vexation, and misery—all very new to him.

"Sir Gilbert! what is the matter?" said Madame Zophée, smiling almost with amusement at the temper and excitement in his face, which for an instant she put down to boyish jealousy and to the childish impatience which he so often evinced at any thing which came across his will. "What are you looking so indignant about?"

"Why do you ask me?" he said; "you know

quite well. I *can not* stand it any more. I hate that Russian fellow, and I will *not* have him riding by you all day."

"Hush!" she exclaimed, hastily, looking anxiously round lest his eager words had been overheard. "Hush, Sir Gilbert! you must not speak in that way."

"But I will!" he went on. "I can not stand the man, with his airs and his patronage, so coolly thinking he may walk off as he likes with you."

"Sir Gilbert! Sir Gilbert! do not be so absurd," she said. "You are behaving like an angry boy. What do you mean?"

"I mean I will not have it. I want to ride with you. I have come on purpose to ride with you; and what right has he to come between us and take you away like this? No one else has ever done it, and I will not stand it now."

"Sir Gilbert! what do you mean?" she said again. "Listen. The grand duke has been so kind to me, you do not know how kind, and it is for his wife's sake, you know; all for the sake of old days when she remembers me a child. Do not be foolish, Sir Gilbert. Please go away now; I must, indeed, drive you away; so please go. See, you must not stand so close to him; he has heard our voices; we must not speak so loud. Ah! he has finished talking with the Princess, and he is coming again to speak to me now."

"I can not stand it, and I am going away—back home again," Gilbert exclaimed, in passionate tones. "If it must be, I will leave you, as you wish it, and you drive me away, because I do not want to vex you, Madame Zophée, by being rude to this Russian, to this friend of yours. I do not want to do it; and as I feel now I think I might, so I *will* go. But stay; say good-bye to me. When we meet again, I will not be angry as I am now. I will go away, for I know I am making a fool of myself, but when I see you again I will have cooled down. Only say good-bye to me, that I may not be quite miserable and desolate all the day long."

"Sir Gilbert, how can you be so absurd?" she said, softly. "What a boy you are!"

"I dare say you do think me a boy," he answered, a little bitterly, and he took her hand in his, clasping it a moment in farewell. "I dare say you do think me a boy," he repeated, and as he spoke she looked up quickly into his face.

His hand had closed upon hers, where it lay upon her pommel, with an eagerness and fervor in its touch that was quite new to him, and she would have drawn her hand away in astonishment, but he held it for that instant firm and tight. She looked up at him, and her lips quivered with a sudden start of mingled astonishment and dismay. Her eyes distended with a curious expression of surprise and deprecation too as they met his, resting upon her with that new light she had never seen in them before. A strange, wistful light it was. It combated for an instant his anger, his disappointment, and chagrin, and then it conquered them utterly, and his eyes suffused and glistened upon her, full of tenderness and eager love.

"Sir Gilbert! Sir Gilbert!" she whispered, in a low voice that was tremulous with intense excitement and with pain, "let me tell you something—now—quickly; let me tell it, I have been wanting to speak to you; I have been wishing to tell you for all these days, but—"

"I will not hear what you would tell me," he exclaimed, passionately, "till you have listened to what I would say to you."

"But I must—I must," she said, her voice breaking with the weight of strange agony, in its low, suppressed tone.

"Never mind," he said, hastily, for the grand duke approached to join her again. "Here he comes—the ruffian! but never mind. We have a great deal to say, both of us, I dare say; but we shall meet again ere long. Good-bye."

And then he turned and left her, and she recovered her composure as best she could. How she spent that day, how she got through the long hours, with their weight of conversation and sight-seeing and etiquette, was one of those things she could never remember, and could never tell.

CHAPTER XXII.

ENCHANTMENTS BROKEN.

Gilbert spent the day, on his side, in riding straight back to the chalet, in total disregard and oblivion of any thing that conventionality might demand from a member of a picnic. He forgot all about the picnic, indeed, and about every body it included, save Madame Zophée. He forgot that he had promised his aunt to light the fire, was indifferent who boiled the kettle, or what *bonmots* were made by the baron as they sat on the grass at tea. He would have nothing to say to it all, as Madame Zophée would have so little to say to him. He would not linger, as one of that merry, laughing party, all the afternoon, to see another man, whosoever it might be, lounging by her side and riding by her pony, absorbing her smiles and enjoying her conversation; so he left them, disgusted and very miserable, but still quite resolved in his own mind. It did not much matter, he said, as he rode quickly down the valleys. He had his own deep-laid plan.

It was well on in the afternoon when he reached the chalet. The servants were waiting there from St. Hilaire to take the tired ponies, and to one of them he gave his, bidding the man return with it to the château. Then he opened the gate into Madame Zophée's garden.

How richly spring was budding there! The turf was soft and green, the trees were bursting into leaf, the flowers were opening in starry blossoms all over the borders, and the roses were blooming round the windows and the rustic porch. There was no one there. The place looked sweet and familiar to him, coming to it after all these winter months; but it seemed curiously quiet this afternoon, for the men-servants were away on the mountain with their mistress, and Lustoff had gone round to the stable to enliven his solitude in the company of the Belgian dog.

The quiet stillness of the place fell softly over Gilbert's ruffled spirit, and he soon began to return slowly to a happier and more amiable mood. He wandered about the garden a little, looking at her rose-bushes one by one, thinking of the day when he had first come there and gathered the rich golden festoons for her, in all

the glory of their latest bloom. He trod slowly backward and forward the particular pathway on which he knew *she* spent many a summer evening, pacing in her calm solitude in view of the mountain *pics* she loved. His mind was full very soon of numberless little happy reminiscences and thoughts of her, as she had come and gone in his sight, through all last autumn, in and out of this garden, and up and down the woody slopes to St. Hilaire; and he became quite happy, and composed, and satisfied in his heart, as time went on, as he wandered about and thought of her, and waited for her return.

At last the sun began to set, and he felt tired of his wanderings. He realized that he had been sauntering on the soft turf for a long while; and he went and sat down then, just on the threshold of her window, resting his head back against the lintel, and letting his eyes wander idly over the deepening crimson flush of the sky. He forgot to smoke all this time; his mind and imagination were far too busy and full. He was thinking, and going over the thought again and again, how strange it was that he had never known he loved her all these long months through; that he had been so happy, and never known the cause; that it had been glowing in his heart with the glory of a priceless jewel—his tender love—for many a day, as he now realized, and he had never found it out. She had been "a part of the sunshine of St. Hilaire;" so he had once said to his aunt, as he remembered, and he smiled to himself as he recollected suddenly the shrewdness of his aunt's reply. For she — his little, strange, sweet friend—had been in truth, not, as he had asserted, a part of a universal sunshine, but the very source and centre of that sunshine herself; not only gilding for him with a golden glory, as he sat and dreamed there, Pau and the Pyrenees, the chalet and St. Hilaire, but all the world besides — all life, all future, and every changeful circumstance or scene to come. The moments fled rapidly as he sat lost in delicious reverie, his whole heart and soul bathed in the sweetness of that inner light. The morning of love had risen gloriously for him, and his life seemed flooded with the sunshine of anticipation and hope.

Suddenly he started up. Voices were drawing near the gate. Mingling voices, masculine and womanly, loud and low; the whole party was returning; and at the same time the roll of wheels drew near. They would dismount at the gate of the garden (so much he knew), and they would then get into their carriages, every one of them, and drive rapidly home. He would be well rid of them at last, he assured himself—of aunts and uncles, friends and cousins, strangers and dukes. Such a lot of them; it had been really very hard on him all the day. He felt angry again, quite ready for a fresh outburst, as the voices drew near; and then he suddenly obeyed an instinctive impulse, and drew out of sight of the gate, away along a side shrubbery path round by the edge of the garden, listening and waiting, and full of impatience, till that inevitable duke had said his last words and had driven away. He heard the words, in those full, rich Russian accents which had infuriated him so often during the last three days; he heard Madame Zophée's tones in answer; he heard the Princess and his aunt calling out to her their kind words of "good-night;" and then the welcome sound came of the roll of the carriages down the hill one after another, and the ring of the hoofs of Morton's horse as he hastened after them, and cantered along in the hollow below by Jeanne de Veuil's side.

Then did Gilbert emerge from his seclusion, and come out upon the lawn, and along the pathway from the drawing-room toward the gate. Madame Zophée was leaning there, watching her departing friends. She had taken her hat off, and held it in one hand, while the other supported her cheek. She stood very still, her head drooping rather wearily, her long dress sweeping the grass by her side. He drew near, treading softly, and had come half-way down the path before his footsteps fell on her ear. Then she started, turned suddenly, and saw him, and he sprung quickly forward before she could say one word. She paused, receded a step, and looked up at him: before she was aware of it her hands were clasped firmly in his.

They stood an instant in silence, and, quick as lightning and fleeting as the vivid flash, a gleam of uncontrollable feeling quivered on her face. It was a smile answering his smile, and one glance from her shadowy eyes, giving back the love-light, eager, tender, wistful, and passionate, that quivered under the dark lashes in the blue depths of his. Vivid, brilliant, and beautiful, her glance met him, and thrilled with intense sweetness to his joyous heart—and then it vanished.

"Zophée, Zophée!" he had murmured, very earnestly and very low; and at his voice the spell broke, the light fled from her eyes, and the smile on her lips changed instantly to a quiver of suffering and dismay.

"Zophée!" he went on, retaining her two hands firmly within his own, and disregarding her feverish efforts to draw back from him and to turn away, "Zophée, I have waited here the whole day long for you—to tell you—ah! you know what I have to say."

"Hush, hush!" she cried, in tones of bitterest anguish. "Hush, Sir Gilbert!—Sir Gilbert, let me go away."

"Nay, hear me!" he persisted. "Are you surprised? I thought every body knew it—that it was only my own heart that could be so foolish as not to know itself, only I who have been blind. You know, Zophée, how utterly I love you!" he said.

"Sir Gilbert! God forgive me! for the love of Heaven let me go!"

"Ah, no! why leave me?" he persisted. "Stay, hear me, let me tell it you again and again. It is so sweet to have realized it. I love you, Zophée, I love you—and that is all I had to tell," he added.

It was in his light, frank, boyish way he uttered the last words, and a sweet, sunny look glanced in his eyes again as he spoke, and Zophée turned her face from him, and wrested one of her trembling hands away, and covered her eyes with it that she might not see him, that the thrill of her heart, vibrating at his words and voice, might not break forth in her glance again, answering the love in his.

"Hush!" she said, at last, in passionate accents, with a voice full of strange anguish. "Do not break my heart—do not madden me—do not

cover me and crush me with remorse and bitterness and shame. Listen to me, Sir Gilbert, listen to me; and, if you can, forgive me," she cried.

"Zophée, there is but one word I wish to hear from you," he whispered, softly.

"No, no! Hear me, hear me; you know nothing, you do not know what you say. O God! what have I done? What have I to tell you?" she cried, with passionate bitterness again.

"I care not what you have to tell me!" he exclaimed, in reply. "Tell me nothing, Zophée. I wish to hear nothing of all you would conceal. I care not, I tell you, what your history has been. I care only for you, and our life; all my hope is for the future, Zophée. I care nothing for the past."

"Hush, hush!" she cried again. "Hear me. I *must* tell you of my life. I must tell you my whole history — yes, every thing, every thing. Then, who knows, you may—perhaps you may forgive. Come in, come in!" she added, suddenly, with a feverish and excited manner, as if the struggle and the agony of her hidden trouble were all too much for her, and as if she scarcely knew what she said. "Come in, and I will lay before you the record of my life."

He followed her as she trod hastily up the pathway till they reached the window through which they had passed in together the first time on that autumn evening six months ago, and then she paused and turned again toward him as he stood. She put up her hands suddenly and clasped them together under her bending face, and a great sigh quivered and agonized her whole frame as she looked up an instant, and then bent her head in a strange attitude of supplication and humility; and he, troubled and perplexed at her agitation, said again, "One word, Zophée, one word, my own sweet friend, so long my friend, now my dearest, my own, I hope—my love. A little word will be enough for me, and then if I distress you, Zophée, I will go. But must I leave you? not surely till I have had my word."

"Forgive me, forgive me, is all—is all that I can say," she murmured.

"Zophée!" he exclaimed again, and his tone was low and tremulous this time, and a sudden pallor came upon his cheek. "What do you mean?" he said.

"Forgive me! what more can I say to you, dear, nay, beloved friend? Forgive, forgive! and hear me if you have patience to do so. Hear me I know you will, for you are noble, you are true and kind. You will hear me that you may forgive me, more and more forgive me as you hear, and that you may perhaps go away, leaving me without bitter hatred in your heart."

"Zophée, Zophée!" he cried then, for her words were inexplicable to him, but they pierced him, like poisoned arrows, with sharp, sudden pain. "Leave you! what can you mean?" he cried.

"Hear me, and go," she answered, her voice sinking to a broken whisper, and her face bending upon her clasped hands. "It is all I can say to you. Hear me, forgive me, and go."

He was silent an instant then, an expression of strong feeling sweeping over his face. The light seemed to go suddenly out of it. The sunny look of youth changed, his smiling lips hardened and became stern. Full of perplexity and confusion, he stood silent, looking down upon her, dimly realizing the purport of her repeated words —the farewell that was in them, the dismissal she was struggling to imply.

"Do you mean that you do not love me?" he said, at length, very slowly, in a low and curiously altered tone.

"No, no!" she exclaimed, the word escaping her lips hastily, before she could arrest it or realize what she said. "Not that! no, no!"

He caught her hand once more.

"Then, in God's name, look up, Zophée, and speak to me!" he exclaimed, his voice ringing again with passionate eagerness. "Answer me —answer me. Tell me you love me—my heart is breaking!" he said.

"And mine," she murmured, "is broken—broken in grief for you, dear friend; and in worse than grief—in shame and agony of humiliation for myself. What have I done?" she continued, her composure breaking down again. "What have I done? May God forgive me, if you never can!" and she hid her face once more.

"Will you speak to me?" he said, presently, in a low, painful tone, after waiting a moment in bitterness and perplexity. "I am so miserable, Zophée. Can you not tell me what you have to say?"

"I am trying to speak," she said—"trying to tell you. Come in, come in! I would tell you of my whole life, Sir Gilbert, but you will not hear me; and it is a long, weary story to tell."

"And I care not," he exclaimed again, emphatically, "I care not to hear it. Keep your life's secret — keep it forever secret, Zophée, if you will. Tell *me* only," he went on, passionately—"tell me only what I want to hear from you; tell me only of—your love."

They had passed into the room together during the last words, and she had sat down by her writing-table, while he stood waiting by her side; and she hid her face and turned away from him, and he paused again and looked silently down. Suddenly, as she sat there, her face buried in her hands, her whole frame quivering with strong agony; as she struggled to speak to him; as she strove to stem back in her heart the wave of tenderness that surged up in answer to his voice; as she sought vainly for words in which to say to him what she had to tell; as he stood there and looked down, and the soft sunset glanced full upon her bending figure and quivered in rays of light and shade upon her dusky hair, there rose up within him suddenly a storm uncontrollable of passionate love and pity for her, and he flung himself down by her side, caught up the folds of her dress and the fringe of her falling mantle, kissed them again and again, and in a voice, breaking with strong emotion, "Never mind—never mind any thing—any thing; only love me!" he cried.

The strength of his emotion and the painful excitement of his voice and manner seemed to rouse her. She turned her face toward him, and a look of keen suffering passed over it for a moment as her eyes met his. Then she gathered herself together, and essayed once more to speak. She put up her hand, as if to compose and steady him, upon his shoulder. She looked into his face, all quivering as it was with intense feeling; and then, as he again, in tenderest accents, murmured her name, she said, in a low, trembling tone,

"Sir Gilbert, I *must* speak to you, and you must listen to me while I tell you of my life, of my history, of every thing that in all my wandering years has befallen me; above all, while I speak to you of—my husband."

At the last word her voice sunk almost to a whisper, but still it fell upon his ear spoken distinct and clear.

"Tell me nothing, nothing—save that you love me," he reiterated, in passionate accents again.

"No, no! Hush! hush! you must listen; you must hear me. I must speak of him; you do not know—you never asked me, and till the other day I could not tell you," she said. "But now, now, Sir Gilbert, you must not speak thus to me; you must go; you must leave me. I must never, never see you again, for you must never tell me that you love me; you must never ask me for my love—I have none to give you. Alas! alas! it is not mine to give." And she turned from him, and her head sunk on her clasped hands again.

Gilbert had risen to his feet almost at her first words, and his hand had dropped from its hold of hers. He stood by her side as the sentences broke from her, looking down upon her eager, pleading, and agitated face; and when she ceased and turned from him again, a strange expression came over his countenance, a cold pallor upon his cheek, an icy hardness to his eyes, a stern, bitter look forming itself upon his quivering lips.

"What am I to understand, Zophée?" he said; and his voice was low and constrained now, as if he were struggling to put a strong force of control upon himself. "What am I to understand from the words you say?"

"I can scarcely tell you," she continued, rapidly. "I scarcely know myself. Till the other day—till the duke came, I mean—I knew nothing; and though I feared often, and kept my promises, and veiled my guardian's secret and sheltered his honor and his name, still I thought *him* dead. I did—we all did," she added. "Even his father awaited only assurance for my recall—"

"Zophée! Zophée! what are you saying?" cried Gilbert, breaking in suddenly upon her words. "Speak plainly to me. What have I to hear? What am I to understand?"

"Understand — that *he* lives," she answered him.

"He? Do you mean your husband? Zophée, Zophée, do not say it!" he exclaimed then, his voice ringing with horror and anguish as the truth she was trying to convey to him came breaking slowly in upon his mind. "Hush! hush! do not say it, do not say it!" he cried.

"Say it! I must say it," she said. "I have been wanting to say it for days to you, only you would not come to me; you would not hear."

"Oh no, no!" he cried again, suddenly, clenching his hands together as he spoke, throwing his head back, and stamping his foot upon the ground as if to annihilate and crush beneath it the terrible and agonizing idea. "No, no! Say it is not true; it is a hideous dream. Am I mad, Zophée? I love you, I tell you. I have loved you, and you have been mine, only mine, for all these many days. Say it is not true, Zophée; say it is not true."

"I can not, I can not," she said.

"Do you not see that you are maddening me?" he broke out again. "Do you not see that you are breaking my heart? Say they are but jest, these cruel words; say you are but trying me—they are but jest and folly. Say that you are mine, my darling. Say, is it not so? You are my own, only mine—no one, dead or living, can come between us now."

"Hush, hush!" she said. "It is true—true. He lives; he lives. Two months ago, as the Duke George tells me, he was seen alive."

"I will not believe it; I will not. Do not tell it me; do not say it to me. It is not true; it is a base, cruel, horrible lie!" he cried.

"It is true; it is true. I am not free. I have no love to give you — to give any one. Dear friend, forgive me, and leave me," she whispered low.

Then for a moment he did leave her; he walked away and turned from her without word of forgiveness, without answer of any kind; and he stood turned quite away from her, silent, confused, every faculty seemingly stunned.

"Will you not forgive me?" she asked, suddenly again. "Will you not forgive me? or at least hear me before you condemn me quite unheard. Hear me!" she added, passionately, "my friend Gilbert, my dear, dear friend, hear me; do not turn from me, do not condemn me unheard."

He had walked to the window and was looking out upon the valley with eyes that saw nothing, striving to clear his mind and to still the throbbing in his brain, and to understand what she had said to him. He made no answer, and Zophée buried her face in her quivering hands again and bent over the table, her whole frame shaken with the strong agony, like a quivering leaf in the storm. She was utterly heart-broken at that moment—utterly heart-broken, for herself, for him.

Suddenly he turned to her again.

"I can not bear it—I can not bear it!" he cried. "Say it is not true, Zophée; it is a mad dream that is torturing my brain; it is not true. Can not I wake again? Speak to me; tell me it is not true; there is no one between us. You love me, and I have never loved but you. What is it? Speak to me—it is not true; surely it is not true!"

She could say no more now. She kept her face still covered with her hands, she shook her head only in answer to his last vehement words; and he came up once more and stood close to her, and they were both quite silent again. The truth was forcing itself upon him. The truth—and the fact that it was the truth—seemed to stupefy him with misery, to still every power of realization or understanding in his mind. He could not think clearly or see clearly; but, as he stood there, memories were rushing wildly over him of all her strange and inexplicable ways, of her secret, her mysterious life, of the veil that hung low over her heart, of her silence, her sorrow—of her many incomprehensible words. Was this what it meant? This—even now he understood nothing save that "some one" lived who stood between them, and that that "some one" was—her husband. It all rushed upon him with irrepressible force; his heart seemed breaking with speechless horror and agony, his brain felt utterly stunned. He could understand nothing, save the one dreadful fact. Some one stood between them; some one lived to separate them,

one whom he thought—whom she had thought—was dead. It all seemed too much, too sudden. He could not realize or gather strength to bear it, and only one confused feeling took then possession of his mind: he must go. He must escape into the free air, and be alone. He must look into his own heart and understand what had befallen him; he must clear up this fearful darkness that seemed to cloud and quite cover his understanding and his brain.

Once again, then, without another word, he nearly turned and left her; left her, as she sat weeping there, her face hidden away from him, her voice silenced by the agony of emotion which shook her frame. He almost left her, but as he went, just as he turned away, something stayed him. His strong tenderness for her came surging up; his eager pity, his bitter longing for her love, his passionate desire to see once more her sweet, soft smile—all overcame him, and before he left her he sprung back again.

He took her hands in his, drawing them forcibly, almost roughly, from her face, and he bent down and made her look at him with her soft, brown eyes, and he gazed, straight and searchingly, into their depth.

"Zophée, Zophée! You love me? At all events, you *do* love me?" he said. "Before I leave you, will you not say even as much as *that* to me?"

The tears welled over then and coursed down her cheeks, and her lips parted again in a quivering smile of farewell. She tried to turn from him, and, with the two hands which he held clasped so eagerly, to push him gently away, but she could not say another word to him; and, after waiting a moment and looking for his answer into her face, he bent low, raised her hands to his lips, and kissed them, tenderly and passionately, again and again. Then he loosened his strong hold upon them, and while she turned away to cover her tearful face once more, he was gone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VIGILS.

It was four miles across the valley from the chalet to the Bridge of Jurançon, at the entrance of the town of Pau. Gilbert walked rapidly over the way, unconscious of the distance, unconscious of the time. It was quite evening, and almost dark, when he entered by the Place Grammont; the lamp-lights were flickering along the streets and under the trees when he passed the Place Royale, and the stars were coming out, clear and brilliant, in the archway of the sky. He noticed nothing; he trod rapidly along, and reached the Rue de Lycée, and crossed the courtyard, and went up to his own room, quite unconscious of how he had come there, of what he was doing, or of what he meant to do.

He came in and sat down, without calling his servant or seeking for lights, by his little writing-table in the window, and he rested his head upon his hands, and looked drearily out into the darkness and across the Gave to the stern mountains that rose far away against the dim horizon of the sky. There they were, glorious and stupendous as ever, in the dreamy distance that lies so far beyond our human turmoils, and that amidst and above them all remains ever so tranquil and so sublime. He looked, but he saw—nothing. In the stunned and bitter trouble of his heart and brain, the tranquil glory of the mountains had no message for him.

The whole thing had come so suddenly: the breaking-up of his complacency and composure, the discovery of his love, the sweetness of its realization, the intense brightness of his undaunted hopes; then the crushing disappointment, the revelation, made in such few swift words, carrying such a burden of misery, such a blank, unconquerable darkness in their meaning, causing such a chaos of horror in his heart and mind. What did it all mean? Her husband lived—and she had never told him! Her husband, whose very existence in any dim and far-distant past had never fallen, as the faintest shadow, between them. He lived, and stood forever in their path! And she had never told him, and had let him love her, and had let it all go on; and it had been so sweet, and so perfect, and so heavenly, through all these weeks and weeks of happy, sunlit days. And now—now? It was all too much for him. It overcame, and quite crushed him down.

In dumb agony of spirit, he sat there hour after hour as the night fell. He never knew how long he sat, or how the time had passed. His servant came, and, in obedience to a half-conscious order, had brought him food, and then left him again, silenced and awe-struck by the expression of mute suffering in his master's face; and Gilbert had eaten, and then sat down again, and had bid the man once more to leave him, adding that he would not go out that night, that he should require nothing, and that every one might go to bed. He would be left alone, he repeated. "He had had bad news?" "Yes," he said, dreamily, in answer to the half-spoken question the servant ventured to put.

And then, again, he sat on in solitude, and saw the night fall deeper and deeper, and the moon glisten softly over the mountains for hour after hour. Sometimes he rose, and paced up and down in restless misery, and again he would return to his place by the window and gaze out upon the hills; but he could not go to rest; he could not clear or calm his mind; he could not find peace, or be still. And he sat there, or paced to and fro, as hour succeeded hour, and the night passed on.

The morning came breaking upon him at last while he was still gazing there. The gray, misty light crept over the horizon, and flushed into warm tints of violet and rose, and at last the mountains and the valley were beautiful with the glories of the morning, and his weary, aching eyes wandered over them, still but half conscious of what he saw.

The changeful splendor of the breaking day seemed, however, at last to move him. The expression of dull stupor passed from his eyes and brow, as the warm, deep light crept slowly over the far tops of the hills. He roused himself for a moment; he pushed his hair back from his forehead; he sighed heavily, as if tired out with the night-long reiteration of his bitter thoughts; he threw his head back, and, as if that strong, glorious light flushing from the gold-bathed mountains were too much for him, he closed his eyes, and for a moment again remained quite

still. The morning was breaking so beautifully over there, the glorious Pyrenean day was rising into glad sunshine once more; and for him, ah! for him, all sunshine seemed, for this and for all coming days, to have gone, quite gone out from his heart.

Suddenly, as he sat with closed eyelids thus, a sound reached him; it roused him once again, and, without knowing why he did it, made him start hastily up. It was five o'clock. Morning was quite come now, and the world was waking round him, and the distant roll of wheels was passing over the streets; and at that moment, as the hour rang from the little clock on his chimney-piece, the sharp clatter of a horse's hoof echoed up from the court-yard below. It was that sound which at length had roused him.

Still, scarce knowing why he went, he turned out of his sitting-room and crossed the passage, and went to the large window looking into the yard, and he pressed his hot forehead upon the cold glass and looked down wearily, with heavy-laden eyes, into the court below. And then he started. His grooms were not out yet; there were none of his servants there, nor was it any horse of his that was striking his hoofs with noisy impatience upon the pavement. But both horse and rider he had seen before.

Just under the window, standing still and obedient, waiting for some one to emerge, he saw through the cool, clear morning light Vazuza, Madame Zophée's little, beautiful black mare, her long, bushy tail twitching impatiently, her neck arched under the restraining rein, and on her back Vasilie, sitting upright, motionless as an orderly bearing military commands. He had his flat fur cap on, and a short kaftan trimmed round the neck and sleeves with fur. Gilbert recognized him immediately; and obeying his first impulse, he turned quickly and walked down the stairs. He opened the big house-door into the court-yard, and came out, and Vasilie touched his cap and bowed gravely as he appeared.

"I am delighted," the Russian said, in very broken French, "delighted to see monsieur. I was awaiting for a groom or valet to bear my message to him; but monsieur is right to take the beautiful air of the morning, and I am happy to find him well. I have a letter—a packet from Madame Zophia Petrovna Variazinka for monsieur, and I hasten to deliver it now. See, it is safe; it is here. Madame is also stirring; she came out, even to the stables, this morning, as I was tending Vazuza, before four o'clock, and she gave me this, and said, 'Ride, Vasilie, and give it to the servant of the Monsieur English, that he may have it when he leaves his chamber at an early hour.' 'Sluches,' I said, and I am here; I obey. I now give it to monsieur with my own hand, which is surely the best obedience which madame could desire."

And he stooped, after this long harangue, and put a large, sealed letter, with much ceremony, into Gilbert's hand. Gilbert had been too bewildered, and far too much surprised to interrupt him.

"Does madame expect an answer? Will you wait till I have opened and read this, Vasilie?" he said, at length, as he took the packet and turned it slowly in his hand.

"Willingly I will await, monsieur. Your pleasure is my command. Or stay; it is but five o'clock. I will pass to the Villette de Veuil with your permission, for I would see the learned Sardou there. I would ask a prescription, monsieur, for the cure of the darling Vazuza's cough. He is old and wise, that Sardou—he knows many a thing; and I will come again here at seven, in two hours indeed. Will that serve your commands, monsieur? I will await here your orders. Will that serve you—eh, monsieur, if I come again?"

"Good," said Gilbert, quietly, in a dreamy, half-conscious tone, looking strangely from the letter up to Vasilie, and then back at his precious packet again. "Very good. Come again in two hours," he said; and then Vasilie rode slowly out of the yard, and Gilbert turned up the broad, white steps, and went back to his room once more.

It was bright daylight now, and the glow of a beautiful spring morning was flooding mountains and valley, and filling the room. But he felt chilled and weary as he came back to his window-seat, though the touch of the letter, as he held it in his hand, thrilled, with the warmth of renewed excitement, to his heart. He was worn out with the night's vigil, and the vibrations of strong feeling that shot through his frame seemed to overpower him. He could not open his letter; he felt too weary and sick and faint. He rose suddenly, and rang hastily for his servant, who had happily heard him moving in the house, and immediately appeared. Gilbert told him to bring coffee; for the thought struck him that what he felt now was the need of food to give him strength to bear the new reviving life that was stirring with such strange excitement within, thrilling him, with such a fever of reawakening anticipation and reviving hope. The very sight of her letter, as he held it gently between his fingers, and traced the delicate writing of his name upon the cover, seemed to do all this for him without knowing the contents.

She had written to him! She had been thinking of him, then, as he had sat there the long night through thinking only of her, and she had written to him, and lengthily. Surely here lay at last, then, explanation clear and comprehensible of that dire confusion of horrid mystery that tortured and stunned his brain. Yesterday he had had no strength to stay to hear quietly her story, so she had written it in pity for him; and here, surely, it lay for his perusal now.

He sat pausing still, however—he scarcely knew why, except from the sheer weakness and fatigue of his throbbing brain—pausing before he opened her letter; and the memory of her came again, flitting backward and forward before him, as he sat tracing her writing. The vision of her sweet, quiet face; of her great, dreamy eyes; of her soft, dusky hair; of all her tender, changeful expressions—all came back to him, thrilling new and strangely to his heart. For, as he thought of her now, all the bitter, hard things he had felt toward her during that long night recurred to him, and his heart smote him because of them again and again.

She had written to him, he told himself, and he had thought so bitterly of her that he felt scarcely worthy now to read her letter. She was sorry for him; and in his misery during that dark night all sorrow had nearly left his heart for *her*, and he had mourned his own

suffering only; and for that he felt now unworthy.

Here, in her own handwriting, in the lightly traced, foreign-looking lines he had learned to love so well, was the story of her part in the sorrow that had fallen so strangely over him.

Here was the unveiled history of her hidden and silent past. He felt unworthy to peruse it, so hardly and so bitterly, while she sat and wrote to him, had he thought of her. But she had written; she had spent the long, weary night in preparing this for him. Now, surely, he must rouse himself and read.

He sat down in his low smoking-chair, and with quick, trembling fingers he at last broke the seal of her letter. His eyes suffused, and something gathered in them, half blinding him, as he read the opening words.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HER TALE.

"I AM sitting up all night to write to you. You will not hear me, and I have so much to say. You will not let me tell you what I have been trying to tell again and again during the last week, and what I have *longed* to tell you for many months gone by.

"Dear friend, when I think that, with all my resolutions, and all my weak struggles, I have let you come to feel for me as you do, my heart is crushed with remorse and self-reproach, and bitter shame; and my sorrow for *you*—my repentance for the great injury I have done you—overpowers every feeling of regret or pity for myself. But *my* heart is also riven; I am sad and mournful for my own loss, for I must lose you, my dear friend. When I looked up and met your glance that afternoon on which the duke first arrived, I knew—I felt an instinctive and saddening conviction—that I was bidding you in my own heart farewell; silently it rose within me—'farewell.' The words he had said to me—the message he had brought—seemed the knell of our happy friendship, and I felt they must separate us forever. For he called me back to the past—to Russia, dear friend; and you would return to your own land again.

"Would that we had then parted at that happy moment—parted with our friendship all living and bright for each other—without ever waking up to realize what *parting* means for us, without living to know that our friendship was dead.

"If I could have seen you go laughing and light-hearted as you came to me, and as I have known you, I could have borne my own share of our parting grief. I would have cherished the memory of your presence, and of your laugh, and of your smile, through all my lonely years in the future, as the sweet, gentle memory of a dear, bright friend; and I should have felt thankful that this happy winter had been, for it has somehow brought youth back with a flood of sunlight into my deadened heart. A glow might have lingered in memory and associations that would have lighted up my solitude through many a shadowy hour.

"But now, alas! it is all otherwise. Only bitter regrets are mine, and weary reiterations fill my mind as I look back upon the happy months that have been.

"Why did I deceive myself? why did I allow it all?—the sweetness of our blossoming friendship, or its bitter and inevitable fruits. Dear friend, forgive me. Again and again the words well up to my lips; again and again I crave to say them to you, in deepest humiliation of my soul. And now can I expiate? Never! Can I excuse myself? It is for you to say. Judge, and forgive me, if you can, Gilbert. I tell you my story without reserve; I hide nothing from you. All my past, all my secrets, are yours.

"I must begin—let me think how—by telling you of two friends, Pietro Dimitrivitch Variazinka and Serge Michaïlovitch Vododski, who, forty years ago, studied side by side in the great college at St. Petersburg. The same study made of these two different men. Serge Vododski, from his earliest years, was a thinker, a philanthropist, a politician—always a successful man. He came from Northern Russia. His people were of the grave and hardy race who dwell there—'Old Russians,' as they are called—a grand, independent people, a race who have never felt the yoke of the Tartar, nor fallen under the Eastern's sway.

"Pietro Variazinka was from the South—of Polish descent, from his name, and of Southern blood, from his temperament. In every element of his character he was the opposite of Vododski. Enthusiastic, impassioned, excitable, visionary in theories, vehement and indiscreet in his expressions, as the other was sober and calm. Variazinka was a poet. They were the counterpoints of human character; and as sunshine wooes the shade, and shade absorbs the sunshine, so these two cast their checkered influence across each other's life, and with a wonderful intensity of young devotion they loved one another. From their earliest days their strong, earnest patriotism formed a bond of union between them. They adored their Russia, as young Russians do love their land. They loved her in the depth of her bondage, in the midst of the sufferings in which through those dark years she lay.

"These were dark days for Russia. Nicholas was on the imperial throne, and his dynasty was in its spirit crushing to aspiration, to new thonghts, to all expansion of the life and souls of men.

"Both Serge Vododski and Pietro Variazinka pined to serve their country. Both thrilled with ardor to fight in her battle that led toward fuller freedom and light. Both had drunk deep of the new wine of the poets of their early days—of Lomonosof, Puschkin, Davidov, and Derzhavin. They were fired with the ardor of young life as it was kindling, strong and bright, in their Northern land, and 'Svobodnaya Rossia' were, of all living speech, the words to them most dear.

"Vododski set his grave mind to work in a right direction. He found means of serving his country at an early age, and in a good way. Practically, and with a quiet activity, he served her well.

"Variazinka, on the other hand, served his *patrie*, in the fiery days of his early youth, chiefly in his dreams. The poems of Derzhavin were as a gospel to him. The story of Lamarinsk bewitched him—of that young revolutionary poet of freedom who, raising his voice and flashing his glori-

ous historic verses over St. Petersburg, had lived in a transitory gleam in the early days of Nicholas, and had vanished, leaving nothing but a track of light behind — a light that glowed, however, for young Russia as the first faint promise of the day. His story, above all others, fired the brain of Pietro Variazinka, and made him nearly mad. Before he was twenty, and just when Vododski, who was three years his senior, received his appointment to a desk in the office of the chief minister of state, Variazinka published the first stanza of a poem on liberty in the advanced journal of St. Petersburg, of which the second stanza was long expected, and long looked for, but never saw the light of day. For, alas! ere the ink was dry on the last page, or the fervor of his art and passion had cooled from the young poet's brow, the summons had reached him too. His muse was consigned to ignominy and destruction, and he was on his way to exile and obscurity forever.

"He went, condemned to the mines; but, before he reached them, a voice had been raised to arrest so far his doom. Serge Vododski was just then making an early and very prudent marriage with a distant cousin of Alexandra Féodorovna, whose son, George Nicolaïévitch, is now at Pau. As a guerdon of her love, Serge sought from his wife, on their marriage-eve, intercession through the empress for his friend; and thus, at the outset of their two lives, he redeemed Pietro from degradation and slavery, and raised him from a convict to an exile. Thus Serge won for Variazinka the precious freedom to make his home as fancy led him anywhere within the limits of that wide Eastern realm—exiled from Russia, indeed; but through Asia he might wander as he pleased.

"He went South—across the Kirghiz steppe —because he was a poet still, and because beautiful foliage, and lovely skies, and the soft atmosphere of the South were to him as joys still left in life.

"Do you remember the drawing you once found in my port-folio of the house beneath the soft, exotic shades of the Tamarisk by the sapphire waves of the Caspian Sea? It was there that my father wandered; there he found his soft Southern bride—his 'Tsiganie,' as he loved to call her, whether truly, or just to please a poetic fancy on his own part, I never clearly knew. There he lived, and she with him, and I —their one little child. There we lived, in a strange wilderness of sunshine and flowers, and in the beauty and the glory of young, joyous life.

"My mother—how well I can recall her! She was happy, gentle, dark-eyed, silent, or speaking in soft, cooing tones—strange, tender, Southern words—of which the very echoes seem to have died away in my ears now like the whispering of the far-off waves. I was happy, happy as the song-birds, joyous as the sun rippling on our azure inland sea.

"Only he, my father—poet, patriot, dreamer —was weary often, and very heart-sick in his exiled life. My Southern mother never understood him, never in the very least. How could she? Love was the only language for exchanging thought between them that she knew. She was beautiful, and he loved her, and he was as the sun in the midday heavens to her. But understand him! Ah! only I, his wild, dreamy child, could do that in those days.

"I understood him, and, in all that lonely country, only I. From my earliest years, I can not recollect the day when his thoughts, and dreams, and rich flow of poetic language were difficult or mysterious to me. I do not remember a time when, through him, I did not love the far country of his early youth—Russia, the land for which he had pleaded in living words that have since been life to many, though they were death and exile to him.

"I loved the freedom of Russia, and the glory of Russia, and the welfare of its people, and the honor of its name, long before my eyes had rested on its snowy steppes, or my feet had trodden its rugged soil. I loved it because he loved it, because its glory was dearer to my father than home, or than freedom, or than life.

"No echo, however, reached us, through many years of my young days, of the real history of that far-off land of ours. And it was not till my mother was dead, till my father's health was well-nigh broken, till all the vigor of his wild youth had fled, till the fire of his poetry was quenched within him, and the hopes of his throbbing heart quite extinguished as well, that the news reached us, at long last; after many years, to him—ah! so weary and so many—the message came, that his exile was over, his sentence was canceled, and his sorrows at an end.

"It was by the same voice that my father then learned particulars of the war that had been between France, Russia, and England half a score of years before. Then only he heard that Nicholas Paulovitch had died while I was yet an infant in the cradle; that reform—wide, generous, powerful, and beneficent—was agitating Russia from Archangel to Kasan; and that leading the van of this reform, side by side with the chief councilors of a wise and beneficent sovereign, stood Serge Michaïlovitch Vododski, his earliest and never-forgotten friend.

"In my first infant prayers, murmured in broken words by the side of my Russian father, in childish supplication to the God scarce known to my sun-born mother, and in the form of a church of which she had never heard, I had learned long ago to blend the name of Serge Vododski with all the rest I loved, praying for him as the savior of my father in his first exile, as his deliverer from the heavy chains, the fiery scourge, and the bitter shame of a convict mine.

"But now I had more to learn; and I can still remember the passionate enthusiasm and adoration for the name that thrilled through my heart as I saw the glow in my father's pale cheek and the flash in his eyes, when liberty was brought to him, the recall to his beloved, his own native land, and when the news reached us that all this was due to the efforts — constant, faithful, and untiring — of Serge Vododski, who, through all his life of success and honorable prosperity, had never once forgotten his exiled and less happy friend.

"I adored his name: to my sinking and heart-weary father he sent that new glow of re-awakening life. All unknown I adored him, and in passionate accents of eager enthusiasm I stood and vowed my whole heart's devotion to him: I promised before God and the Church, to my father and to my own soul, that I would live but

to serve Serge Michaïlovitch Vododski, and to repay him the heavy debt of our freedom and our lives. My father approved my saying, and added his blessing to my vow, assenting thereto with the words, 'May it be yours indeed, my daughter, to pay the debt of gratitude that lies so heavy upon me!' Eager, enthusiastic words on both sides were ours that joyous day—words of which the meaning was to one and both unknown; but we stood and spoke them, and the vow was vowed.

"After that we left Persia, and our sunny home by the Caspian Sea, and we traveled long—long and far. Do you remember another picture I showed to you?—my father's drawing of our journey in a deer-drawn teljéda across the steppes. He took the sketch when we halted one night, as I told you, at a village near the frontier by the Transcaucasian way. We came on into Russia then, wild wayfarers, savage-like pilgrims from the Sun-lands, as we were.

"We came to Moscow, and there Vododski met us. Once more the comrades of a glowing youth met, both long past the meridian of their changeful days; the successful and great-hearted politician meeting once again the poet, from whose wasted years exile had worn all power and fire of spirit away. And he, our friend, was tender and careful and pitiful for the poor, broken-down one, and gathered him, weary and life-worn, into the shelter of his love.

"'You must not stay here, Pietro,' Vododski said; and I remember how gently the words were murmured as he glanced with his deep, far-seeing eyes from our windows upon Moscow's wintry raiment of snow. 'You must not linger a week here; the journey already has been too much for you; you were foolish to cross the steppes so early in the spring. Now this climate would kill you, my friend, and that exotic blossom of yours, your little dusky-haired maid of the sun. You must go South again, both of you. At once you must go—nay, leave it to me,' he went on. 'I will make arrangements for you; you shall accompany my sister, for she goes southward immediately; she goes next week to Pau.'

"And so we came, traveling here safely under the kind protection of Vododski's relations; saved, by his foresight, every trial; our way smoothed by his considerate care. We came here, and when we were settled, he wrote to us and said his work for us was now nearly over, for the scheme of his devoted efforts was complete. The old home of my father's family, he wrote, Zytomir, my inheritance, of which my father had dreamed and talked so often in the far South, was his once more. Restored from confiscation, given back to crown honorably the last fading years of my father's life, came, through Vododski's message, as the emperor's gift, sent at last to my father, as a tardy but well-prized recognition of that genius and patriotism which had been ever so true and heart-felt, though in the old days so premature.

"Then was my father happy and in great peace, because he was the honored master of Variadonska once again, and a poet whose verse was permitted, read, and admired; and because Russia was going to be free and happy, and filled through all its wide borders with peace and with light. All his old dreams were dawning softer over the horizon in full realization and truth, and all the patriotic writers of his younger days had not lived, or written, or suffered exile, or shed their hearts' blood in vain.

"Therefore my father died happily—for he died soon after that; and then I was alone till he sent for me, Serge Vododski. He was my guardian, he said, and I should be as his daughter—live and grow up to womanhood in his house. And, as I told you once before, from the Pyrenees I went to him, traveling back to Russia, which from that time became for years my home.

"I went to him, and in the lovely fertile districts of Vladimir I dwelt with him, and grew up with his daughter, in their solitary country life. She was as a sweet sister to me, and Serge Vododski, from the first hour of my going among them, was as a new-found father—tender, devoted, and soon to me unspeakably dear. My future became his close concern, my education became a new and continual interest to him; and I was happy, intensely happy, because every day I lived out, with gratitude and earnestly studied service, the deep devotion which for him I had vowed—the devotion I had vowed in my Sun-lands before my God, to my father, and to my own soul. I became even more than was his daughter to him in those days. I became his favorite and very constant companion. I was his 'Sun-maid,' his 'Tsiganie,' as he used to call me, echoing sweetly to my ears the pretty love-names of my father, which he had learned from him in those few Moscow days.

"His daughter, little Zaida Sergeovna Vododski, was a pretty girl, young and charming and bright-hearted; but politics, patriotism, the past or future of Russia, had no place in her volatile mind. Of course, he loved her devotedly; but when he came from his busy life in St. Petersburg to visit us in Vladimir, I was the companion he sought during his weeks of repose. For I understood him as I had understood my father; I found easy and truthful translations of his thoughts and schemes and projects for our beloved Russia in the memory of my father's impassionate writings and words.

"And I spoke often to him as I grew older, and we talked together in language that echoed my poet-father's teachings, and declared me quickly as his spiritual child. I spoke the glowing enthusiasm of my heart for these dreams of our national glory, and filled my guardian often with surprise and delight. He fed and strengthened that enthusiasm with the influence of his own clear and forcible mind.

"His name rose in honor during these years; his intellect was as strong and noble as his heart was loyal and deep; and he lived in an age, and made part of the council of a court where genius, free, creative, and original, was recognized and appreciated; and where love for emperor and country, the Russian people and the dynasty of the Romanoffs, could all live, fervent, brilliant, and—together.

"Our home was in Vladimir. Comtesse Zaida and I remained there many years, and grew up side by side. He left us there always when he went to St. Petersburg, but he came back to us whenever he could. And through those happy years we shared between us all the tender affection which he could spare from one whom I have not yet mentioned—the central object of his heart's strong devotion—his only son.

"I am now coming to my own story: to the part of it, at least, which most deeply concerns us, my dear friend — both you and me. Bear with me a few minutes, while I try to describe things as they were then, and endeavor to reconcile and understand characters and circumstances as they come crowding upon my memory now—as I recall that son and father, so contrasted in every point of nature and characteristic as they were. If the father was earnest, deep-hearted, devoted, utterly unselfish, his life vowed to high and glorious pursuits, the son was all that is most opposite to this. I can not quote such words as, in his case, for description could be used with truth. He was unworthy, ten times unworthy, of the father who loved him, and of the name he bore.

"And yet the depth of that father's devotion! If he loved us, he adored his son. If he hoped in our future, he believed in his. Against every thing he clung to him; in face of every thing he cherished a confidence in his repentance and his return.

"I disliked Metträi Vododski from the very beginning. I disliked him because, again and again, from his earliest school-days he pierced his father's heart. Often I saw the bitter anguish of the father, and wondered, girl as I was, at the constant and indestructible nature of his love. Metträi scorned his high aims, scoffed at his theories, defied his counsels, and disgraced him often by reckless and public contradiction of his views; and, as he grew older, and arrived at action and became a man, Metträi still saw no beauty or glory in the grand sublimity of his father's spirit, but rushed into new ways, surging madly to and fro in political opinions and creeds, starting new ideas with each returning moon, and rushing to follow every young headlong party in the State whose words kindled excitement, whose deeds produced uproar by way of social reform.

"I disliked him instinctively; and but for his father's sake I should never have addressed him by look or word. Surely, therefore, it was but a wild whim—I do think only a wild fancy, among many fancies that seized him with regard to me, and that was destined to rule so forcibly the whole history of my life. God knows when or why the idea came to him. I never knew it; never dreamed what was before me, never surmised that the sacrifice I had vowed in the land of my younger days was about to be demanded of me at last. I had no suspicion until his father came to me one day, with unusual concern written upon his grave face.

"'My Sun-maid,' he said, in the soft Russian translation of the words—'my Sun-maid, I would speak to you. Zophée, my Tsiganie, my Metträi loves you. Will you save my son for me?'

"And so it came to be. I offered my sacrifice, gave my life to him, as he required it, just in my heart's struggling answer to his words. My vow was accomplished; he asked my life of me, and I laid it down. Then and there I answered him, and promised to be the wife of his son.

"There were fierce political turmoils arising about this time in Russia on every side. They sprung, most of them, from secret and poisonous sources of evil in dark corners of the community, among infamous and evil-hearted men. Little jets of fire were being shot up in many places. Again and again the placid air was disturbed by them, and the sublime composure ruffled with which Russian reforms were progressing in these early Alexandrian days. In certain circles, moreover, where every secret was known, and dark things stood in a vivid light of scrutiny and observation, the name of Metträi Vododski had been more than once mentioned as having to do with matters such as these. Several of the fiery jets had been traced to sources very close to him, and dark suspicions were gathering silently round this unworthy bearer of his father's name.

"That noble name, so beloved and adored through the breadth of Russia, how bitter it was to feel that it was threatened with shame! 'You can save him,' Serge Vododski said to me, with glittering eyes, as Metträi's name trembled on his lips; 'you can save him,' repeated he. And could I refuse to save? Not if my heart's blood were to flow in all reality at his feet in the sacrifice a living and crimson stream. I could *not* refuse. I was ready!

"I was but a child, remember, then—a woman in the strength of my enthusiasm, and in the intensity of my purpose of sacrificial love—but a child in all knowledge of my own heart, or of human life, or of the world, save of my flowery South-lands, and of our quiet retreat in the plains of Vladimir.

"At K—— we were married. The day was one marked in Russian history—known, cursed, and execrated by every loyal Russian tongue. It was a dark and a famous day. We were married with all the pomp and ceremony of our Church, but still very quietly. Metträi was so restless and uncertain, that haste was what our father wished for in our union, not any proud gathering of friends.

"So thus *his* friends all remained unknown to me; and as I had scarcely ever left Vladimir, there were none to come on my account. We were married almost privately; only the Grand Duke George, my guardian's old friend (whose children had been the playmates at Vladimir of Zaida Vododski and myself), being present, with the Duchess Olga, his wife.

"I am telling you the story of that day so quietly that I can hardly realize now, after all this time, that I am writing of myself. But so it was. We returned, after the lengthy ceremony was over, to my guardian's house, for we were to proceed, in contradiction to the usual rule of conventionality in a Russian marriage, and were to remain at my guardian's until the morrow; then we were to leave together. The Government permission for a long absence of several years had been obtained for Metträi by his father, and I was to take him, as that dear, devoted father hoped, away for his salvation—away from evil friends and wild temptations, and dark deeds and wicked schemes—to wander in Southern lands with me, to travel, and to change his nature, and to forget.

"I confess that I never seemed to feel any power for all this, for I did not love him; but still our father wished it, and I agreed.

"When we came home to the Vododski Palace at K——, after our marriage, my husband of one hour left me, promising shortly to return. He had been strange and excitable in manner all day, and his father looked anxiously at him many

times as he talked loudly, and without prudence or restraint. The emperor was at K——, passing through on his way to Yalta, in the far South; and there were others in K—— also at that time —men who had appeared suddenly there, and whose presence was marked, watched, and followed by many lynx-like eyes.

"It was my marriage-day. I felt I should have been hopeful and light-hearted, even though I spent the long evening alone, but I was miserable. I could not hope; I felt strangely oppressed. The very air all day, and especially as evening fell, seemed laden with storm, and the sky was lowering in the far west, as if threatening strange darkness to come: so, at least, it seemed to me. As night fell, and the silver bells of St. Philip rang over the old town, that storm burst in wild excitement, fierce rage, and strong cries of resentful vengeance from every corner of the town. And the news spread like wild-fire: the emperor had been shot at, walking in the garden of the Place, and had narrowly escaped with his life—the good emperor, Alexander "the Beneficent," whose power, in his short reign, had already swept over every corner of his vast land; the beloved czar, whose voice had been the law of liberty to his people, whose actions had been stamped with benignity and grace; he whose accession in Russia had been as the birth of joy, for he had risen even as the Promised King of old, to open the prison doors, to loosen the bonds of the oppressed, to lighten the burdens of the serf and the slave, to give to Russia the key-note of freedom and the torch of knowledge and of spiritual light—he had been fired at by a secret, dastardly hand, and Russia had escaped but narrowly from a dreary mourning of sudden orphanage and despair.

"It ran like a wild cry through the city that night—the frenzy of the people's horror and alarm. And K—— sorrowed, and hid her face in humiliation, because to her belonged disgrace and degradation forever. Within her ancient walls an evil hand had been stretched forth to take the twice-sacred life of their pope and czar.

"The criminal had been taken, report said; and his accomplices—for there were many engaged in that dark plot—had been captured as well. Names were unknown, however. Action is quiet and secret in that country in times such as these, so names were quite concealed in all the general report, and I heard nothing that could account for my frenzy of undefined apprehension until quite late in the night, when my guardian came to me, and I knew all.

"Pale, agitated, almost speechless at first, I scarcely knew him, Serge Michaïlovitch Vododski: he was, indeed, little like himself. His proud crest humbled, his shoulders bent, his eye cast down, his glance uncertain, his voice quivering, all bereft of strength. He came and told me the truth. My husband would no more return to me; he had been captured within six yards of the would-be assassin of his emperor, and he lay imprisoned in the deep dungeons of Fort Nicholas already.

"My guardian was broken in heart and spirit, like a grand old tree crushed and shivered by a fearful storm. What could I do but love him and comfort him? What could I do but fling my arms around him, and pour my tears upon his gray, bending head? What could I do? Much, as he was soon to tell me. He had come to me direct from Zodroki, the chief of the police department of K——, who had come at once and secretly to him when the arrests were accomplished; and this was what my guardian had rushed to me to say: the arrest of my husband was still a secret, and, for the sake of the honored name of Serge Vododski, it would be kept a secret still. Would I help to keep it? He, the broken-hearted father of the criminal, was high in power, and could do much for him, and much also to shelter forever the honor of his house and name. Only would *I* keep his secret?

"He said it would be easy, for it required only silence and acquiescence from me. Easy! So it seemed to him for his son's sake, and so it seemed to me for his. It meant only perfect obedience and complete sacrifice from me. He explained further, and his plan grew clear, although spoken in hasty and broken accents, coming hardly from his trembling lips.

"I was little known, he said; beyond Vladimir not known at all. His son's marriage was a matter of public announcement, however; his son's projected departure for years of travel had been widely spoken of among their friends. Would I go and travel then—where I would—only away, out of sight, and quite away; and would I keep the secret in my wanderings? Would I let the great world that knew the name of Vododski, and honored it as a name without shadow or stain—let all that world of Metträi's father think still that Metträi was absent, merely journeying to and fro; that he was traveling, happy, honorable, and innocent, and in company with me, his wife? Would I go and hide myself, retaining my own father's name—one common enough in Poland, and unlikely to attract remark? Would I be silent and patient and submissive, under solitude and exile, and in the shadow of mystery, for years to come, while he strove to obtain pardon and ransom for my husband—his guilty son? The striving, to him, must be secret, and therefore long. The convict's name would be secret; in the mines he would be a number, and nothing besides. Serge Vododski was powerful, all might be achieved, all redeemed successfully; only the keeping of the secret lay first with me.

"You know that I have kept it. You, my dear friend, whom I have so deeply injured by my reticence, know how loyally I have obeyed my guardian, and refrained from all possible reference to the history of my life. I came here, where my father had been, and the noble old Vododski did all he could for me to make my exile a home.

"Then years went on; and though I was solitary and weary, because this silence hangs like chains upon my spirit, and though my heart was often sore for him who was indeed my husband, and for him, my beloved guardian, whose brave spirit had been so smitten to the dust, I had consolations, for I felt my father's gratitude was speaking in my silence, and my life and exile were paying now the rich price of his.

"I had many thoughts, too, in my solitude of the noble work which Serge Vododski had done for Russia—work which had been my father's work as well—and I felt often that I, in my veiled obscurity, was helping to intensify the power of Vododski's example and his influence by up-

holding the honor of his name. I felt my own little life gloriously lost, and absorbed into the great future of reform and national progress and universal good; and as I stood often here, in view of these mountains that surround my exile home, I have thought, as Lomonosof has written:

"'Just as a sand whelmed in th' infinite sea;
A ray the frozen iceberg sends to heaven,
A feather in the fierce flame's majesty,
A mote by midnight's maddened whirlwind driven,
Am I, midst this parade. An atom—less than naught—
Lost and overpowered by life's gigantic thought.'

"Thus it has seemed to me that I stood in my isolation and obscurity before the grandeur of the future and the coming time, losing myself and my one little life of insignificance willingly—casting it, as a silent sacrifice, away. Thus hope, and youth, and happiness, and joy, and love, all that was myself once, floated from me to be absorbed, as my guardian's life had been absorbed, into the vast immensity of national honor and universal human good.

"All this was before you came, dear friend. Some time before the news had reached me that Metträi Vododski had escaped from the Siberian mines, just as his father's efforts for him were approaching success, just as hope was dawning again in the father's heart that he might yet see his son restored to him, his name still sheltered and unstained. The news had reached the head of the Siberian police agency in St. Petersburg, that he had eluded their vigilance, and had disappeared from the mine. He got away, as was believed, to eastward, to the district of the rebel races—wild, restless tribes, who haunted the outer fringe of the convict settlement there. And he was followed, traced, and—it was long imagined—hunted down.

"He was reported dead, indeed, by the police authorities, for they thought he had been recognized in the midst of a party of rebels, and shot in a skirmish which took place. And we believed it—his father and Zaida and I. Only we lacked proofs, and I still remained here, while my guardian made such inquiries and investigations as were called for to insure the propriety of my return.

"I was awaiting the result of these inquiries when you first knew me. I was uncertain then what steps my guardian would prescribe to me for the safety of his precious secret in the future. If life-long silence as to my past was to be maintained here, and maintained forever, or carried back to Russia for seclusion there, I still knew nothing, and I awaited his fiat, anxious and ignorant of its result.

"You came, and anxiety died within me; for I ceased somehow to care whether I went or staid. Over the past, during these months, a veil seems to have fallen for me, softening all recollections, and depriving them of pain. Life seemed to have reached me at last here—reached even *me*—and it was such a rosy life, new and sweet and strange, it stole all my memories away.

"So it was, dear friend, that I allowed it, for myself and for you, that swift, fleeting morning dream. So it was that I drifted into this wilderness in which I awake. Surely I did but dream during these months; surely I was dreaming still on that dark day when the Duke George came to me—the day when I first saw that soft love-light in your kind, bright eyes, and read the doom of our mutual suffering there also. For on that day the duke, who was long governor of the Caucasian province, told me that *my husband lived.*

"In another skirmish with these rebel tribes, one had been captured—one who was recognized as Metträi Vododski, the escaped criminal of the Siberian mines.

"News travels slowly from these Eastern regions. Metträi had been captured, and his life saved by intercession through the Duke George's influence; but, before the tidings reached *me* of his discovery, he had escaped again; and he is there now. As far as we know aught of him, he is among these people, and alive.

"So I reach the point where we parted today, and I feel that I can write no more. And yet there is much still I long to say to you, though I have told my whole story now, and I have nothing more to tell. But I long to thank you—to thank you for your brightness and your youth, and for your winning kindliness to me, and for all the happy days you have given me that I have to remember in all time to come. But when I would write these words, my pen is arrested. Thankfulness and gladness for your sunshine and your youth are changed, as I think of yesterday, into sorrow, into sadness, into remorse and despair, and I can say no more save —forgive me, if, now you know all, you feel you *can.* And, dear friend, if you will not break my heart utterly, be happy. Let me think of you still bright and youthful, as I have seen you so many days in these months gone by. Let me think it is so, and that life stretches fair and beautiful before you still, even though this letter be to bid you—farewell."

CHAPTER XXV.

ONE WORD—FAREWELL.

As Gilbert finished this letter, the sound of Vazuza's hoofs striking on the pavement of the court below came up once again to his ear, and he rose, folding the pages slowly in his hand. He drained once again the cupful of coffee that his servant had placed afresh, hot and ready, for him on the table, and tried in vain to swallow a morsel of bread, and then he took up his hat, went out of his room, down-stairs, and out to the court-yard, with a curious expression, softened yet determined, gathering all the while upon his face. As he opened the great hall-door at the foot of the staircase, the fresh morning air came blowing in upon him, lifting the brown hair that fell heavily over his forehead, and cooling the fever of his worn face.

There Vazuza stood, returned from her morning canter on the Route de Morlaas, and there was Vasilie, grim and motionless as a rock, sitting patiently, awaiting his commands. Gilbert hesitated a moment as he came out, and glanced hurriedly around. It was seven o'clock now, and his grooms had opened the stable-door into the court-yard, and were busy with his horses, emitting into the morning air many curious and characteristic sounds. Gilbert paused, and then

a look of impatience swept over his face. He could not wait even until his horse was saddled; he turned to Vasilie, and laid his hand upon Vazuza's rein.

"Did you tell me," he said slowly, in French, "that Madame Variazinka was ready—that she came to you in the garden at five o'clock?"

"Yes," said Vasilie, in his solemn manner, "madame was ready; she gave me the letter herself. I left her among her roses when I rode away. Monsieur has written the answer?" he went on, inquiringly, glancing with surprise at Madame Zophée's letter, which Gilbert still held open in his hand.

"I will take the answer," replied Gilbert. "Vasilie, will you lend me your horse? See, take one of mine—which you like—Charles will saddle for you; but let me have Vazuza, for I must ride to the chalet at once."

Before Gilbert had finished his sentence, Vasilie had sprung to the ground. He pulled his hat off, and then stood with head bent and uncovered, holding Vazuza's rein with one hand and the stirrup with the other, and Gilbert sprung on to her back.

"Take which horse of mine you will, Vasilie," he repeated; "I will ride Vazuza home." And then he drew the reins through his fingers, and the pretty, black mare arched her proud, glossy neck, pawed the stones impatiently for a moment, and then Gilbert turned her head slowly toward the big gate-way and rode out of the yard.

It was a lovely morning; the mountains were glistening softly, tender lights creeping over their summits, and chasing the shadows down their snowy slopes. The côteaux lay smiling in the dewy sparkle of the morning sunshine, and all glad and beautiful with the coming spring. The air was clear and light and delicious, and it kissed his pale cheek, and floated softly across his brow as he cantered over the bridge to Jurançon, along the road to Gelos, and made his way up the familiar green slopes of the côteaux toward the chalet and St. Hilaire. The whole scenery was sweet and familiar, and it was beautiful as a dream in this morning light.

He rode along, however, as he had done the night before, unconscious of any thing external to his own thoughts and feelings, only lifting his eyes as he went, to note the way, and urging Vazuza up the slopes and over the shoulder of the low côteaux with feverish impatience and haste. The rapid pace seemed to relieve the fierce throbbing of his heart as he went along, and to soothe the strange condition of his mind. He would have found it impossible just then to say how that letter had affected him; he only knew that he felt in haste to get over the ground; he felt that he wished to reach her quickly and without any delay, and that he was wild with impatience, and half delirious with the fever of keen excitement that filled his heart and brain.

He had made no plans of what he would say to her when he did reach her, however. That he wished to see her again was all that he realized—that he wished to stand once more, as he had stood last night, by her side in the garden, where Vasilie had said that he had left her in the early morning two hours ago. So he urged Vazuza on, and by the back entrance he reached the stable-yard of the chalet. There Ivan, coming at the sound of his approach, found him, and relieved him of Vazuza, with some murmured remark of astonishment in Russian, as he turned away.

Then Gilbert walked across the stable-yard with a quiet, steady step, and pushed through the little gate that led into Madame Zophée's flower-garden, and wound along round the house toward the lawn on the front side, walking, now he had reached the chalet, in a quiet and composed manner, as if his coming to her at this strange morning hour were the most natural thing he could do—in fact, quite what she would expect of him.

For so it seemed to him—surely she would expect him, he thought, at once, when he had read that story in her letter. She would expect him, and he had come.

He had left her the night before, in the mad impulse of anger, bitterness, and dismay, and so he had come back, because all was altered; and love, tenderness, pity for her, eager concern, drove him instantly to seek her again.

He came out upon the lawn, and trod softly across the green turf, that felt smooth as velvet beneath his tread, and was covered with dew-drops, sparkling like diamonds in the sun; and he paused near the drawing-room window, and looked round, and drank in, quite unconsciously for a moment, the morning glory of the Pic de Bigorre rising above the rolling mist, the soft beauty of the green valley, and of the clustering woods upon the côteaux slopes; let his eyes wander over meadow and hill; caught for an instant the mystic effects of the curling blue smoke that rose softly into the morning sky from some cottage or chateau above every woody point in the view. And then his gaze came wandering back again into the rich, bright foreground of Madame Zophée's garden, with its burst of spring verdure and clusters of brilliant flowers. It lay beneath the flush of the morning, gemmed with those dewy diamonds, dropped upon every flowery petal and on every grassy blade.

It was all so sweet and sparkling, full of light and color, and softness and verdure and shade. His heart thrilled beneath the majesty of the mountain view towering above him, and the sweet familiar loveliness in her garden all around—that bright and picturesque beauty which seemed always to surround and infold her, and ever, to memory and association, seemed as a part of her. The garden was empty, however, and he sat down a moment on the wicker seat that stood on the grass outside her window—perhaps forgotten since the night before—and he waited there. He looked dreamily round as he waited, and glanced backward into her sitting-room, which was empty also. The morning sunshine only filled it, and touched the carving of the picture-frames, and the curious ornaments of silver and gold that lay about the room, with bits of bright reflection and light.

He could see her writing-table, where she had sat and written to him through the night before. It was all disordered, and her handkerchief lay there on the carpet beside her chair. Her hat, too, was still on the little table on which she had thrown it when she had taken it off as they talked together, as she came in yesterday evening from the picnic, and from her ride. The room

seemed full of her presence; and so was the garden, and the sweet, beautiful view over the valleys and côteaux, and the glad sunshine of the spring morning, and the glory of the majestic hills.

He waited on for her, much as he had waited the day before, and yet differently. He was not bright and unconscious, full of joyous excitement, of secure anticipations, of hopefulness, of all the sweet mystic experiences of a happy love. He was not all this as he had been then, but still less was he heart-crushed and spirit-broken as when he left the night before. He was quite changed again. He was still intensely excited, but the strong feelings burning in his heart now were different, though still very confused. A determination seemed to nerve him of something he scarcely knew what; a sort of vague and unexpressed resolve, to which he had given no form or name to himself, seemed rising within him. A resolve to which he felt sure, however, nothing but death would bring failure or change.

Then, too, a strong and passionate pity filled his heart, and love, tender and chivalrous, eager, deep, and unalterable, quivered and thrilled there again and again; and it grew in strength and depth and determination as he waited in her garden in that morning light.

He sat waiting; and as thoughts come swift and curious at such moments, the memory of his old life seemed to sweep across him—his life, practical, active, unpoetic as it had been before he had ever known his friend—and after these thoughts came, following quickly, the realization of the gradual change that had taken place. Beauty had found life and speech for him during those months he had spent on the Pyrenees; music had found an echo within him; poetry had disclosed a meaning, revealed a mystic life, taught him a strange, new, ineffable joy; and all, as he now knew, had meant—love.

Love by the way had met him; love had unsealed the depths of his nature, quickened his dull perceptions, colored the monotony of his thoughts, and lighted up the horizon of all his life to come.

He had just reached this realization in this vague dreaming back upon himself, when she came at last to him—stepping out suddenly upon the lawn from her open window, in her white morning-dress, her soft shawl of Pyrenean wool wrapped, as usual, close round her shoulders, her skirts sweeping the grass, her face pale with the tears and vigils of the night, and her eyes soft, dark, and glowing with deep expression as she looked out upon the morning view.

She passed Gilbert quite close, without observing him as she came out, for his seat was pushed back from the window, under the clustering creepers of the wall, and she stood still for a few moments, fancying herself in solitude, her face raised a little upward, her hands clasped, her whole attitude and aspect speaking the composure of courageous suffering, resignation, and calm resolve. She seemed to stand there, with her upturned glance, thus facing her future as it lay before her, dauntless, resolved, patiently awaiting her fate with all its bitter decrees.

She stood so still, and he watched her for one minute, and then he rose suddenly from his chair. He came forward; she scarcely heard his step upon the turf; she had no time to turn round, or to exclaim his name, before he was by her side, had infolded her close and eagerly in his arms, and had kissed her tenderly again and again.

"My own! my darling!" he murmured, in low, trembling tones; "my own, and only mine! You never loved him, Zophée! you never belonged to him! You belong only, only to me!"

They were standing alone there in the morning light, among the spring flowers and roses; and the breath of the mountain air, and the song of the birds, and the sweet, fresh scent of the opening spring, seemed all to echo in harmony with the burst of young love that in quick, passionate words came pouring then before she could arrest them from Gilbert's lips. He held her close for that moment, and she stood quite silent and still. She heard him, and for that little while she bent thus silently, yielding before the sweet, strong torrent of his love—yielding to the answering impulse of her own heart, drinking in the music of his voice, resting, for just a moment, in the strong, safe shelter of his arms.

But then she drew back from him; she put up her hand on his shoulder, and looked into his face, and her eyes suffused with hot tears, and her lips quivered with her violent effort for composure and self-control. She saw the changed aspect of his countenance and his expression, and it pierced her heart anew with sorrow for herself—for him.

"Gilbert! Gilbert! dear friend," she murmured, "do not make me hate myself yet more and more."

He did not seem to understand her; he stood looking down upon her, she still resting one hand, as if to steady and recall him to himself, upon his shoulder, and still looking calmly and beseechingly into his face. He caught her other hand in his.

"I have come," he went on, "at once—as soon as I had read your letter. It was so good of you to write—I am so glad. I was mad last night, I think, when I left you; but now I am almost happy. You never loved him; your love, my own, is all, all for me."

"Dear friend," she repeated, "have you forgiven me?"

"Forgive!" exclaimed he, breaking in upon her sentence. "What is there to forgive? You love me, Zophée, you love me. Only say it, only say it," he repeated again and again.

"Hush! hush!" she murmured, drawing farther back from him, but retaining his hand lightly between both of hers. "Dear friend, say you forgive me; say that you understand my history, that you approve my silence, that you forgive all the trouble that I have brought on you. Will you keep my secret, for it is only known to you? will you carry it away with you? and will you say once to me now, and kindly, just once, farewell?"

"Farewell!" he exclaimed; "I shall never say farewell to you. You will not drive me from you, Zophée; you love me, you will not drive me away. You do love me; you will let me stay with you; for you must be mine, my very own. You must forget all the horrid past; you must never, never again, for one moment even, remember that you might have belonged to him."

"Sir Gilbert, do not break my heart," she said, softly, again. "Do not crush me with shame

and despair. I have nothing to say to you but farewell, dear friend; nothing but 'God bless you,' and 'God speed you,' as you go; and as your life flows on, albeit far away from me, may God indeed bless it, and may all brightness, all happiness of this earth, be yours! But farewell, dear friend, farewell!"

"Zophée, do not madden me!" he cried. "I will never leave you!"

"Hush! hush!" she murmured, softly, as she bent her head before him again. "Hush!" she repeated, "you must leave me. Forgive me, and say farewell."

"Zophée! Zophée!" He stretched out his arms to infold her once more, a gust of strong feeling sweeping over his face; his voice broke and trembled; his accents were eager, vehement, and all uncontrolled. "Do not drive me mad!" he cried again. "Listen, Zophée. I know your secret, but none others know it save you and I; let it be a secret still, then, my own, my love. Stay here, and I will stay near to you; or come with me away, away where you will, and where none shall ever hear our secret, or know that any other, save myself, my darling, ever dared to call you his."

"Sir Gilbert! Sir Gilbert! Spare me! spare me!" she cried then to him, turning away, and wresting one hand from his hold to clasp it over her eyes. "Spare me! Do not plunge me deeper and deeper into humiliation and remorse! Say farewell, dear friend, and go."

"Never! never!" he exclaimed, with passionate energy again.

"Ah! then," she sighed, with an echo of intense anguish in her voice, "then God forgive me, if you can never do so. God forgive, and help me to live in strength, and fidelity, and honor, and truth. May he help me, if you will not; may God forgive me, if you never can."

"Zophée! Zophée! what do you mean?" he cried.

"I have been true," she went on, "and I will be true till I die. I promised—I will keep my promise. I will wait for him, I will follow him if they let me go to him, for he is my husband before God and man; and my promise to his father, to my guardian, to my father's deliverer and friend, was to give my life for him, and I will give it."

"But, Zophée, is my life. my shattered, blighted life, no concern to you?"

"Forgive me," she whispered. "Forgive me, Sir Gilbert, is all that I can say."

"I shall never be happy more," he continued, hastily; "I can not live without you. I can not imagine a life now from which your presence is gone. I shall never be happy. Must we do it, Zophée? Must we kill the joy out of both our lives?"

"The joy of our lives, dear friend, the happiness of the passing day, need that be all? Higher than happy hearts are noble lives; greater than joy in our own selves, surely, is joy that we buy with our heart's blood for others. See; can you not go—can you not leave me, taking with you, and remembering ever, those words of Lomonosof which I once wrote out for you: 'Self lost in sacrifice—love laid on the altar of devoted promise'—that is my life as it lies before me. And yours? Let me not blight it. Dear, bright young companion of those months gone by, do not smite and crush me with that last dark thought, which is *more* than I can bear. I can not give you my life, for it has been given away already. I can not give you my love—I must wrest it from you again. Another—he, my guardian's son, my husband—he may come; it must be his. He may claim it, and in truth and fidelity I must keep it for him forever. But take what I can dare to give you. Take all my heart's deep, earnest concern, my anxious thought and my tearful prayers, my constant memory—all, all are yours. Will you not take them and go?"

"I do not know where to go," he exclaimed, bitterly. "If you drive me from you, there seems nothing left for me in life to care for—nowhere I care to go—nothing I care any more to do."

"Nay, do not say so," she urged him, looking up at him with her sad, pleading eyes, and holding his hand still between her own with a soft, light clasp. "Nay, do not—do not say so. Rather let me think that for you too there may be a noble life—the life manly, earnest, and devoted awaiting you, and all such as you, in your own far-distant land."

"I think I never shall go back to my own land," he began again. "I hate to think of it, or any thing I used to care for in old days at home."

"Ah! spare me! spare me!" murmured Zophée again. "Gilbert, dear friend, do not force me to feel that I have destroyed your life. Ah! rather would I that you forget me—that you remembered me no more."

"How can I forget you?" he exclaimed. "I shall never forget you. I know quite well how it will be with me in the old home there. I shall never lose the constant thought of you, not for a day, not for a moment."

"Nay," she said again, "can not you lose the thought of me, dear friend, in thoughts good and devoted? Forget this dream of a summer morning in the work of the growing days. Ah! will you not let me think of you with all the sweet tenderness of our strong friendship; think of you as ennobled, not injured, in your bright young heart and spirit, by your acquaintance with me, by those hours, of which the memory will be so dear to me, which we have passed together, and in which we have communed with deep sympathy and enjoyment, while our friendship glided insidiously into love. It was my fault—my sin; forgive me, dear friend, once more again, and yet again I say it, forgive me! Say farewell, and—go."

She turned from him when she ceased speaking now, and a look of weariness passed over her face as she raised her hand with a despairing gesture to motion him once more away from her; and she stood silent, with her face averted and her head bending, as if the excitement and agitation of her words had quite worn out her strength at last, as if she had no power left to say more to him at all.

And Gilbert watched her thus for a little while, in silence also, with a deep sadness falling gradually over his face. It seemed to express itself even in his attitude, and in the movement of his hand, as he raised it to take his hat off, and to sweep back his hair from his flushed forehead.

He watched her in silence for a few minutes,

that seemed long to both of them, in their bitterness of spirit and despair; and then, somehow, instinct, that was always with him so true and courteous, came to him as his guide, and he approached her, and took her hand once more, and this time with a quiet and gentle touch.

"Farewell! farewell, then!" he said, but he could go no farther; his voice quivered, and the words refused to come. His hand closed again, with lingering tenderness, upon hers. "You drive me away then, my love," he continued; "and at your words, for I would not weary you, I will go. But I take your words, as you say, along with me, my dear one; for they are, as they have ever been for me, inspiring and noble words. And I will go, in obedience—go because you send me, but not, believe me, to forget."

"Ah! yes," she murmured; "forget, forget!"

But he interrupted her again.

"Nay," he said, "I will go, for I can not speak of friendship now for you, and my heart is breaking, and my brain is confused, and I scarcely know what I say. So I will leave you, indeed."

"Farewell," she murmured; "God bless you, my dear, noble friend. God bless you—farewell!"

"Farewell," he echoed, in low, trembling tone; and she thought then that he had left her, for his face was hidden, and he had dropped her hand for an instant, as if to turn and go. But he caught it once more, and in broken accents began again.

"My sweet Zophée, my Solava, as they taught me to call you—you who have been as music and beauty, as soul and spirit, to my hard life—good-bye; I say it till we meet again. For do not think, my own one, that this is to be indeed the end. Farewell till we meet again, I say—till we meet again, I say—till the confused thought that is in my mind, and the wish that is in my heart, is one day worked out and realized, and until I can come back and say, in truth to you, *my* love."

"Go," she murmured then again to him, "go, go;" for her heart seemed breaking under his eager, wistful words. It was so hard to part with him, so difficult, in her solitude and loneliness, to drive him away, and each moment it grew harder, and her strength was failing her; she felt it slipping fast away. "Go, go," she repeated.

But once again he continued. He had something more he wished still to say to her, and he took her hand gently in his own again. His voice was low and painful now, but all bitterness was quite gone from it; nothing echoed, in its murmuring tones, but the sadness of his farewell.

"Ah!" he said, "the dream is over—the bright, soft beauty of my first morning dream—and I will go to-day, even as you say to me, to clear, cold daylight, such as we know it in our Northern lands. And in that light I must think and realize, and find out what has come to me; what I am to suffer, and what I can do. But I will come to you again, my Solava, here in your mountains, on the sweet slopes of your côteaux of the Pyrenees; and when I come then, you will know, my Sun-maid, my sweet, soft flower of the South, that in our North-lands also we can love and be true. I will never forget you, or cease to love you, for one moment," he repeated, "until I come to you again."

"Farewell, farewell," she whispered, her eyes raining tears, as she tried to look up at him once more. A sweet, sad smile was quivering on her lips at the strong, boyish vehemence of his last words; for they were like himself somehow, and ringing with an echo of his old force of determination and resolve. They touched her, and his voice thrilled her anew, and his hand clasping hers seemed such comfort, such security, such strength.

For he loved her, and that strong, young energy of his love was sweet to her, and the brightness of his character was like the light of heaven shed across her soul. And yet she drove him from her; yet she drew her hand from his, and turned lingeringly away; and she let him go down through the garden, along the pathway, and across the valley, although with him seemed to vanish all sunlight and all summer from her heart.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT ERLE'S LYNN.

Lady Anna Erle had scarcely time to recover from the shock of her son's letter, written to her from the Rue de Lycée, Pau, on the evening before the picnic to St. P——, when she received a telegram from Boulogne, announcing his return.

Gilbert was coming home—straight home, it seemed to him—in a direct course from the chalet on the côteaux to the park-gates of Erle's Lynn. He never paused from the moment when he held Madame Zophée's hand for the last time, and bent over her in broken words of farewell on the lawn, outside her window, until he reached his home.

He stood in his room in the Rue de Lycée that morning only just long enough to give directions to his servant, and to write a few parting words to Morton and to his aunt. He felt he could not see any of them, he had so little to say. He must carry Madame Zophée's secret along with him, and his own suffering it was quite needless to tell. They could not comfort him; they could do little for him; they could not even understand the full reason of his despair. He could tell them nothing, and he shrunk from the thought of their sympathy, and their questions, and all their kindly concern.

So he made up his mind, and by twelve o'clock he was ready.

"Take this letter to Monsieur le Vicomte de St. Hilaire; and follow me to England with the horses to-morrow."

This was all he said in order or explanation to his servants, and then, by the midday mail to Paris, he was gone.

By the time the cold twilight of spring was falling on the park and throwing chill shadows across the large drawing-room at Erle's Lynn, the third morning after the picnic to St. P——, Lady Anna was expecting her son.

She sat, awaiting his arrival, in a frame of mind more easily conceived than depicted, for the thought of the news that he was probably bringing with him was almost more than she could bear.

Lady Anna Erle, as has been already said, was a strong-willed and narrow-minded woman. All her life-long she had been very limited in the range of her observation, and her opportunities for the study of varieties in national character had been few. She had, nevertheless, formed her opinions, and she had formed them with energy and force. Her views on most subjects were most decided and unalterable; and they were conservative, insular, and sectarian to a degree. Her esteem for her own opinions was, moreover, very high and unassailable — little open to enlightenment, conversion, or change; and on the subject of foreigners, and especially of foreigners of her own sex, she had formed views that were very unfavorable and very strong. For foreign religions, and, indeed, for any religious thought differing in any way from her own and the Rev. Mr. Raybroke's, she had no toleration whatever.

It may, therefore, be easily conceived that her son's letter had filled her with unspeakable horror.

"That outlandish woman" — the only term her mind suggested by which to call poor Madame Zophée—appeared in vivid and terrible colors to her imagination, and her heart grew angry, hard, and chill, at the thought of "this foreigner," "this woman of Babylon," "this worshiper of unknown gods," being brought one day to Erle's Lynn, and placed there upon the throne that had so long been hers!

This centre fact in Gilbert's letter had been the one thing on which her mind had seized. He was bringing her home a daughter, his wife, and one chosen by himself in full freedom of selection, and not chosen under guidance from her. And this woman of strange religion, and barbarous language, and outlandish name was to take her place and reign where she had reigned—over Gilbert's heart and life, and over all the wide domain and territories of Erle's Lynn.

This was the one point which had touched her in his long, strange letter. All the poetic ardor, and the strong filial affection, and the sweet ring of youth and love that had colored every sentence and word, had quite escaped her. Such effusions from Gilbert were unfamiliar; such outpourings of feeling and hope and desire were all unreadable to her cold, clear, practical perceptions; and her one overwhelming terror, as she perused it all, was that, before she could get him home or reach him, the deed would be done.

She had sent for her private pastoral adviser, and together they had read Gilbert's outpouring, and "youthful and impetuous indeed" had been the judgment upon his lines. The boy had got into bad hands, they thought, and fallen a victim to some wicked design. What was to be done for him?

They had no time to consider before his telegram followed his epistle: and he was expected among them at once.

Lady Anna awaited him in an anxious and very agitated frame. He was coming again; and after six months she was to see him, to hear his ringing laugh, to meet his merry glance once more; and the consciousness of this filled her, in spite of all her fears and her foreboding, with delight. But he was coming, she remembered at the same time, with such news as would call for her instant disapproval and reprimand.

And she waited, ready to administer these, full of righteous indignation and wrath, just as she had awaited many a time before now, after boyish escapades of his, of which his tutor had complained to her, and for which she felt duty required her, on his return from the partridge-shooting or from the river, to take him sternly to task.

And indeed, much in the same spirit as she used to wait for the boy in those old days, she waited for the recreant now, full of disapproval, and strong in the conviction of the power of her own judgment and advice.

As the clock struck eight, and just as the old butler stepped into the drawing-room to inquire if her ladyship would wait dinner for Sir Gilbert any longer, the dog-cart from the station came bowling up to the door, and she rose, pushed her work aside, and paused.

There was a banging of doors, a rushing of footsteps, as the servants hurried through the hall; and still she paused. Should she go out to him? She had never done so in the old time when displeased with him. It had been her habit on such occasions to wait until he came to her, and so he used to come, with reddening cheek and wistful, conscious eyes, and shy, boyish ways, to seek her forgiveness. Why should she act differently, and go out to him now? She paused; and her maternal ears listened eagerly, unconsciously, for what she expected to hear—the quick tread of his hurrying footsteps, the ring of his cheery voice through the great arched hall, his merry answers to the greetings of his old servants. But of all this she heard nothing. The doors swung and banged, there were the sounds of the footmen hurrying to and fro, and then, just as she was springing forward to obey the impulse at length that urged her to go to meet him at his own house-door, the sound of his footsteps reached her, not hastening eagerly as in the old impetuous days, but coming with heavy, slow, measured tread up the hall toward her drawing-room door.

Then it opened, and he entered, and for one instant all anger and disapproval, and all possible shadow between them, were forgotten, and she sprung eagerly to his arms.

"My son, Gilbert—my son!"

She put up her hands to infold him with strong, irrepressible tenderness, and Gilbert put his arm round her and drew her close to him, and bent forward and kissed her white forehead several times before he spoke a word.

Then she pushed him back from her, and took his hand, and looked into his face with quick impulse of astonishment as he said, "Yes, mother, here I am — come home again;" but so gently, so gravely he spoke to her, that she paused before she answered, and looked up at him again.

There was no rush of boyish fervor to be quelled and driven back by her disapproval; there was no outbreak of youthful merriment to be subdued by studied coldness, until her lecture had been given as in old times and her forgiveness obtained. There was only quiet tenderness in his manner to her, and in his eyes as they met hers there was no laughing light to be extinguished at all. They were stern as her own eyes, they were dim and weary, and very sad and grave.

"Gilbert," she murmured again at length, as he bent once more to kiss her, and drew her

gently with his arm round her toward the seat by the fire.

"I have come home, you see, mother," he went on, with a sudden effort, "after all, you see—after all your fears, and after all the perils of travel, and all the risks of adventure. Here I am, come back to you; and I find you well, mother?" he added. "I hope so; you look well."

"I am quite well," she said. "Only sad, Gilbert, and anxious."

"Sad! To have me back again?" he said, with a little laugh. Then he put her into her chair, and stood in front of her, and looked round the room with all its familiar furnishings and well-known aspect, and tried to smile down upon her, and to shake the depression and embarrassment from his manner.

"I think I am very glad to be home again," he said, after a minute or two, during which she had inspected him, and tried to understand the change, and sought in her own mind for a sentence with which to begin her inquiries and her reprimandatory remarks.

He gave her no time to begin. Before she had done wondering vaguely at him, he began again.

"I have come straight through, mother, from Pau direct; left the day before yesterday in the forenoon, and slept in town last night; and so here I am. I think I am glad to be home again. How odd the old place looks! how familiar! and yet how long ago it seems since I went away!"

"It seems long to me, Gilbert, I assure you."

"Does it? I hope you have not been dull? No, no; I am sure not—with Mr. Raybroke to keep you company. You did not expect me back for six months, mother, when I went away, did you? Only you thought I should have seen so many places, and have traveled so far, and, after all, Pau has been the limits of my journeyings. And yet—I think I have traveled a long way too," he added, with a quick, restless sigh, "along the road of life, at all events."

"I hope, my son, that your journeyings have been of benefit to you," she began, gravely.

"Benefit—I don't know—I always thought it a bore, you know," he said, a little wearily, "new people and new scenes. I think I am delighted to be in the old home again, mother, and I dare say I shall soon settle down."

Settle down. That was an alarming expression, Lady Anna felt. Surely, she thought to herself, they were getting near the point. Still he said nothing to her; he looked restlessly about him and out of the window, and then he turned and stretched his hands before the dull-burning fire.

"I don't like coal so well as wood," he said, suddenly, after a moment's pause, in which his mind had evidently traveled a long way, made a quick comparison, and come back again.

"My dear boy," she began, in answer, "it is quite natural, quite what I expected, what I dreaded—in fact, what I may say I have always feared—that every thing that you have left behind you in those foreign parts (where I never advised that you should go) may have dangerous attractions for you, that may draw you from the path of duty and habit which lies at home."

A solemn answer to a lightly made remark! But he took it quite naturally, being accustomed to his mother and her sayings.

"Not every thing," he said, with a short laugh; and then he turned to move away.

A loud bell rang in the distance somewhere, breaking on his ear with a familiar clang. It was the bell in the stable-tower, ringing the approach of his mother's punctilious dinner-hour.

He turned at the sound, and moved languidly across the room.

Then she rose and followed him. Eagerness, impatience, wonder over the curious change that had come to him, over the new reserve in voice and manner, over the gravity of his expression and tone, were overcoming all recollection of her anger at last. Words of reprimand were passing out of her mind, and words of anxious inquiry were welling up in their place.

He turned to leave the room. They had said now as much to each other—at least, she to him—as she had ever said on former occasions, when he had come back to her after short separations from time to time; and he would have left her now, and gone off to find his own way up to his usual haunts—to his room, or his stable, or his kennel—where he had wandered about, and lived among his dogs and his horses, and the interests of his sports and amusements, through many a by-gone day. But his mother stopped him.

"Gilbert, Gilbert," she said, laying her hand on his arm, with a quick, impetuous movement quite unusual to her, "Gilbert, speak to me—tell me—what you have to tell."

He turned and looked at her for a moment with surprise, with a sudden light of suffering at her words flashing from his eyes.

"To tell you?" he said, in a low, hard tone; "to tell? Why, I have nothing to tell."

"Nothing? Gilbert, what do you mean? What have you done? What has happened? You wrote to me—"

"I wrote to you!" he exclaimed, starting back a step, and looking at her for a moment, with a sudden gleam of recollection breaking over his face. "I wrote to you, mother?"

"You wrote to me that you loved—that you meant to marry—a strange, outlandish woman, whose name I had never heard, whose religion was a horror to me, whose tongue I could not speak, whose—"

Lady Anna had found voice at last, and her feelings came pouring forth without choice of epithet or restraint. But Gilbert arrested her.

"Stop, stop, mother!" he said, with a voice full of pain, and with a sudden sternness of manner that hushed her in spite of herself. "Stop," he continued, in a low, wondering tone. "I had quite forgotten that letter—it seems so long ago. Yes, mother, of course—the night before—the night before we went to St. P——, you know—of course—I wrote to you."

"You wrote to me," she burst out again, "and you broke my heart with the cruel tidings that, unknown to me, unsanctioned by me, you had—"

"Hush, mother, hush," he said, very gently again, "all this is unnecessary. Nothing is as you fear," he added, with a little, bitter, sarcastic laugh, "nothing—it is over—you need not agitate or vex yourself for one instant now."

"Over!" she exclaimed; and then she started back, and looked up into his face as he stood be-

fore her, and she noted the pale shade falling over his cheek, the dark circles round his eyes, the lines, deep and strong, drawn across his forehead, and the curious quiver of pain upon his lips; and she remembered suddenly then the happy words in his long letter, the sunshine of love that had gleamed upon every page, the joy, and the youth, and the brightness of the whole, that had provoked her so sorely, prepared her for bitter trial, and filled her with anger and pain.

She had prepared herself indeed for a meeting very different from this with her boy. What did it all mean? Was the trial spared her? And was the suffering his?

"But, Gilbert," she said, "you wrote to me about some woman—about something—"

"Mother," he said, quietly, "I am at home but ten minutes—I am very tired, I think perhaps too weary to know what I really think or feel or want to say. Will you spare me, and say nothing to me—nothing about what I wrote to you—nothing at all? Will you, mother—because I ask you—will you be patient with me for just a little while?"

And then he turned to her, with a smile so wistful and so sad upon his lips, and with eyes so weary and laden with pain, that Lady Anna's heart woke up suddenly within her beneath his glance, and she clasped her hands together, and looked with a quick gleam of sorrow, of sympathy, of compassion, breaking irresistibly forth from her stern, gray eyes.

He was her son—her boy—her only one, her bright, beautiful darling, and as such he lived in her stern, deep heart, though she never called him, to her inner self, by such fond, foolish names. His very brightness had been a sin to her in the old days, and her conduct toward him had been ruled by duty, and stern duty alone.

But now that all the brightness was gone, she sought for it with a new, strange feeling of longing to see that sweet joy-gleam of youth in his eyes once more; and in her heart, breaking and yielding for him, the guide of duty seemed of no more use.

Love was calling out in sympathy for him, eager mother-love welling up at last, in bitter mourning for his mourning, and in strong sorrow for his pain; and as he looked at her, and the expression of her feeling for him broke forth upon her lips and in her deep-set eyes, it met him with an effect of comfort, soothing curiously but strongly, because—she was his mother, and he was in pain. And he read the look, and answered it, and smiled upon her with wistful thankfulness. He put his arm round her, and kissed her softly and gravely once more, and murmured, "Mother, mother, it is good to be at home again. Do not speak yet of her, for I can not; but have patience with me, and I *will* tell you all of the story that is mine."

And no later than that evening, as they sat together in the large, grim old room that had always recurred to Gilbert's mind in such strong contrast to the drawing-room at St. Hilaire, he told her all that, as he said, was his to tell. And Lady Anna, really sorry for her boy, did her best to listen with patience, while he dwelt with loving, lingering words on the likeness of Madame Zophée which he drew for her, in colors glowing with his ardent love.

Lady Anna strove with admirable persistency to veil her satisfaction when the climax came, and she heard that, for reasons unrevealed to her, that strange, outlandish heroine of her son's dreams would probably never come to reign as mistress in Erle's Lynn, or rule over that life which hitherto had been spent in quite exclusive devotion her own.

She veiled her feelings as she best could, but it was almost too much for her; and she shook her head, in spite of herself, when he told her of Madame Zophée's virtues and spiritual charms, of her earnest religious devotion, of her sweet piety, of her high standard, of her singleness of heart.

"I can never regret I have known her," he said, "whatever happens—even if I never see her again. To love her is to love every thing, mother, that is high and beautiful and true; to love her is to have loftier views of our own life, of selfishness, of duty, of right and wrong."

So he talked for many hours, and Lady Anna wondered over him, saying little, sorrowing often, but rejoicing much.

"But I mean to get over it, mother, you know," he said at length, as he rose at a late hour to go to his room. "I promised her to get over it—not to let it crush or destroy the energy of my life. She would despise me if I did that, and I should despise myself. After a little time, you will see, I shall get over it. Only, mother, never try to say any thing against her again."

CHAPTER XXVII.

LOVE THE CONQUEROR.

"I WILL get over it," said Gilbert, as he left his mother that night. "I *will* get over it; or, at all events, I'll try."

And so he did try; for it was not in him to yield to a weak, wailing indulgence of his grief. His old, active habits came back naturally to him, and almost immediately he returned to them all again.

He set vigorously to work on the very morrow, and tried to be as interested as he was active about his place; he tried his very best.

He shot, he fished, he rode, he went hither and thither across the length and breadth of his lands. He threw himself into it all as ardently (so he told himself) as if he had never been away. He worked as he had never worked before at the business and interests of his property, and he plunged into every kind of enterprise and occupation within his reach.

He had never fished so much, never ridden so far; he had never been so often seen in the county town, at business meetings, across the farmers' fields, along the roads, and on the market square. He seemed constantly occupied, and full of interests, as if returning indeed with renewed energies to familiar ways. Yet, as he went to and fro among the people, all remarked of him that he was changed. High and low, from the keeper who carried his fishing-basket, and the groom who led round his horse, to the farmer whose hand he shook in his hearty way at the open gate when he rode home of an evening, or the old county squires who met him in the town, all observed the same thing: "Sir Gilbert Erle was changed;" "he was not the

same man;" they said of him: "what had come to him in these foreign parts?"

What *had* come to him? Often enough he asked the question of himself, striving to understand and overcome it. For none of them all knew, as he himself knew, how much he was really changed; for the great change was within him. And as time went on, more and more fully he realized it.

He was quite unconscious that his cheek had paled and lost its flush of ready youth; that his eyes had become grave; that a look of age had swept across his countenance, and quite driven that cheerful gleam of boyish *insouciance* away; but this he knew—that, strive as he would, it was quite gone from *within* him; that all enjoyment, all good, all enthusiasm had been swept out of the elements of his life. He could *not* get over it. Month after month it became worse for him, till it seemed in vain to strive. It never left him, not for one moment, during all that time—the presence within his heart of her quiet, dreamy face, the echo of her voice, the reflection of her smile. It came back to him unceasingly, and the longing and the hunger with which it filled him at times quite overcame him with its weary pain.

He was at home, and all seemed so familiar around him; every thing was surely here calculated, as he told himself, to restore him to his old indifference to any other world, to his quondam condition of complacency and satisfaction with himself. But all completely failed.

Love had taken hold of him, and absorbed entire, strong possession of his heart. That love of his—that seemed often to himself, as he suffered under it, wonderful as it was new—love for "a stranger," as his mother said, a little foreigner of sweet, sad face and dusky hair, who had no part in any of his old life here, and had never had any share in the interests or occupations of his home. How had she stolen the heart out of this old life for him? How had she bewitched away all that once had been himself? For she had done it—not one bit of heart had he brought back with him for any thing that he found at home.

His nature had always declared itself single, with a curious oneness of devotion, and concentrated eagerness of enthusiasm for any thing, light or serious, with which he had to do; and single it still proved in this new devotion—single, undivided, and changeless indeed. Every thought was colored by his memories; every incident in the daily routine of his life contained something to carry heart and association back to their unfailing centre on the Pyrenees. It never for one moment forsook him.

If he went out of a morning, as the bright summer came hastening on, and saw the sun fall in broad gleams of rosy light across the sward in his mother's garden, and upon her stiff parterres of flowers, the sunshine mocked him, and the scent of the flowers came up to him laden with bewildering pain; for he was once again instantly in memory with his friend in the garden on the côteaux slopes; and sunshine, and the scent of flowers, and the joy of summer, without her, had no charm, nor any sweetness for him.

When he went off alone with his basket and fishing-rod, which in these days was what he liked best to do, he would tread lightly as he went, feeling for a few minutes that the freshness of the woods, and the interest of his sport, and the beauty of his own glistening river, which he had loved his whole life-long, could bring him pleasure once more, and he would seem to enjoy himself for a moment at least. But then it would escape him! He would cast his line, and, as it floated away over the gleaming surface of the stream, he would forget it all—the sport, the fish he expected, the hook he was bound to watch—for *her* face would rise for him through the flickering shades and over the dancing water; and his thoughts would wander away, and his heart seem to break anew with his bitter longing, while his line sunk idly to the river's bed, and was entangled in the gray lichen-covered stones ere he even remembered to draw it in or to recast it.

And so it was with him, day after day.

After that first evening he never spoke to his mother of Zophée—not again, at least, till many months had gone by. He was silent while the struggle was still upon him, while he was proving in his own heart whether will and energy could extinguish love. He went in and out before her during this time, hiding his misery as he best could, making no complaint, letting her think him busy, interested, and falling again into the ways of home. And he only appeared altered to her in that he was more serious, much aged, no longer frivolous and ever laughing as in the former days; but grave, concerned, and always occupied, commanding from her, as from every one, silence, compliance, and respect.

She could hardly define the change that had come between them, but she felt it, and accepted it without a word. She saw him go out daily, riding, fishing, or driving, full of business, going here and there, and she, congratulating herself as remembering "the Babylonish woman," was silent, with strange discretion, from the very fullness of her satisfaction, thinking all was well. For she saw him often spring vigorously, as of old, into his saddle and ride away; and she watched often the firm, swinging step with which he went off across the lawn, and she thought, certainly, as months wore on, that his love was forgotten, and his heart full of his old pursuits and amusements, because he was silent, and this much was all she saw.

She never knew how the rein drooped and the horse went stumbling idly along over many a mile of the road, while Gilbert quite forgot him, nor heeded where he went. Nor did it occur to Lady Anna to wonder, as others did, when again and again the fishing-basket came empty home. He hid all his sufferings from her; he worked hard, and he struggled hard; he did his best, but not for one single day did he ever really succeed. He could not—could not forget her! his friend, his little Russian love, far away from his English home, solitary on her mountains. He could not forget her, not for one day or hour.

They wrote to him, of course, all this time from St. Hilaire, letters full of perplexity and dismay at his disappearance and eagerness for his return. And these letters, coming occasionally throughout the summer, nearly drove him mad. And Madame Zophée herself wrote once—in the deep anxiety of her heart for his well-being and comfort; she wrote gentle, earnest

words, breathing tenderness and concern for him irrepressibly in every line, and begging once again his forgiveness; beseeching him to forget her, and take comfort, to have courage and strength and confidence in his life.

And he thought her letter did him good; and so it did for a little while. It was such wonderful happiness to see her handwriting, to read again and again the sweet, exhorting words. There was such a true echo of herself in them. But he was worse, far worse than ever, in consequence, after a time, for the longing broke over him so bitterly, and with such an energy of acute pain—the longing to see her again, to be with her, to hear her voice, to hold her hand once more. It all nearly made a child of him for one whole, miserable day, and made him utterly ashamed of his own weakness and of himself. Then it was that the realization came to him that all his efforts had failed.

Then he knew in his own heart that they were of no use; that life without her held nothing for him, and that love, and disappointment, and pain, and parting, and weariness had quite broken him down. He knew then that fate had met him out there on the Pyrenees, and that it was vain to fight against its decrees; that the fate had come his way which meets thus sometimes strong-hearted, practical men of his chilly clime—men whose youth had passed like a long holiday of active and pleasant exercise, of eager though always external pursuits; a life of sport and energetic efforts of simple physical force; a youth in which there had been nothing romantic, little spiritual, and, as he now knew, no sentiment at all. And the fate which had met him had bewitched all this existence away; bewitched him with sunshine and radiance and beauty, and music and poetry, and sweetness and love. And love had got him fast, and quite enchained him, and he caressed with sweet and bitter memories his chain.

He struggled, he made every sort of effort; but in his innermost heart he knew he had failed.

It was drawing on toward early autumn at last, and the days were at hand when hunting would be the question again, and the stud for the winter had to be considered and taken in.

Of this his old groom had reminded Gilbert suddenly one August morning, wondering much that his master had failed in realizing the fact for himself; and this intelligence had roused Gilbert and affected him curiously, and had struck within him quite a new vein of thought.

Hunting—winter coming again—while he had been dreaming away the months in his misery. Summer had come and gone, and he had lived life and done his work hardly and honestly, and now he must begin to hunt again.

"Good God!" he thought, "what a round it was, and how he hated it all!" How utterly and hopelessly insupportable it had become to him, this whole monotonous routine of his life! Its changes and its seasons had no longer any interest for him. In this groove of weary monotony life could *not* be borne.

There was something in the native impetuosity of his nature that waked up suddenly under this realization, and rebelled within him against a passive submission to his fate. A life which implied such suffering for him, could *not*, he felt within his restless heart, be endured without resistance, without some active, untiring effort—to be made somehow, anyhow, or anywhere—for his own deliverance and behalf. He felt he could not sit down to suffer, dumb and unresisting, alone with a dreary and monotonous existence in his old home. To kill the suffering had been his first effort, and to kill it he had tried manfully; but it would not die. Now something else must be thought of. He was young and strong, eager and adventurous; surely something could be done for his own deliverance with such qualities as these. He would stand still and suffer no longer. He could not conquer his love; he would stay quiet beneath its bitterness no more.

This realization came upon him soon after receiving Madame Zophée's letter. It came with a whole flood of new thoughts and ideas, and with the strong conviction that it was no good his trying to go on with the routine of his old life. It was all over for him; he did not care for hunting in the least, he thought; he was not sure that he had ever cared for it, and if he had, he certainly could not tell why.

So one morning he said to his old groom, who was much aghast at the information, that he would have no new hunters that year; that the sales at the country towns might go on quietly without him, for all he cared; and that his regular stud of horses might stay happily in their pastures, in the mean time, for him.

And that same evening, while Lady Anna sat in her usual corner putting the finishing touches to one of her huge gray woolen shawls, he came to her and sat down on a low chair, just in front of the dull fire, and before she could ask him questions or start any subject of interest, mutual or domestic, he told her, in the quiet tones that had become habitual to him, that once more he was going away.

She started, and would have answered him with eager expostulation, but he stopped her, and went on again.

"I have done my best," he said. "I have done my best, mother, but I can not get over it; I can not live without her in any sort of happiness, and I can not resign myself to a fate of misery without one struggle more—not, mother, at least, until I am quite certain that it *is* my fate, and that it is so absolutely and inevitably for me decreed. And so I am going away, and you must not stop me. You must not wonder even, and you must not ask me where I go, for I can not tell, except that I am going to travel, and that I think I shall travel far. I know nothing; I have not clearly formed my plans yet, nor have I one distinct idea. I only know what I want to do, and that I mean to do it. I will write to you, however," he went on, "at all events, as long as I can; and take care of yourself, mother, and take care of home, and of every thing for me, till I come back again. I am resolved to come to the very end of it all, and I will. I shall have no more uncertainty, no more clouds and confusion. I will come back, when I return to you, either a happy or a resigned and determined man. I can not let all this beat me, and as it is now, it will do so. It is too much for me; it is crushing me down. It is the uncertainty and the darkness of it all. I can not bear it, I say. I must clear it up; so you must have patience with me, mother, and just let me go."

And with little more explanation, and with few more words, he did go, taking with him her tears and her blessing, and little else besides; for he left his servant, and his heavy baggage, and all incumbrances behind him, and he went off alone.

He took, however, one thing that much surprised his mother—one thing which he had asked from her. It was a letter to that old relation of her family for whom the Duke George inquired at Pau, the relative who had been in former times an exalted member of the English embassy to Russia, long resident in St. Petersburg, and familiar with many persons high in Russian office, and first among Russian powers.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LADY ANNA ON THE CÔTEAUX.

We are at Pau again, and it is early spring. The winter has been cold and long; very cold and very long indeed in England, where it has not yet thought of coming to an end, and very different even here from that sunny year which Gilbert Erle had spent in view of the Pic du Midi and on the côteaux of the Pyrenees.

At Pau, however, it is yielding. The clouds are rising from the distant horizon, the mountains are losing that gloomy aspect they sometimes wear throughout such chilly winters, an aspect very ominous of recurring storm. The côteaux are beginning to smile again; the *pics* are piercing once more a sapphire sky; and today a burst of unwonted heat has broken suddenly upon the country, heralding with soft promise and assurance the quick approach of spring. The heavens are cloudless, the sunlight falls bright and clear, the heat is intense and astonishing, coming so quickly after the cold; and the winter is almost forgotten already to-day, by the *flâneurs* on the Place and on the Boulevard, and by the peasants in the gardens and budding vineyards across the hills; for spring smiles to them so brightly from the sweet landscape of the côteaux, and the silvery summits of the mountains glisten quite marvelously in the glad radiance of the sun.

It is about three in the afternoon. Numbers of people, taking their drives along the road through Jurançon, are turning their carriages already, meaning to be at home again before the sun bends toward the mountain horizon and the heat of the day is gone. But, far along the route, winding its way slowly up the steep hill beyond Gelos, one carriage still keeps on its steady progress, going farther and farther away from Pau. The road is dusty; the strong heat of the midday has already dried up the pools of rain; and as the carriage has not yet reached the shadows of the côteaux, the sunshine beats down upon it very hot and fierce. The horses seem tired, and the coachman sleepy; for he slouches upon his box, and nods his head, and only raises his eyes drowsily from time to time, to glance stupidly around him, as if he did not quite know where he was going, and as if he were sulky, moreover, and did not much care. His companion on the driving-seat did not seem very capable of guiding him, to judge by *his* expression of countenance, which was emphatically characteristic of bewilderment and much general dissatisfaction as well.

He was a stout, pompous, highly respectable, and, indeed, rather ecclesiastical-looking personage, with a fine rubicund countenance that shone brilliantly in the sun. He was very scrupulously attired, wearing an unexceptionable hat, a large great-coat with high velvet collar, beneath which a vast white cravat was folded carefully away. He sat, silent and stolid, by the coachman's side, looking straight before him, with one hand resting on each knee; his whole aspect evinced the contradictory sentiments that were tormenting his soul; expostulations of judgment combating the submission of conscience, and the repugnance in his person to the proceedings generally, submitting hardly to the necessities of his position and of the case.

He was a first-class butler *en voyage*, and a butler who had never been *en voyage* before. Evidently he did not like it.

Inside the carriage—her figure drawn to its full height and stiffest angle, her head protected from the sun-glare by a large umbrella, her neck strained to catch as much of the view of the long road before them as the broad shoulders of the chief functionary of her household would allow her to see—sat Lady Anna Erle, on the high-road beyond Gelos winding up the lower slope of the western côteaux of the Pyrenees.

It was about the last spot in Europe on which one might expect to find her, and yet here she was. She was escorted by her fat butler, and accompanied by her maid, a very acid-looking person, who sat with her back to the horses inside the carriage, and whose glances, turned disconsolately from side to side, proclaimed her to be neither cheered by the sunshine nor warmed into enthusiasm by the beauty of the view. She seemed not less discouraged than the functionary on the driving-box, and she looked even more grim and dignified under the circumstances than Lady Anna herself.

This was an erratic move, indeed, on the part of Lady Anna Erle; and there were wiser people than Mr. Bullman and Mistress Redbridge, at Erle's Lynn, to whom it appeared very mysterious indeed. For she had consulted no one, and had left every body to wonder as he wished. The journey had been undertaken suddenly, and with little time for preparation or any precursory announcement of her plans. She had left Erle's Lynn a week before, while the east wind was still sweeping round the old house, and the snow still lay in the approach. She had been there through a long winter of snow and keen winds, and black, drifting storm, since Gilbert had left her in August; and it was difficult indeed to say when the thought had first sprung up within her on which she was acting now. Probably it had come gradually — growing up from a wonder into a longing, that increased to a fever of impatience, and an agony of apprehension and dismay. Then the sudden inspiration of an idea, and resolution following it with an activity and eager spirit of enterprise, that sprung from the fervor of her love and her anxiety, and from her intense strong longing and despair. For her heart was breaking for him — her son, her one boy, her lost one; to hear of him, to find him, to hold him in her eager embrace once more, that was the bitter and weary longing which had

driven her from her fireside at Erle's Lynn, for, for many months, Gilbert had been lost to her indeed.

The winter had been long and dreary enough, in the grim old drawing-room at Erle's Lynn, after he left her; but for some weeks she was fairly satisfied, for she heard from him from time to time. His letters came often, and though they were short and uncommunicative, they were full of assurance of his well-being, full of concern for her, and full of promise of his return. He wrote little about his own feelings, however, and nothing about his projects or plans.

She heard from him at first from London, where he seemed to linger awhile, his mind full of something, and with a purpose evidently in view. From there he wrote that he had tried to hunt up her old relative, the quondam English embassador to Russia, but that, at that autumn season, he was not in town. Some days Gilbert seemed to spend over this search; then a letter came from him from Dover. He had been down into Dorsetshire, he wrote, had found the old embassador, had presented his introduction, and had been kindly received. "But the man is an old fool," Gilbert had tersely added; "he thinks every thing impossible, because at his time of life it might perhaps be impossible to him, and he discourages me very much. But he has helped me all he can, nevertheless, and given me letters to just the very people I want to know; and so now I can go ahead, and to-morrow I shall once more cross the Channel."

This much he said, and a few days afterward his mother heard from him from Paris. His letter from there made her feel very uncomfortable, filling her still further with wonder and perplexity over his schemes.

"He could not find quite the right people for his purpose in Paris, after all," he said; "but he had come upon several who had been of use to him, and they were all acting very kindly, and were sending him prosperously on. In a day or two he would start again;" and, accordingly, a week later, Lady Anna heard of him from Berlin.

He said very little in any explanation of his journey. "He had people to hunt up," he wrote, adding that he "should have to stay there probably a while." And, sure enough, weeks slipped away after that, while again she still heard from him from Berlin. He still lingered there; "he could not find a man he wanted," so he mysteriously wrote—"a fellow," as he continued, "to whom the old embassador had sent him: the man was away from Berlin;" and Gilbert said he could not track him, and so must wait for his return.

Several letters then followed each other, by all of which he seemed absorbed in this search, until, finally, "the man was found," so he duly reported, and much amazed indeed was his mother with this last letter, in which he disclosed the name and degree of this personage for whom he had been searching with such incomprehensible zeal. It was the General Vormonoff, a man who had been military chief of the Siberian Council at St. Petersburg when her old relative had been English embassador there. "And he," Gilbert added, "had been very friendly, and had handed him on, with introductions and passports, to the very people he wanted—the men who had been in similar posts of high power and authority during later years, and those also who held the same positions in St. Petersburg, and the remoter regions of the Russian empire now."

What, in Heaven's name, he wanted with all these extraordinary people was more than Lady Anna's wildest flights of imagination could conceive. But that it was something connected with "that strange and Babylonish woman" she felt assured. She fumed more and more within herself as she perused these mysterious letters; and, with hourly increasing bitterness, she hated Zophée, the unknown cause of all this mystery and trouble. What could Gilbert be doing? He seemed in the strangest company, and engrossed in the most unaccountable occupations. What could it all mean? Simply, "that woman"—so Lady Anna reiterated often to herself—"that strange and outlandish Tartar woman." For what had her son called her—"a Tsiganie?"—pshaw! a savage, to whom Christian propriety and Christian religion were, doubtless, alike unappreciated as unknown.

How the vision of that dreadful woman, of savage speech and heathen worship, haunted poor Lady Anna throughout all that winter, painted ever by her imagination in colors most repellent and dark! The thoughts of this woman at Erle's Lynn pursued her as a phantom of the future, and daily it seemed to become at once more certain and more abhorrent to her mind; for all this mystery and this traveling meant certainly only—her.

And Lady Anna felt, as these mysterious letters arrived, that it might be coming upon her at any time now. Some morning, as she felt convinced, Gilbert would announce his return, bringing home with him his heathen bride. For what could she tell? What was he really doing? She did not know. And where was the outlandish woman all this time? And where might not *he* be indeed? She could make nothing of it at all, and dim suspicion filled her with bitterness and concern.

It was a pity that all this time Gilbert could not have been more frank with his mother as to his real doings and schemes; but, as he said often afterward, frankness, just then, would have spoiled every thing. He had to do what he was doing quietly, silently, and without interference or remark; and all this he could not possibly have escaped had he enlightened her, for she certainly would not have left him to pursue his projects, had she known them, undisturbed.

Then, habit did not propel him to frankness, nor did his conscience point him toward it as a duty. She had never encouraged him to open confidence; she had never had any sympathy with his sentiments, even while expressing, as on that first evening of his return, sorrow and sympathy for himself; she had never understood what she called "his infatuation," or never believed in it as a worthy and real thing. And now, he well knew, she would feel little sympathy with his projects, or approval of his plans. So he prosecuted them in silence, without further explanation than lay for her in these curt epistles of his.

Suddenly one of these came, announcing that he was leaving Berlin—that his business there was over, that he had discovered all he wanted to know, and that he was starting again, and

this time on a very long journey, the exact points of which he was still unable to tell. He would write to his mother, he said, on the very first opportunity, at his first halting-place; and he would write, he continued, as frequently and as unfailingly as he could. But he was going far, he added; and if weeks came now and then, during his travels, in which she might fail to hear from him, she must not mind, nor wonder, nor fear any thing, but simply be patient, and believe that it was only because he could not help it, and because posts and letter-sending were not within his reach.

All this, once more, filled her with unspeakable perplexity, and with much indignation as well. What could he mean? On what mad enterprise was he bent? Where was he going? Where, where—indeed? She could not tell, and no one could assist or enlighten her. She laid up his letters and waited, wrathful and wondering, her mind full of anger at Gilbert, and of strong, ever-increasing hatred of the unknown woman—her enemy, the Russian, the strange heathen who had led him so far astray; and, week after week passing wearily, found her waiting still.

For, from that day, she heard of him no more. The winter had set in soon afterward at Erle's Lynn, and a bleak and a stormy winter it was. And throughout the weary, dark months Lady Anna sat, still waiting, for a long while feeling merely bewildered and very angry, until, as the time rolled on, anger gave way to apprehension, wonder to bitter anxiety, and then that weary longing grew up within her, filling her with heart-felt despair.

By the time the year turned, indeed, she was well-nigh distracted with her fears and her longing, for she still heard nothing of her son, and as the cold early months of the year went slowly on, her heart saddened and sorrowed, and sunk daily lower in her solitude, and her longings and her fears quite overcame her, for her wandering and wayward boy.

It was when the last days of February came that she suddenly felt, with a restless impatience (much as he had felt), that what she suffered could be borne no longer; that she could sit still and wait and wonder in patience no more; that she must do something; that she must go somewhere; that she must search for him; that she must start off, and never rest satisfied till he was found. This was the resolution that she took one lonely evening, and that she formed with that same strength and energy of purpose that her son had evinced in all his doings, and which was indeed the single part of her character which she had transmitted to him.

And having taken the resolution, she reflected upon it and formed her plans, and proceeded to accomplish them, much also as he would have done, with silent energy, without assistance from any body, and consulting no one at all.

Thinking over her son's history during the last twelve months, her mind suggested to her but one point to which she should direct her journey. The place round which his memory had lingered so tenderly, the scenes which he had brought so forcibly before her by description so often, that they had come to represent to her imagination the central apex of the whole continent of Europe, the one place at which any one who traveled could ever possibly arrive, the country he loved so passionately, the Béarnais capital, the town of Pau. There, among those wild mountains of which he had spoken, was the stronghold-dwelling of "the Tartar woman;" there, by her wiles and devices, she had doubtless inveigled Gilbert, and there held him now enslaved. There too among the mountains, as Lady Anna vaguely imagined, dwelt that errant sister of hers, that recreant from their father's faith, the giddy, reprehensible Violet of old times, the Marquise de St. Hilaire of to-day.

Gilbert, she knew, loved all of them — these merry-hearted friends of his on the côteaux of the Pyrenees. Where else, then, should Lady Anna journey in search of her son, and in what other direction could she hope to find a clue to his whereabouts, or any trace of himself?

To Pau, therefore, she resolved to travel, accompanied by her ancient and acidulated handmaiden, and protected by the chief functionary of the household, who said he "'oped he kneyv his dooty, if others didn't; through dangers and adventures and perils, he, at least, would be found by her ladyship's side."

It might be edifying enough to linger for a page or two over the many adventures that did indeed overtake that trio, in the course of their week's traveling from Erle's Lynn to Pau—for they had gone through a great deal, undoubtedly —but we must not pause to do so; for all this time Lady Anna, at the end of her long railway journey, is driving up the steeps of the côteaux, and advancing, as she imagines, toward the Château of St. Hilaire.

She had inquired for the marquise immediately on her arrival at Pau, of the English-speaking master of the Hôtel de France, in whose omnibus she found herself and her luggage at the railway station, and at whose door she finally seemed destined to be set down. From him she had learned that Madame la Marquise, with all her family, was at the château on the côteaux, having gone over there from her house in the Rue de Lycée about a week before. They would return, doubtless, he imagined, as the season was not yet over in the gay world of Pau—only Lent had just begun — and he imagined Madame la Marquise had just gone to her country home for a short rest and change. There was nothing more, therefore, to be heard of her in the town evidently, and nothing at all to be seen. So Lady Anna, after a moment's demur and consideration, was perforce constrained to comply with Monsieur Gardère's polite entreaty, that she would descend from the omnibus and at least refresh herself in his house. She was "Miladi Erle," as he realized from her attendant's statements, from the address visible upon her luggage, and, ultimately, from her ceremonious announcement of herself; and he recognized her quickly for whom she was, the sister of Madame la Marquise de St. Hilaire, and the mother of the gallant *chasseur* of last winter, "Sare Geelbarte Airrl." He gave her his best attention, and it was in a carriage of his procuring that, an hour after the arrival of the Paris train, Lady Anna was winding slowly along in the heat and dust and sunshine through the valley and up the côteaux to St. Hilaire.

She was very tired, worn out indeed, with the unwonted fatigue of a railway journey. Her mind, too, was overstrained and excited by all the novelty of the unfamiliar scenes through

which she had traveled, and still more by the weight of apprehension, resentment, and anxiety that lay so heavy upon her heart. The way seemed very long as the horses dragged the heavy landau slowly up the hill. The beauty of the landscape did nothing to soothe or refresh her, for she seemed scarcely to observe it. Her imagination was quite proof against all such impressions for the time being, and full only of anxiety and of pain.

She felt angry with her sister as she drove along, angry as if the marquise's offense and elopement had been of yesterday. She burst into new fury against that iniquitous marriage of long ago, which was indeed the remote cause that had led to all her own annoyance now; and very bitter indeed had her feelings grown by this time against that enemy whom she had never seen, the "outlandish woman" whose influence had wrought such evil in her son's life, and such misery and desolation in her own. Lady Anna sat weary and impatient, and the carriage wound heavily up the hill. The ascent became very steep at length; they were climbing over the shoulder of a côteau with precipitous sides, and toiling up a road that was narrow and strangely rough and unpolished for a carriage-way; and as they mounted, *pic* after *pic* of the mountains came in view, towering far beyond them in the sunlight, and tuft after tuft of the woody côteaux showed their rounded heads, each crowned with the high sloping roofs and clustering turrets and chimneys of the châteaux, villas, and country residences that lay all around.

"Ha!" exclaimed the coachman, suddenly, with an accent of astonishment and vexation in his voice. "Ha! there over there, mon Dieu, across the valley, is St. Hilaire."

He stopped his horses as he spoke, shrugged his shoulders, and pointed with his whip to the top of a wooded hill that rose above their heads. It was not the côteau up which they were driving, however, but a neighboring one; a narrow valley with a gurgling rivulet in its woody depths, lay between this line. There indeed, on that côteau-slope, rose the Château de St. Hilaire, the tall turrets rearing themselves against the clear blue sky, the mullioned windows glistening in the golden sunshine. It loomed high above them, its aspect was very imposing, and it looked very quiet and still. No smoke rose from its chimneys, no one was moving anywhere along the pathways, or about the door; there were no signs of life or habitation whatever. The coachman held his horses up with difficulty as they stood there, for the ascent was very steep, and he growled to himself as he looked about him with wonder and hesitation. Mr. Bullman, on the box, said nothing, but drew his hat gently over his eyes, as the glare of the afternoon sun came straight upon his rubicund countenance. Mrs. Redbridge shrugged her shoulders, and looked about her with unconcealed disgust; and Lady Anna, in the clear, slow, curious old-fashioned French, that had lingered in her memory from her earliest days, refreshed by systematic perusal of certain French works, classical and religious, asked of the surly coachman, "And is that the Château de St. Hilaire?"

"Yes, madame," he answered; "but how are we to get there? It is on the other side of the valley. Sacré! I have turned into the wrong road."

"The wrong road! Extraordinary," exclaimed Lady Anna in English—"extraordinary that the man should not know his way!"

"Not know his way!" screamed Mrs. Redbridge; then she added, emphatically, changing her tone to one of serious and conclusive assurance, "Then we are lost—lost and betrayed; just what I always told you, my lady; and now we'll be benighted, taken up by brigands, and carried off to them awful mountains. I always said it; and now, my lady, you will see."

"You are a fool, Redbridge," said Lady Anna. "Benighted with that sun glaring in our faces, and brigands. Pshaw! you are a fool!"

"As your ladyship pleases," replied Redbridge, bitterly; "but I always told you, my lady, and now you will see. Yah!" she screamed suddenly again, as the horses backed a few inches nearer the precipice from the weight of the carriage bearing heavily upon them from behind, "yah! may I get out, please? Oh law, my lady, we will be clean killed, every one of us, in three minutes' time! Please, coachman—dear Mr. Bullman—do let me get out!"

"Silence, woman!" exclaimed Lady Anna. "Coachman," she ventured in French again, "do you really not know your way to St. Hilaire?"

"Not without turning the carriage, madame," replied the man, "and that is what it's impossible to do here. We must go to the top and down the other side again, and perhaps we shall get turning room there. Sacré!" he growled again; and then, addressing his horses, he shouted suddenly, at the top of his voice, "Yee-hoop! allez!" loosening at the same time the drag that he had placed upon the wheel. "Yee-hoop!" But it was in vain; the horses had been out before that day, most evidently, and the hot drive across the valley had quite exhausted their remaining powers. They made one effort, pulled the carriage up the steep ascent a few yards farther, then stopped, threw their heads up, and backed again. There was a precipice of fifty feet deep into the valley below, and with no parapet running along its edge on one side of them, and to this the hind wheels of the heavy vehicle drew alarmingly near.

Mr. Bullman sprang to his feet, and Mrs. Redbridge screamed lustily, and the coachman cried, "La, la!" to his horses, and pulled the mechanical drag on with a quick, forcible effort again. Lady Anna turned a shade paler, but she sat perfectly still, with a dignity and composed control worthy of herself, while the carriage slowly stopped once more, and Mr. Bullman jumped hastily to the ground. His first impulse was a wise one. He picked up the two largest stones he could see, and stuck them behind the carriage-wheels, which seemed almost to totter but a few inches from the precipice brink; and then he came round to the carriage-door.

"Yes, yes; get out, madame," said their driver, with much decision and little ceremony, before Bullman could speak. "You must get out, if you do not want to break your neck inside."

"Get out!" exclaimed Lady Anna, indignantly.

"If your ladyship would not really mind," said Mr. Bullman, in imploring accents. He stood with one hand resting on the door-handle, while with the other he raised his hat respectful-

ly from his very dignified gray head. "If your ladyship would not mind for a few minutes, till we reach the hill-top, it really would be safer, I believe."

"Oh, please, my lady; yes, yes," implored Mrs. Redbridge. "Do, please, my lady, let me get out!"

"Sit still, Redbridge," replied Lady Anna, severely. "What an execrable coward you are! Get out, Bullman?" she continued, turning to her old man-servant: "get out of my carriage on the high-road? You know—you know I never do such a thing."

"But on this occasion, my lady, if your ladyship would not really mind."

"Won't the man drive on? Can't you tell him, Bullman? How stupid you all are! Redbridge, you goose! stop that sniveling or get out; get out with you if you will: but I, Bullman, I must say—I must really say it is most extraordinary."

"I am very sorry, my lady, that your ladyship—but—"

"Descendez, donc! descendez! get out quick, madame, if you please," shouted the man from the box again, for the horses were throwing up their heads and showing signs of renewed efforts to move; and whether backward or forward this time appeared extremely uncertain.

Redbridge at this point, without further ceremony, bundled hastily out. Fear quite overcame all awe or veneration, and, regardless even of her ladyship's toes, she tumbled on to the dusty road. Then at last Lady Anna arose, yielding, not to her own fears indeed, but in obedience to the imploring looks of her old functionary, and the peremptory coercion of the coachman from the box; and she descended, slowly and ceremoniously, leaning with as much state upon Bullman's arm as if stepping from her chariot on to her own threshold at Erle's Lynn.

She found herself in the centre then of the steep, rugged way; and in a few seconds, saving her two disconsolate servants, she found herself there alone, for "Yee-hoop!" the coachman cried once more to his horses, loosening the reins, shaking their heads violently as he shouted, cracking his long whip, and jangling the harness-bells, and suddenly away went his steeds, relieved of three solid burdens, away, galloping at a rattling pace, toward the summit of the hill. Lady Anna was left to wend her way up wearily as she best could.

The sun was still fierce and glaring, the heat was intense, and so, very slowly and with halting footsteps, Lady Anna climbed the steep. Still more haltingly she was followed by her faithful but most discouraging attendants, of whom one looked driven to the very outer verge of all dignity and endurance, and the other was hopelessly dissolved in tears. Lady Anna heeded neither of them, but went courageously on. She soon saw the carriage reach the hill-top, and there the coachman waited, perhaps politely for his freight to catch him up and get in again, more probably to speculate as to what he should next do. When, after many minutes of weary climbing, they reached him, they found the latter was indeed the case; for he was now looking blankly before him at two winding, sloping roads that led both down into the hollows below. One seemed to stretch away into the distant country, while the other disappeared into the russet woods of the valley, and looked as if it might possibly lead to St. Hilaire; but the man was undecided whether to follow it.

The prospect from here was splendid. Far up on the high côteau above them towered still in view the turrets of St. Hilaire. The leafless woods on the sloping sides of the little valley which lay between them and the château clustered deep down and also high up on the opposite side; it hid the château, all save the higher turrets, from their view, from where they now stood, and it grew thick and close round the gardens, and screened every building that might lie on the slopes between. Only half-way down the sides of the valley there rose into the still air a soft wreath of feathery smoke, floating away above the tops of the brown trees, and curling far down the hollow below them. It revealed that some house or cottage was hidden snugly in the clustering wood over there; and this bit of blue smoke caught Lady Anna's eye, as she paused and meditated, for it spoke of comfort and welcome and habitation, of some one neighborly and near, of a fireside, and a cozy homestead; it seemed to speak in contradiction to the still and solitary aspect of Château de St. Hilaire; and it spoke to her thus at her journey's end, with curious force and sweetness, that bit of curling smoke.

"What are we to do?" she said to the coachman presently, for he did not request her to enter the carriage, and he was still looking confusedly around.

Mr. Bullman stood respectful, "at ease," a few paces behind her ladyship. Mrs. Redbridge had sat down by the ditch side, and dried her tears.

"Dieu sait!" the man answered, shrugging his shoulders with emphatic grimaces of disgust. "I do not know my way no more than an owl. Whether to go up, or go down, or turn round and go back again, I can not tell. These valleys here on the côteaux are too much for me, and—pardon, madame—but I am not of this country myself. I come from the side of the Cauteret, I do."

"As if I cared where you come from," exclaimed Lady Anna, indignantly, roused at length from her wonted composure of demeanor and address. "What do you mean by undertaking to drive a lady and a stranger to a place which you do not know?"

The man shrugged his shoulders again.

"Pardon, madame, but I thought I did know. I have often driven parties round the country this way, in view of St. Hilaire; and how was I to tell that the château was so difficult to reach?"

"Bah! And now, what do you intend to do?"

"I do not know," exclaimed the coachman again, with surly resignation to the inevitable; "stay where I am, I suppose, till my horses are rested, then find the way somehow to where madame desires to go."

"Could we not make inquiries, my lady?" murmured Bullman, presently, from behind. "Some of they rustics, my lady, such as we saw down the road a bit, might know the way to the castle. We might institoot inquiries, if your ladyship pleases."

"Of course, yes!" exclaimed Lady Anna. "That will be the very best thing to do. But I see no peasants now, Bullman."

"Perhaps, my lady, from his elevated position the coachman might," insinuated Bullman, discreetly.

"Ah! yes—so! Coachman," again she continued, addressing the man in French, "why do you not inquire your way?"

"Ah-ha!" he said, with a sardonic laugh; "very easy, just what we should do, madame; only there is no one to ask. Nothing on this side the valley; but—hold!" he exclaimed, suddenly, standing up on his box, and looking round from side to side as he spoke, as if her remark had inspired him with a new idea; "ah! I declare, down across the shoulder of the hill, I see one little house. If madame would send her courier there, he might indeed find somebody to be our guide."

"An excellent idea! I see the cottage plainly," exclaimed Lady Anna; "and, Bullman," she continued, recovering her dignity again, and giving her orders with all her usual ceremony and composure, "Bullman, you will just please step to that cottage—see, its chimneys are quite visible above that low group of trees; you will just step there, and present Lady Anna Erle's compliments, and say—no, I forgot, not that exactly—but, please, simply state that Lady Anna Erle, of Erle's Lynn, waits on the hill above here, and will feel obliged by their sending at once a person to show her the road to St. Hilaire."

Bullman bowed instantly his obedience, with a state and ceremony that rivaled her own; but still he hesitated.

"Your ladyship's orders," he murmured, "are my law; but—a thousand pardons, my lady—the idea is admirable, but there is a little difficulty about the speech on my part—a hesitation. I am sure your ladyship will excuse and understand."

"The speech! The language, you mean. Oh, good gracious! Bullman, I quite forgot. Ah! well the coachman must go, and you can hold the horses, eh?"

"Well, my lady," demurred Bullman, "if, now, it was an English pair; but they French critturs— Indeed, my lady, I doubt it, if an accident were to occur now to impede your ladyship's progress—"

"Pshaw! Well, *what*, I ask you, is to be done?"

Bullman looked sadly toward the roof of the little cottage nestling in the group of brown trees, from which their succor was to come, and then he glanced back at Lady Anna again. A meek and wistful expression came over his pompous countenance.

"Ah, well, it is not for me to suggest, my lady," he said; "but your ladyship has that fine command over the difficulties of the French tongue that I would almost venture to insinuate that if I accompanied your ladyship—"

"You mean to say, Bullman, that I must go myself; that is a pretty pass to come to. If I want any thing done, I must do it; if I want an errand carried, I must carry it myself. Well!"

"I do not see any one about the cottages," broke in the coachman, impatiently, "or I could shout to them from here to come; but if you will send your man to knock at the door or window, madame, it might be a good thing. For me, I can not leave these horses, or they will yet have the carriage over the edge. Go, go," he added, emphatically, to Bullman, pointing at the same time with much energy at the distant cottage roof.

"Come," said Lady Anna, in a very dignified accent; and she set forth. Bullman stepped a few paces behind her, while Redbridge dragged herself up slowly from out the ditch, followed at some distance, drying her eyes disconsolately as she went along.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ESCUARAN EVENING SONGS.

Lady Anna crossed the brow of the hill, walking wearily again over the hot road. The sun was sinking now into gorgeous masses of crimson clouds that rose, piled up one above the other, away beyond the farthest horizon of the mountains; the broad level rays of light came straight across the valleys and hill-tops, bathing the whole glorious landscape in a ruddy glow; and Lady Anna paused, in spite of herself, to exclaim and gaze as the splendor and richness and bewitching beauty of the scene broke for the first time upon her realization, as on her view.

Gilbert's enthusiasm recurred to her: her cheek flushed with unwonted emotion, and tears welled up unbidden to her eyes; for the thought came back to her of all his glowing descriptions, of his passionate enthusiasm, of his tenderness for this, as he had once called it, "the paradise of his romance." It all rushed over her, full of thrilling memories. And these were Gilbert's mountains! these the snowy peaks in which he had so delighted, the smiling sunlit valleys he had loved so well, the land of his dreams, the home of his heart, the shrine of all his devotion; there it lay, outstretched in its richness, and its glory, and its beauty, before her now. At last she almost echoed his enthusiasm, as her heart beat, and her tired eyes wandered across the valleys and the côteaux tops toward that glorious horizon, where the snowy crests pierced the evening sky.

In the foreground, a little down the hill among the trees, lay the cottage; and, after a few moments' pause, Lady Anna walked on again, and went straight toward it. It was a low-roofed, poor little place, with gray-marled walls; a deep porch, and low-latticed windows. A straggling vine-garden led up to it; a shaggy goat browsed on a plot of grass close to the door; some red earthen pots stood about under the porch-leads; a thin blue smoke rose from the chimney. The house was evidently inhabited, though no one was to be seen. It was poor and comfortless; but a wild, picturesque little spot, the grand background of the mountains rising all around it, and the broad rays of the sunset bathing it in crimson light.

"If you please, my lady, shall I knock?" said Bullman, as Lady Anna still paused. "The 'ouse do seem inhabited, to judge from the bit of smoke, but it is astonishing quiet."

"Ah, hush!" exclaimed Lady Anna, as her

footstep trod the threshold, and she paused again, for Bullman's discreet speech and suggestion had been interrupted by a sound that at that moment stole out softly upon her ear. "Hush! hush!" she said again, and she remained still and listened.

It was the low sound of singing that reached her, coming from within the little humble door; of singing so sweet, so soft, so musical, and so wonderfully sympathetic that Lady Anna, whose nerves were already touched by the fatigue and excitements of her journey, and by the heart-thrilling associations and influence of that glorious sunset view, listened, hushed and arrested, with a wonderful echo of softened feeling moving somewhere deeply within her, and glistening in the reflection of her eyes. She was very tired, she thought, and *that* was surely why the simple song, the cooing strains of a peasant-woman, doubtless hushing her child to sleep, should thus touch her so strangely; but, truly, it was very beautiful, and in silence she remained listening still, the notes of the soft voice stealing out to her. It was, as she imagined, a Basque peasant-song:

"Ichuson urac handi,
Eztu ondoric agueri,"

were the words that came floating out to her, chanted to that music of the mountains that is at once so soothing and sympathetic, so wild and sweet and strange; it was, in truth, a song that the peasants of the far-away ranges or the Escuara gypsies sing on such sunset evenings to soothe the little children to sleep.

"Pasaco ninsaqueni audic
Maitea icustea gatic,"

came the thrilling cadence, rising and falling again and again, and Lady Anna listened. A few minutes, and then suddenly, with quickened curiosity, she pushed the door gently open, just a little way—she saw into the room. Then again she paused; she slightly started, and stepped backward and was silent again. She had opened the door so quietly that she had been unheard, and the singing went on still, and it continued so thrilling and so sweet, that it was little wonder she shrunk from interrupting it; besides, the scene before her was strange and unexpected enough to induce her thus to pause and gaze.

Through a small lattice on the western side the sun-rays streamed into the little square room, bathing its inmates with a warm, golden glow; it touched every thing, all the poor little humble pieces of furniture, with bright color and light; it glistened on the copper pans and platters on the shelves; it deepened the red tints of the earthen dishes, the jugs and water-cruches of quaint classical form that stood about on the table and on the ground. It seemed quite to extinguish the lustre and flame of a small log-fire that burned in the black chimney; it lighted up the picturesque figure and bright-colored petticoat and kerchief of a peasant-woman, who stood with her back turned to Lady Anna in the centre of the room; it fell in warm, soft rays across a rough wooden bed in which lay, apparently sleeping, a sick and pain-worn child; and it crowned as with a halo of glory the dusky hair and uncovered head of a young and graceful woman, who sat, her face turned also from the door-way, chanting her sweet music by the sick child's bed. Both she and the mother, for surely she *was* the mother, that peasant who stood there, her whole attitude speaking watchful anxiety and concern, both were so occupied in watching the little suffering one as she dropped asleep under the soothing power of that soft-rippling voice, that they did not notice that the door had opened, nor that any one stood watching them there. The lady sung on, sitting perfectly still and absorbed, a curious and lovely picture—that halo of the golden sunset resting upon her waving hair, her long skirts sweeping the ground beside her, her hat lying on a stool a few yards away, her graceful figure bending, her hands clasped upon her knee, her head moving gently to and fro with the floating rise and fall of the low, soft cadence of her song.

Suddenly the peasant-woman moved; some sound from without, from Bullman or Redbridge, in their desolation, in the distance, must have reached her ear; she moved, she turned, and she saw Lady Anna.

"Cielo!" she exclaimed, in her Basque tongue, and in a low, suppressed voice of surprise, "Cielo! madame, what will you? Do you want to enter here?" And she sprung forward, with a glance of anxiety toward her child, fearful lest it should be disturbed.

At the same time, with the instinctive hospitality of her race, she threw the door open, and at her exclamation and movement the singing ceased, for at that instant the lady had also heard. She hushed her song, she turned round, and the unknown faces of Lady Anna Erle and Mr. Bullman met her eye. In a moment she had sprung to her feet. Who they were, what they wanted at that hour, and at that distance from the town, she could not know, but still she hurried forward without delay. Enough; she saw strangers and English, as she detected before she spoke one word, and it was her duty to arrest them. She came quickly forward, and, without the slightest hesitation, laid her hand upon Lady Anna's arm.

"'Will you be so very kind as to tell me," began that lady, in her slow and very stumbling French; but she had scarcely time to say even so much before those two soft, eager hands were clasped eagerly over hers; she was drawn back, with gentle force and determination, into the garden, and a clear voice was saying to her in rapid accents, and in English almost as pure as her own,

"You must not go in there; pardon me, madame, but indeed you must not; that poor child is ill—very ill, I fear—with a most malignant fever, and the doctor assured me no one can with any safety breathe the air of the room. You must not go in."

"A malignant fever!" screamed Mrs. Redbridge, who, at the appearance of that elegant-looking little lady, had come hastily within earshot of where she stood. "Malignant fever, indeed! My lady, my lady, what next?" And she beat a rapid retreat again toward the garden gate.

"Ahem, my lady!" began Bullman also, stepping briskly backward from the perilous proximity of the door.

But Lady Anna heeded neither of them; she was listening still to the rapid, eager accents of the unknown speaker, and she was gazing, hav-

ing not yet uttered a word, upon the strange, unfamiliar loveliness of the countenance, as the stranger stood, her hands still clasping Lady Anna's, her eyes glowing in the sun-rays, full of earnest expression, and deep and clear in their reflection as two limpid wells of light.

"You must not go in," she still repeated, her voice falling with a soft, musical intonation, and with a slight foreign accent, upon the last syllable of her words. "You must not go in."

"And yet," said Lady Anna, softly, answering the vivid, speaking expression of the countenance more than the words, and seeming to give utterance within herself to the quick, strange impression its singular beauty had made upon her, "and yet *you* have been in there."

"I? Ah, yes; why not?" she answered, turning her face a little away, with a quiet look of curious pain flashing across it; "what does it matter for me?" And then she turned again and looked straight up at Lady Anna, and another expression, a sudden gleam of surprise, of inquiry, of perplexity, came over her face. She scanned the cold, handsome countenance before her, and noted the clear-cut features, the curl of the lip, and the droop of the eyes. Was it a countenance unknown to her? Had she never looked upon the fine-drawn outline of these Deningham features before? She gazed wonderingly an instant, and then she spoke again.

"Can I do any thing for you, madame? Do you want any one? Are you not in search of something, that you stop on your evening drive to open this cottage door? Can I do any thing for you?"

Then it came flashing out upon her, suddenly and instantly, the cold brilliancy of the beautiful Deningham smile, the smile that on Gilbert's *lips* so resembled his mother's, though she rarely reflected the sweet, kind light of his bright-blue eyes.

Lady Anna bowed courteously now, and with a rapid flash her lips parted and her face lighted up for a moment, and in that smile her questioner recognized her before she spoke another word. The two eager hands that had clasped Lady Anna's relaxed their hold, and dropped slowly away, and the lady retired back a step, and looked up with irrepressible astonishment in her gaze. Her lips parted, and seemed to tremble with mute consternation as Lady Anna, still courteously smiling, proceeded to say, "You can certainly do something for me if you will be so very kind; though, indeed, the comfort of finding you here to speak English to me seems to demand so much gratitude for the moment as to make me forgetful of every thing else. But you can, indeed, help me."

"Will you command me?" murmured the other again, and a tremulous emotion seemed to break into her voice—she could scarcely control it; but Lady Anna was not quick in her perceptions, and she noticed nothing peculiar in the sudden feeling that quivered over the lovely face. Quite unconscious, she continued, "I have lost my way; I have a stupid coachman. We are on the wrong side of the valley, he tells me, and he positively can not drive me to the Château de St. Hilaire."

To St. Hilaire! All doubt, if there had been any, of Lady Anna's identity had vanished now.

"To St. Hilaire?" the strange lady repeated; and she scanned her questioner's face again, but no glance of recognition of her own identity was visible there. What should she say or do? Lady Anna looked pale and worn out, but still perfectly unconscious, as her unknown friend repeated, "To St. Hilaire?"

"Yes, yes—to the Château de St. Hilaire. I intend to visit my sister. My carriage is on the eminence there. Will you be so obliging as to cause some one to direct us?"

"I am very sorry," said the other, in soft accents; "but it is a long way round from this point by the carriage-entrance to the grounds of St. Hilaire. Your coachman has come quite the wrong way; but—" and she laughed a little low, quaint laugh to herself at a curious, suddenly recurring memory—"I have known people make that same mistake before."

"Dear me, how very tiresome!" exclaimed Lady Anna.

"But you wish to go to St. Hilaire," continued the other, "to visit the marquise? But, madame, do you know that there is nobody at the château at present?"

"No one at the château? What!" exclaimed Lady Anna, remembering, with sudden consternation, that in her hurry and excitement and impatience she had never announced her visit. "Is my sister—is the Marquise de St. Hilaire away?"

"Yes, madame, they are all away. They have gone to Biarritz for a fortnight or more. Of course, the marquise could not have expected you at this period. Surely not, madame; surely not, indeed?"

"No, sure enough, she did not expect me," said Lady Anna, curtly. "I did not announce myself, as perhaps I should have done; but I had business with my sister," she added, gloomily. "I wished to see her quickly; so, without waiting to write to her, I came off at once."

"Ah, what a pity!" said her unknown friend, slowly. "How grieved the dear marquise will be."

"But I presume the whole household is not gone," continued Lady Anna, brusquely. "I dare say I shall find a servant or two to look after me until my sister's return."

"Surely," was the reply. "You will be received with all proper attention, rest assured, madame, and a telegram shall be sent to the marquise without delay. But still I fear, for your comfort and requirements, there is scarcely sufficient—the upper servants accompanied the family. The vicomte was married, madame, as of course you know, last spring. He has been in Spain with his wife lately, and has just come back, and they have gone to meet him; but the marquise will certainly return immediately when she hears that you have arrived."

"Dear me! dear me!" exclaimed Lady Anna, "how tiresome it all is, to be sure. Here am I at the top of the wrong hill, and at the end of my long journey, and it seems there will be nobody to meet me, after all." And, overcome with fatigue and disappointment, the stately old lady's composure very nearly gave way. The other looked up at her sympathetically, and with tender, wondering eyes for a moment, and then she said, very low,

"And you are the sister of the Marquise de St. Hilaire, madame?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Violet de St. Hilaire is my only sister, I tell you, and I am Lady Anna Erle."

The soft, lovely face that she looked upon was bent again as she spoke, and there came no answer, while Lady Anna turned away and looked petulantly around. She was annoyed beyond endurance at last. Suddenly the other said, hesitatingly, as if uncertain how much it really became her to say,

"You are the sister of the dear marquise, and I, madame—I think I may say—I am her friend. In her absence, can I do nothing? May I venture, although I am a stranger, indeed—"

"A stranger!" exclaimed Lady Anna. "Perhaps so ten minutes ago, my dear; but I am so glad to see you, and to hear you speaking English in this desolate place, that you do not feel in the least a stranger to me. Indeed, unless you will guide me, I have not a notion where to go."

The two soft hands were lying on hers again before she had ceased to speak.

"Will you let me guide you, madame?" came the murmured answer to her last words, uttered with a curious deferential solicitude. "Will you come with me? I am sure you need rest and refreshment. Will you come, although I *am* a stranger to you, madame, although you know not who I may be?"

"Whoever you are, my dear," replied Lady Anna, touched beyond her usual control by the tender, uncommon beauty of the face raised with such wistful deference toward her own, "whoever you may be, you are a saint on earth, or you would not be in *there*," she added, nodding with solemn significance toward the door that had been closed behind them.

"Ah, my poor little patient," said the other, gently; "I have left her doing well. I can slip away easily now."

"That was a Christian duty, my dear—a Christian duty," said Lady Anna, with stern emphasis again.

"Ah, no! There is no question of duty. These people are my dear, familiar friends; naturally they send for me in their troubles, as in their simple joys. But now, madame, may I not guide you? You must be tired indeed. Will you come with me, really? will you let me show you the way?"

"The way to St. Hilaire—I shall indeed be grateful. And, see, my two servants are just down the road. We need not trouble you far, only to direct the coachman."

"But the way to St. Hilaire, dear madame, at least the carriage-way, is several miles round the côteaux from where we now are. You can not reach the château from this side except on foot through the gardens. And you will find nothing ready for your reception at the château. Will you not adopt another plan? Will you not accompany me where I would lead you, and let your servant go round with the carriage, and apprise them of your arrival at St. Hilaire?"

"And meantime I am to go—where?" said Lady Anna.

"Where I will lead you. Will you not accompany me by the foot-path to the château through the gardens? It is no distance, indeed. May I be your guide, dear madame? May I not lead you to my own little home for refreshment and repose?"

"I will gladly accompany you, my dear," said Lady Anna, "for I am tired out and weary indeed. I feel as if my journey had been a long one; and I know not, after all, what I may have found at its end."

"Will you come, then?" whispered the other, softly, and she drew the old lady's hand within her arm; and they turned up the hill till they reached the carriage, and, after a few words of explanation and direction to the servants, they turned down the hill together again, through the wood into the hollow, across the rustic bridge that spanned the rivulet, then up the bank by the winding path.

The old lady walked now with tottering and weary footsteps, wholly unlike her usual self, and she leaned gladly on the younger woman, on whose arm the clinging touch of the frail and trembling fingers thrilled with an intensity of feeling she could scarcely suppress. They reached the road that ran round the wall beneath hanging creepers and roses; they crossed it and passed through a gate at which Gilbert had lingered often, and for the first time one autumn evening, now eighteen months ago; and slowly, and with halting paces, Lady Anna walked on, still letting her young hostess lead and support her—on over the lawn, among the flower-beds, and through the lattice window, that stood open, as usual, revealing the quaint interior of the room.

Lady Anna found herself drawn gently across the threshold and toward the fire-place, while soft words of welcome fell pleasantly on her ears.

The room looked pretty and inviting, and Lady Anna, tired out beyond all power of astonishment or curiosity, yielded unresistingly to the sense of comfort that thus greeted her at the end of her weary way. She had gone through so many strange experiences since she had left Erle's Lynn that this little curious episode in her journey toward St. Hilaire chimed in naturally with all the rest; and without any resistance or question she allowed herself to be quietly divested of her traveling-cloak, and to be set down in home-like proximity to the chimney-corner; and there she sat, quite exhausted and silent for some minutes, scarcely realizing any peculiarity in her situation or noticing her little hostess, who moved about administering to her comfort with quiet and noiseless efforts. She left Lady Anna quietly to recover herself for a few minutes; then, in low, soothing accents, she said,

"You must be tired indeed, dear lady, and I know you will like a cup of tea. Stay, I will order it for you directly. Rest quietly; I will soon return."

And with that she was gone, closing the door gently behind her, and leaving the room to silence and repose. Repose, indeed, Lady Anna found it.

After the long strain of the railway journey, with sleepless nights and weary days, how luxurious seemed the low chair into which she had been placed; how refreshing the complete stillness and comfort of the room; how pleasant, now the sun had set and the evening chills began to fall, was the glow that reached her from the wood fire! How tired she felt, and how strangely and completely at rest!

She sunk gradually back into the depths of the chair; the soothing influence of stillness fell

softly over her spirit; she ceased little by little to remember her weariness—her eyelids closed, her hands were folded softly and placidly one over the other, and she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXX.

AH! STAY.

Lady Anna must have slept long, for the night had fallen when she awoke. She opened her eyes slowly, and, as they lighted on her surroundings, she started. For an instant she could not remember where she was. She remained quiet, and allowed her gaze to wander round the room before she roused herself. Perfect stillness reigned, save for the soft, crackling sound of the burning wood, and the only light was from the fire-flames that danced up bright and clear, showing her, as her eyes traveled slowly, what a strange-looking room it was.

She had been so tired when she came in, and had entered so hurriedly, and had fallen asleep so immediately she sat down, that she had noticed nothing. But now, in the flickering light, the curiously lined walls, the jasper vases, the easel with its pictures, and all the other costly furnishings of the room met her wondering gaze, and all seemed strange to her; and yet not strange! like nothing she had ever seen, most certainly; and yet like something of which she had read or heard.

She sat up that she might see better after a while, moving noiselessly and glancing quietly around; and suddenly she perceived her unknown hostess just opposite to her, drawn back into the shadow, sitting quite silent and still. Lady Anna looked eagerly across and watched her for a moment. She could see the large eyes fixed dreamily on the flames, and she could detect that they were laden with grave expression, and full of some saddening thought—some thought that so absorbed the thinker that she remained unconscious for several minutes that Lady Anna had awaked from her refreshing slumbers, and was gazing with much wonder and compassion into her face. For those feelings were stirred within Lady Anna's heart as she watched that fair young countenance, and traced in its touching aspect some sad, hidden story of pain. She looked so lovely and so resigned, and yet so intensely sorrowful.

Suddenly she turned her eyes full, as she supposed, upon her sleeping guest, and she caught the old lady's gaze fixed full upon her, and across the fire-light their eyes met for a moment in silence, the younger woman's gaze laden with a weight of intense emotion that seemed to agonize her inwardly, and threatened to overcome her self-control; and Lady Anna's full of wondering inquiry, as if her instinct strove fruitlessly to read the enigma written on that wistful face.

Lady Anna paused, and after a moment the other rose, came over to her, and, with a sudden impulse, sunk on her knees by the old lady's side.

"You feel rested?" she said. "You have had a long, quiet sleep, madame? Has it done you good?"

"A great deal of good, my dear," replied Lady Anna, rousing herself with energy. "I feel quite refreshed—much better."

"I am so glad—you look better; for when you entered you seemed worn out indeed," continued her hostess, softly.

"Yes. And, dear me, it seems all so strange! I really do not know what is to become of me," began Lady Anna again. "Here I am, and my sister is away, and there is nobody at the château; and what on earth, I should like to know, am I to do?"

"You will stay here to-night, dear lady," whispered her friend. "See, it is now dark, and upstairs all is ready for you. You will stay, will you not? You will not refuse to stay and rest with me?"

"Refuse? My dear, I am sure I do not know. I have never traveled before, anywhere, at any time of my life, you see, and I am sure I don't in the least know what to do!"

"You will have a cup of tea now, dear madame, that is what you will do," continued the other, rising. "See—your tea, in your English fashion, is all ready for you, and later you will go upstairs and have a quiet night's rest. To-morrow will be time enough to trouble yourself with the question of what you will like to do until Madame de St. Hilaire returns. To-night, at all events, you will stay with me here. Meantime, dear lady, will you drink your cup of tea?" And as she spoke she wheeled a little table, with an English tea-service, to Lady Anna's side, and then she filled a cup with cream and sugar and very fragrant tea. "Is that as you like it?" she asked. "You see, I am very stupid about your English way."

"I am sure you are very kind to me," said Lady Anna—"extremely kind," she continued, as, with much satisfaction and enjoyment, she sipped her tea. "I am sure I ought to be very grateful, and I am. This tea is excellent, my dear, and I must confess, indeed, that I did not expect to drink it as good as this in France."

"But I am not a Frenchwoman, madame," said her hostess, quietly, "nor do I buy my tea in France. This comes to me from a long way off: it is sent to me every year."

"You are not a Frenchwoman?" said Lady Anna, with slight astonishment, looking suddenly round the room again and back to her hostess with rapid glances, as if, now that the fatigue and stupefaction of her senses were passing somewhat away, curiosity as to her situation and her unknown entertainer were beginning to assert its power. The question, "Who and what are you, then, my dear?" rose to her lips instinctively, but it seemed difficult, thus ungarnished, to put it. She paused, and again looked earnestly at her hostess. "You are not a Frenchwoman," she said. "Why, I thought—I thought you were one of my sister Violet's young friends."

"One of her friends, I hope, though not a Frenchwoman. Russia," she added, softly, "was my father's native land."

"A Russian!" Lady Anna put down her tea-cup, and she both started and stared. A Russian! This graceful woman, with those sweet, serious eyes, and soft, caressing manner. She—a Russian! like that other one, "the Babylonish woman"—Lady Anna's hated foe! This young hostess, who had received her with such winning courtesy at the end of her weary journeyings. This woman was a Russian too!

Lady Anna was silent with consternation and

amazement, and the other remained silent also, and looked gravely before her into the fire.

"A Russian!" murmured Lady Anna, and still her unknown friend remained silent, with a curious and irresolute expression in her eyes. "I have never known a Russian, but I have heard of one;" and the old lady paused, as if uncertain what she really wished to say; for all the anxiety and serious purport of her journey came breaking over her afresh, as she remembered her misery, her bitter fears, and her stern anger with her son. "I have heard," she began again; but before she could continue her sentence, her young hostess suddenly took her two hands between her own, and, bending over them until they touched her lips, she said,

"My name is Zophée Variazinka, Lady Anna. Perhaps you have heard of *me*."

The strange-looking, fire-lit room seemed to sink away before Lady Anna's eyes as the words reached her; she grew faint and giddy, and only a low exclamation broke at first from her lips. She started back, as if she would have pushed Madame Zophée from her, in her sudden frenzy of astonishment and dismay. She strove to draw her hands away, but she could not, for the warm touch of the trembling lips was resting upon them, and they were still held fast in Madame Zophée's clasp.

"Forgive me, forgive me," she continued, "I am Zophée Variazinka indeed."

"Impossible!" was the one word that Lady Anna found at last to utter, and she said it again and again as if to assure herself; while Zophée still knelt beside her, with the fire-light falling upon her dusky, bending head, and on the outline of her graceful form. "Impossible!" Lady Anna said once more, as speech came back to her suddenly, and poured then vehemently from her lips. "You, the woman of Babylon—you, the outlandish woman who has stolen away my son! Nonsense, nonsense, my dear, it is quite impossible. Why, you do not *know* what kind of person she is!"

Then Zophée looked up, and she shook her head, and her lips parted and quivered with a wistful smile at the old lady's obstinacy and determination.

"I am she, indeed," she murmured. "I am Zophée Variazinka; and oh, Lady Anna," she added, with sudden passion and intense pathos in her tones, "do not think of me—what matter who or what I am; but oh, for pity's sake! for the love of Heaven! tell me something of Gilbert. Give me tidings at long last of your son!"

Lady Anna seemed scarcely to hear. She loosened her hands from the eager clasp in which they had been inclosed; she put them upon Madame Zophée's shoulder, and turned her face with gentle force toward the fire; and she looked long, with mute astonishment, upon the lovely, delicate features, and into the large, deep, scintillating eyes. She let her gaze rest on that expression—so soft and earnest, so pure and self-contained—and a curious tremor shook her own stern lip.

She thought of Gilbert as she realized that this was the face he had loved and remembered; and then, just as out on the côteaux summits she had caught, for the first time, the spirit of his enthusiasm for the mountain glories, so she seemed to understand all his love and his fidelity to Zophée Variazinka now.

At length, very slowly, and with curious gravity, she said, "Are you indeed speaking the truth?"

"I am Zophée Variazinka," said the other, softly; "and you are—ah! I have heard of you often. What strange leading of destiny has brought you here?"

"I have come," said Lady Anna, "to look for him—you know whom I mean. If you are she, I need not tell you—you must know. And ah! tell me—tell me quickly, for I am his mother, and nearly broken-hearted with the weariness and the waiting. Oh, Zophée Variazinka, what have you done with my son?"

"Your son—Gilbert? Madame, what have I done? Indeed, indeed, I know too well *what* I have done. And if suffering and bitter tears can expiate, I may surely dare to pray even for forgiveness from you."

"But my boy, Gilbert, my only son, where is he? That is what I come all this way to know; that is what I would ask of my sister—of you—of all of you who have known him—who have had him so long among you here. What have you done with him? Where is my son?"

"Where is he, madame? What do you say? Where is he? Before God, I know not. Ah, Heaven! what is it? What have you to tell me of him? Where is he, madame? Ah, Heaven! He has not left you? He is not gone?"

"What do you know of him?" said Lady Anna, with sudden sternness.

"I? I know nothing, dear lady; I know nothing at all. Oh God! what have you to tell me? You seek him?"

"You know nothing?"

"Nothing—nothing. Since last year in spring-time I have seen nothing of him. I have heard of him but once; and, dear madame, in my desolate and weary heart, believe me, I hoped, as I prayed, that he had forgotten me—that he was happy, as if he had never known me. But is it not so? Ah, tell me of him! Is he not at Erle's Lynn now?"

"You know nothing?" repeated Lady Anna again, as if only that one central fact had reached her ears. "And my sister—ah! but surely she must know."

"She—the marquise? No; that, too, must be impossible," said Madame Zophée. "She would have told me. She knows nothing. I am confident he has not been heard of here."

"He has not been here? He has not been heard of? He did not come to you?" repeated Lady Anna again.

"To me? Ah, dear madame, no; not since that bitter morning, that bright spring day, when he went away from me down into the wood below the hill. I have never seen him since; he did not come again. I have borne my sorrow and my broken heart alone. Ah, Lady Anna! pity me, and forgive me, and tell me more; speak of him to me. Gilbert, Gilbert—he has not left *you*, surely? Why, where has he gone?"

"God knows!" said Lady Anna, solemnly, "for I do not. I have not seen him, no more than you have; and when I last heard of him was five long months ago."

"And this," cried Madame Zophée, bitterly, "is my doing still! Ah, madame, forgive me.

If I could only have borne it all; if I could have shielded this sorrow with my life from him, from you! Ah! Gilbert, where are you? Why have you done this? Why do you crush me with anguish? Ah! Gilbert, and you promised me! Gilbert, my love! my love!"

And Zophée, almost forgetful of Lady Anna, bent her head, covered her face with her hands, and sobbed and trembled violently, all her love and her suffering suddenly unsealed within her, and breaking fiercely over the limits of her self-control.

"And did you, then, so love my son?" said Lady Anna, laying her hand on the bending shoulders and speaking soft and low.

"Ah! love him! I was lonely," Madame Zophée said; "and like summer he came to me—like a dream of youth. Love him! It had been wintry darkness so long, so long. And now—I drove him from me; he went his way; and I—since that bitter morning my heart has been very desolate and sad. Ah! madame, you know, you know what it must be. He is your son!"

"My only son," murmured Lady Anna; "and you are Zophée Variazinka, of whom he spoke to me?"

"I am Zophée Variazinka; and, dear madame, now you know, you will not leave me? You will not hate me, and fly from my lonely, desolate home. Nay, stay with me; will you not? Oh, stay!"

"Yes," said Lady Anna, softly, "I will remain. I am tired, my dear, and much astonished, for I see I have been under a mistake. I thought to find *my son* here, and I do not find him, and so I am very heart-sick and sad. But I will remain, for it is not in vain that I have traveled. even though my boy is unfound; for at my journey's end I find what I little looked for, since, my dear, I have discovered you."

"And you will stay! Ah, joy! and I may shower my love for him in tender care of you—you who are brought to me, surely, that I may keep you safe for him. My Gilbert's mother! Ah, joy! you will stay?"

"I will stay," said Lady Anna, gently, and she paused a moment once more; then she laid her hand on Madame Zophée's shoulder again. "And did you so love my boy?" she said. "You loved him, and yet you broke his heart, and drove him quite away."

"Drove him away!" exclaimed Madame Zophée, earnestly, looking with amazement into Lady Anna's face. "Yes, drove him away—as far as possible away. Yes, though it wrung my soul to part with him. Of course, I drove him away."

"And why?" said Lady Anna, gently; "if you love him? Why?"

"If I love him? God help me—if I love him? Did he never tell you? Do you think that any thing but duty, and the holiest sense of what is right and wrong, would have forced me to drive him from me—Gilbert, whom I loved with my whole heart? Did he never tell you?" she said.

"He told me nothing, save that you would not marry him," sighed Lady Anna. "He said all the reasons, all the story, was not *his* secret, but yours."

"Ah, noble!" murmured Madame Zophée. "He never told you, and yet you were his mother, and he your only child, and driven from you, and by me! Ah, madame, surely the revelation is due to you also, even as it was to him—the key to my secrets, the unveiling of all my life—I would tell you also, even as I told him; for I would have you forgive me, even as he forgave. Ah, madame, will you listen as he listened? Will you let me tell you all? But," she added, suddenly, for the recollection came to her of all Lady Anna had that day gone through, "the story is a long one, and you, dear madame, are weary with your journey, and need rest. To-morrow, when you are refreshed and strengthened, we will talk together, and you shall hear my tale."

"Yes," said Lady Anna, gently. "I think I must go now to rest; the day has been a long one, and somehow I do seem to have traveled far."

"Then let me lead you," murmured Zophée again. "Come, lean on my arm once more."

And Lady Anna rose and moved across the room, leaning heavily on Zophée as she walked. She seemed weary indeed in frame and spirit, and very unlike herself. The excitement and fatigue and surprise which had come upon her, crowded into the experience of a day, were all too much for her. So many things came rushing into her mind—intensity of astonishment, and the sudden revulsion of some of her strongest feelings—she felt quite overpowered. She only realized now how glad she was to lean on Zophée, to meet her kind, soft glance, to feel the gentle touch of the caressing fingers, and to rest her gaze on the sensitive, mobile face.

"My dear," Lady Anna said, pausing as they reached the door, "it is a strange Providence that has brought me here to fall down, as it were, travel-worn and weary, on the threshold of your house; and I believe in the leading of Providence," she added, sternly; "and I do not think that I was brought for naught. I will go with you now, and, as you say, rest mind and body, and to-morrow I will hear your tale—hear you gladly—for my heart is touched when you speak the name of my boy Gilbert in your sad, tender way. And, my dear, I think of the cottage on the hill up there, where first I saw you to-day; and as for 'the Babylonish woman'—that 'outlandish person,' you know, for whom my son was foolishly pining all the long summer through—you are not like her in the very least, my dear, and it is all a huge mistake, every bit of it; for you are not she at all."

When, two days later, in answer to an astounding telegram, the Marquise de St. Hilaire arrived hurriedly at home, she had to walk down through the château grounds to the chalet before she found her sister. She came upon her, sitting in Madame Zophée's garden, more happy and placid than she had been for many a day, though Gilbert was still not there.

And if Gilbert himself, indeed, could have looked in upon them at the château or in the chalet any day during the few following weeks, *he* would have been truly surprised. If he could have seen his mother and her renegade sister together, and united in sympathy by their great concern for his absence, and their ceaseless efforts to find some clue to his whereabouts; and, still

more, if he could have seen his mother and Zophée Variazinka passing hours in earnest converse day by day—seen them as they were—closely bound by a love for *him*, of which none could share the depth and intensity—if he could have realized all this, he would have been speechless from amazement, and full of joy.

But he could not see it, and he knew nothing; for all this time, while spring crept softly over the valleys and the côteaux, Gilbert was still far away.

CHAPTER XXXI.

GILBERT AFAR.

THE day after Gilbert wrote that last letter to his mother from Berlin he started on a railway journey, so long, so wearisome, and in many ways so difficult, that it was small wonder he delayed letter-writing till he reached its end. The ticket he took at the Berlin station was for Königsberg, and from thence he crossed the Russian frontier, and proceeded onward, over leagues of country, and through vast forest lands—onward until the wide extent of the Russian-European empire lay between him and the western frontier, at Königsberg.

It was an enterprising journey, and it was undertaken in spite of much opposition from his friends.

Gilbert had made sundry friends since he had started from Erle's Lynn. He had found out, as he wrote to his mother, his old relative, the quondam embassador to Russia, and from him he had obtained introductions to every sort of person at all likely to assist him in the wild project he had in view. The old embassador had been pleased with this ardent and impetuous young relation of his, had encouraged his idea of travel, and had acceded willingly to his request for presentation to Russian circles of power. But he had ridiculed, nevertheless, the programme of the journey, which Gilbert, by help of maps and books of travel, had laid down for himself, laughing at the idea of his going to "Siberia," as a thing absurd—"a mere waste of time," the old diplomate had said. "Go to St. Petersburg, my boy, and I will gladly present you to the chief stars of society there; you will enjoy yourself, have a capital winter, and see a great deal of life—charming society, I assure you; no better to be met with, in its own particular way."

But this advice had made no impression upon Gilbert, though he took all the introductions he could get. And with these he started, lingering only in Paris, and again in Berlin, to see certain great personages to whom the old embassador had sent him for further introductions that might help him on his way.

He traveled right across Russia, through forest and flood, by Moscow, Nijni, and Kasan. On he went until the slopes of the steppes lay outstretched before him, until the lofty summits of the Ural range rose mighty on the horizon, and he had reached the far-distant Perm. Here the railway ended: that iron road was still unfinished which has since carried day into the darkness of Siberia, and drawn Tomsk, and even distant Irkutsk, into the widening light. The trains at that date could carry Gilbert no farther, but a great deal farther he was resolved to go.

It was a strange, wild idea that had entered his mind, seizing violent and unconquerable hold on him, in the latter days of his desolate misery at Erle's Lynn—the idea that he could stay quiet in mute and unresisting suffering no longer, but that he would set off, and neither halt in his journey nor relax in his effort until, traversing snow and forest, mountain and sea and land, piercing the darkness of the convict mines, penetrating the fastnesses of the Russian prisons, scouring the wild country of the Kalmuck or Kirghez-Cossack, going north to the icy ranges of the Arctic Circle, or south to where the steppes of Trans-caucasia are washed by the Caspian Sea, going eastward toward the sunrise, beyond the silver mines of Irkutsk, or the blue lake Baikal—he was resolved to wander, to search, and all untiringly to travel here and there, until he had found Mettiäi Vodoski—found him, alive or dead.

The notion had seized Gilbert's mind that, with energy and enterprise, Mettiäi must indeed be found; and that when found, he might be forced, somehow, to give up that unworthily won right of his over Zophée Variazinka's life. He *must* be found, so Gilbert felt certain.

Full of the strength of his young manhood, rich in the faith and the bright hopes of youth, Gilbert had started, resolution in his mind, one desire ruling omnipotent in his eager heart, and the spirit of enterprise burning high within him.

The introductions he had chiefly coveted, and which he now most prized, were those which his powerful Berlin and Paris friends had given him lightly and with incredulous smiles, doubting much that he would ever use them, and laying real stress only on those which would insure him welcome in the charmed and close-shut circles of St. Petersburg fashion and rank. He had accepted all, but those he really treasured, and of which he scanned eagerly the directions again and again, were to the chief officials of such places as Tobolsk, Ekaterinburg, and Troitsk—towns which he knew he could never penetrate without such credentials. He had letters to the chiefs of the department at all these places, and to the head of the whole Siberian Commission at its centre in Perm. "An adventurous young Englishman," his friends thought him as they gave their introductions; but they doubted his energy holding out beyond Novgorod, and they strongly advised him to test the fascinations of St. Petersburg instead.

But Gilbert was determined, and, quite dauntless, against all persuasion he set forth. At Perm he procured an interpreter, one of the only three men who, in these remote regions, understood both "Little Russian" and French; and, thus accompanied, he proceeded onward again. In a teljéga, with a trusty moujik driver and four fast-fleeting steeds, he started, and soon the long, monotonous traveling of the wind-swept steppes became familiar to him. Through days that seemed endless and innumerable, he skimmed across those snow-clad plains. He drove through the drowsy air of wonderful moonlit nights, while deep silence reigned for miles round him, and the horses' hoofs sunk noiselessly into the snow.

He slept at the solitary stations. He grew at home in the corners by the house-stove, famil-

iar with the kindly peasants, fond of their black bread and chai. The "Lozhadjeï gatovï" from his moujik, as he started of a morning, and the unfailing "Ssovssém" uttered by the postmaster of the house, as the horses sprung forward from the door, became as familiar in his ears as their equivalents of "Horses ready," and "All right, sir," with which the old groom used to start him in his phaeton at Erle's Lynn.

It was lonely work, and it was sometimes wearisome. A physically weaker man would have found the fatigue and exposure unbearable, and, long before the journey was half over, would have turned back or broken down; but Gilbert was strong in spirit, sound in constitution, bright and courageous, of an active and energetic temperament, and of a nature ready to endure; and from first to last he enjoyed it. The jolting of the teljéga over the rough frozen snow, the solitude and the consequent silence, the spare, frugal diet, the poor resting-place by the chimney-corner—all braced and invigorated rather than exhausted him; for the pure, keen air, blowing day after day fresh over the snow, seemed to affect him with a wonderful power at once nerve-stirring and exhilarating. Then he never tired of the wondrous scenes that lay around; of the loveliness of that crystal expanse of snow, or of the changeful effects of light and darkness, of dawn and evening, of sunrise and sunset, as all followed each other in the rapid and ceaseless transitions of the passing day.

He sped along for many of these days. He slept many a night beneath the welcome shelter of the rough log-houses of the steppes; he learned to drink kvass and vodka, as well as the golden chai. He picked up numberless queer-sounding sentences of the peasant Russian, and by help of signs and gesticulation came to understand them too. And they said much that was worth the hearing, these rough and kindly peasants, as they sat by the stove-side in the lonely post-house, and told each other strange tales, in awe-struck and suppressed voices, of the wild, weird doings of the "Chert," the black one, or of the "Domovoy," the unseen spirits of the hearth. Gilbert had many strange experiences by the way, and he kept careful note of all. He means one day to give his reading friends the full benefit of what he experienced and saw. And this being certainly his intention, we will only forestall his publication by describing one among his many days of adventure; of just one we must give the details here.

The scene had often changed, and he had traversed the mighty range that bars the frontier of Europe. He had halted at many places, encountering all official barriers with the powerful letters he bore; he had reached the mines, and traveled in a rough-built troïka from one to the other; he had scanned the convict and the peasant crowds; he had questioned and searched, and interviewed official after official, chief after chief; he had gathered knowledge and gained experience; he had tasted with keen zest the fascination of enterprise; and he had arrived, gradually and by slow and very reluctant degrees, at the realization that the object, the individual, he was in search of was not to be found at all.

Indeed, he was by no means the only one in search of Metträi Vododski; so he learned from a few confidential interviews with some of the convict commissionary chiefs. They treated him with confidence, for to such his letters, and the authorities from which they came, seemed to entitle him. He was described therein as a distinguished personage traveling for purposes that had no reference to political affairs; and the importance of his purpose seemed, to the officials with whom he came in contact, to be sufficiently indicated by the signatures inscribed upon his introductions. They proved powerful enough to insure him all he needed in the way of admittance, information, and help.

Thus he saw much of many things not often seen by travelers in these distant lands, but of Metträi Vododski he found no trace whatever; and for a long time he could hear even nothing at all.

What he did hear, at long last, was not encouraging. It was at Orenzitz, near the European frontier, in a chance conversation, that he at length found some one who would confess, in deep confidence, a knowledge of Vododski's name. This man was the commissioner of the department there. He spoke French, and he talked long with Gilbert, and he finally confessed that he had known Metträi in his convict position by his number, as all there knew him, and also privately by that family name in which Gilbert inquired.

What this man knew, he told him. He spoke of the first term of Metträi's exile in the garb of a convict, and in the deep degradation of the mine, of his rapid promotion, of his restoration to comparative liberty, and of his immediate escape. Further, he told of Metträi's recapture, of the quick trial and condemnation that followed, which with any other political prisoner would have resulted in his death. With any other, but—he had been strangely dealt with throughout, this man Vododski; he had been watched and guarded through some powerful, silent agency working from some lofty source. And the same arm was stretched out in that hour of extremity: an order had filtered through the ranks of official command, and he was saved. They spared him, and only last spring he had eluded them again. Now they, as well as Gilbert, were in eager search of him, and the slightest trace would be followed by a crowd of vigilant eyes.

For he had scarcely escaped a second time, when a secret conspiracy exploded that was ripe, deep-laid, and wanted only courage for its success; and Metträi Vododski had been the founder and chief actuator of this; but he saw another opening suddenly, and he escaped instead. He saved himself, but his name was branded. The outposts on every side were on the watch for him; a high price was set upon his capture; and if he were taken, no intervention from any sort of authority could prevail to save him now. But where was he?—probably dead.

All this Gilbert heard, coming at length quite unawares on the lost traces of the man he sought; and, having heard this much, there was little more that he could do. For just then, in its full violence, the Siberian winter came down upon them; and, snow-locked in that wild, distant land, far beyond the reach of letter-sending, he had to linger and to wait. It was not till the first

breath of the still distant promise of the spring seemed to make the transit possible again, that we find him one day, having wandered as weather permitted, and as the advice of his official friends allowed him to go, far south from the course of his first teljéga journey, and attempting the homeward passage by the Cis-Caucasian steppes.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GOING HOME.

GILBERT was still traversing the wide stretch of that snowy land at the very time when Lady Anna Erle reached the côteaux of the Pyrenees, and found the smiles of spring chasing away the gloom of winter around Madame Zophée's house. Where Gilbert journeyed, all was wintry still. The Caucasus—which in summer are verdant and flower-studded, with a luxury of Southern beauty that rivals even the côteaux of the Pyrenees—were still covered, as he traversed their valleys and lower spurs, with their dazzling garments of snow. The hoofs of his four swift steeds still sunk noiseless upon the soft track, his moujik still wore his sheep-skin wrapped close round his chin.

At the very time when Lady Anna reached the shelter of Madame Zophée's chalet, Gilbert was thus traveling. And at the hour when his mother and his sweet friend—the two people in the wide world who loved him best—were meeting, and striking for the first time the chords of their sympathy, uniting their hearts strongly together by the oneness of their anxiety and earnest love for him, he was pursuing his monotonous journey over steppes and plains; and this particular day he was making for Georgievsk, a town of Cis-Caucasia, as rapidly as the snow and the mists of the evening allowed his eager horses to speed. His moujik stood behind him; his interpreter, silent and uncommunicative, was by his side; and wrapped in his huge muffled furs, almost hidden from head to foot, Gilbert sat, buried in profound reverie and deep, concentrated thought.

He was speeding homeward now: these long sleigh-drives would soon be over for him. He had made his journey rapidly, restlessly, and impetuously, from its very commencement until now, and he had seen a great deal, and encountered a great deal, and by dint of all he had felt and suffered and experienced, he was, moreover, much changed — more, indeed, than he knew or suspected.

As he sat now still and silent, as the sleigh skimmed noiselessly over the snow, many things were recurring to his mind. He looked backward over his journey and its vicissitudes; he looked forward toward the realization that he was going home, and going home quite unsuccessful, having failed, as they warned him he would fail, having endured all the toil and fatigue, encountered all the perils and difficulties of his adventurous journey, without the slightest result. He had exhausted his energies; he had accomplished all that was possible; he had left no effort untried; and he had been quite unsuccessful.

Now he was going home to resign himself, understanding better than he did a year ago what life really demands of a man when bitterness is mingled in his cup of fortune, and he is called upon to be resigned. As his sledge skimmed over the snow, and he sat there in a silence that was really solitude, many clear pictures rose before him of his life, as he was now going back to find it, still without Zophée Variazinka, as he well knew. He had gained nothing, carried no single point, with all his efforts, that would draw her even one step nearer to himself. Life must be lived out without her, for he had failed to break down the barrier that lay between them; life must be lived out, in the gray wintry light of duty, through all the dim years to come. Metträi Vododski still lived, as far as he knew—still stood between happiness and him.

Gilbert was going home, however; and all that day, over the vast, immeasurable snows, the sleigh had carried him far onward on his homeward course; and he had sat and thought there, suffering, and studying to conquer suffering, facing life, and steadily learning, in his strong heart, to resign.

It had been, like many, a brilliant day; the fierce bright sun of Caucasia had glittered since the break of morning over the plains. But it was still a wintry day, and evening came falling early, and as the sledge sped along, still far from its night's destination, clouds were gathering on the horizon, and curious gusts of wind came sweeping over the steppes. The snow, too, was drifting into billows that, as twilight approached, rose and fell and undulated as if the glistening expanse were a heaving sea; and, far away across the eastern horizon, where the wind swept angrily in quick and successive whirls, there was especially a great gathering of this drifting snow which suddenly caught Gilbert's eye, as something quite curious and new to him. He sat up to watch it, just as the moujik driver uttered an exclamation, struck his horses with violence, gathered his reins vigorously together, and sent them plunging rapidly on.

"Ah-ha!" he exclaimed, "glory be to the God of the elements! there is a storm coming up on the horizon to the east."

"Get on!" cried Dimitri, the interpreter, loudly, roused in an instant to a sense of their position, and the danger it implied; for a storm in the steppes is a terrible thing, and the drifting snow is a more fearful sight to the moujik than the fiercest Atlantic billow to the helmsman of a ship at sea.

On they swept with the speed of the lightning-flash; and eagerly they watched the far-away gathering in the eastern horizon, the clouds that rolled ominously, and the snow that came drifting steadily across their way—on they sped.

"We shall not reach Georgievsk to-night alive!" cried the moujik, at last. "On, my little darlings, on! Gee-up! away!" And with his long lash he cracked again and again high over the heads of his fiery horses, shouting to them, both in threatening and endearing epithets, and jingling his rein-bells violently to encourage them along. "But it is of no use," he muttered, "the storm is coming. Georgievsk is three versts from here. We are undone—undone!"

"God have mercy upon us!" murmured Dimitri, with stolid solemnity, as he shivered, and wrapped himself a little closer in his furs.

"But it is glorious — wonderful!" exclaimed

Gilbert, as, with beating heart and crimson cheek, he sat up, forgetful of the danger, and watched the distant splendor of the gathering storm. "It is magnificent!" he exclaimed; and then he drew his spy-glass out, and watched and watched as the sledge sped on.

The clouds deepened and lowered; the snow seemed to rock and heave;, and far over the level plains came again and again upon their ears the low, growling echoes of the whirlwind, mingling with the yelp and bay of affrighted wolves and foxes, as they fled before the gathering storm.

Gilbert watched with suppressed exclamations and with beating heart, and the horses plunged and galloped, and the sledge sped on.

Suddenly, "What is that?" he cried; and he lowered his glass to point eagerly over the plain toward the horizon, where the object that caught his attention was visible against the storm-cloud even to the unaided eye. Both the moujik and Dimitri turned as he directed, and both exclaimed as they gazed. For against the darkening sky, between them and the gathering drift, they could see an object, a dark, curious, swiftly moving mass, too tall and high against the sky to be a wolf-pack, too closely knit to be a caravansary or a sledge-train. They were a band of mounted horses, rattling as fast as spur and urging voice could send them across between their sledge and the horizon of the sky.

"Bogu!" exclaimed the moujik and Dimitri both at once; "they are soldiers; they are an outpost band, scouring the country, seeking for fugitives, and, yah! they are flying, as we are, like antelopes before the storm. Go on, my darlings, my little beauties, go on! Save your master—save us, my children, if you can!"

And with this he drove on his plunging horses again.

Gilbert still watched the small, dark band of riders—a black, swift-moving mass they looked, weird and strange, flying like wild, mad spirits of the tempest, like cherts, as Dimitri exclaimed, meaning storm-devils, or black spirits of the mists.

"Ha! they are not cherts," the moujik said; "they are Cossacks from the Georgievsk stanzia, soldiers of the Russian commissioner of the mines. I know them," he said, "the swift sweep of the little beauties, the good little mountain steeds. But mine can match them! Go on, my darlings! go on!"

Silently then they sped, and nearer came the gathering storm, and Gilbert watched still intently, and with a stern gravity coming over his face. He began to realize the danger, for the billowy drift came nearer, and the ominous growl of the whirlwind came straighter every moment across their track. The little steeds plunged gallantly forward, plowing the snow-drift and struggling bravely with the sweeping winds, and the moujik shouted and cried to them in encouragement; but still the danger rolled terribly near. Strange thoughts came rushing then swiftly through Gilbert's mind, of home, of his mother, of Zophée! Was a wintry grave in the snowy steppes of Cis-Caucasia to be the end, then, of this adventurous battle he had fought to win her for himself—the end of their short, bright romance, and the end of his strong young life just as he had felt it begun? The end—the end—it seemed to sweep wonderfully near; for Death was the message written upon that gathering snow-cloud drifting toward them on the wings of the whirling wind. Death, and a snowy grave, unknown and undiscovered, and here, at least, unmourned.

Still, "it was splendid;" and that was the last thought of which he was clearly conscious at the time. Then he seemed suddenly blinded; there was a deafening whirl in his ears, a sense of something chill, cloudy, dense, and impenetrable, that drifted against them with fearful violence. The sledge rocked and halted for an instant, then once more their brave little team plunged gallantly on. Gilbert heard the moujik's voice shouting above the tempest; then again he seemed deaf and blind. He bent his head; the horses were still plowing the snow-drift, and fighting with dauntless intrepidity through the storm.

A stunned sensation came over Gilbert; he felt faint and stupefied by the violence of the sweeping drift; he bent his head; death every moment felt inevitable; he sat still and calm; he never knew if the time it lasted had been short or long! But suddenly the moujik's voice again rose aloud above the storm, and, through the stupefying noise and confusion, Gilbert caught the meaning of his Russian words.

"Slava Bogu! a gelinka! a little village, praise God! It is Alexandrovsk, my beauties! Speed on, speed on!"

And then again the crack of the long whip came, the sledge rocked and tottered; once more their brave Cossack horses plunged and plowed valiantly through the storm. It seemed to clear then for a moment; lights flashed over the snow-drift, and dazzled, with their vivid reflection, Gilbert's blinded eyes. Then the moujik shouted again. "Slava Bogu!" rose once more above the storm; and, with jingling bells and cracking whip and loud, glad cries, they swept suddenly round the corner of a half-buried post-house, and their gallant little horses brought them whirling to the door.

It was thrown open instantly. The lights gleamed out upon the snow. Rough, kind faces, radiant with hospitality, appeared within. They were saved—miracle of miracles, indeed, as the peasants shouted around them—they had come through a snow-drift, and were saved.

They entered the humble post-house, the gleaming light of the oil-lamps dazzling their snow-blinded eyes; they came in, and Gilbert was soon set down by the warm stove-corner, as ever a welcome and honored guest.

The stanzia was like many others he had visited in the course of his long journeyings. It was a rough little place; the principal room where they sat together was furnished much as usual—with a stove, a few wooden chairs, a rough settle near the chimney-corner, a table, some kvass and vodka flasks, and a samovar. There was a large iron lamp and a small oil one, which last burned day and night in its sacred corner before the family saint. The samovar was soon hot and ready; and wonderfully consoling, after their wild drive, were long, deep draughts of the golden chai; and refreshed by this, and divested of his heavy wrappings, Gilbert sat then, as he had sat many evenings, watching the quaint, domestic scene around him,

and thinking back over the stirring and uncommon adventure of the day.

As he sat there now, without fur cloak or covering, the external changes were visible that had come over him in these months of travel. They accorded justly with the mental and spiritual alterations that had taken place in his character and line of thought, and they were quite as remarkable; indeed, his old friends might scarcely have recognized him at this time, for he was greatly changed. He was haggard and worn by travel and exposure, and he was sobered and manlier in aspect and mien; a brown beard hung low over his chest, and his mustache had grown rough and shaggy. He had quite lost his ceaseless, rippling flow of talk, and the old smile on his lips and the sweet shimmer in his eyes had become rare.

It was impossible to see him just then, and not mourn and miss the brightness, because, alas! its external absence was but an evident sign that it was gone also from the heart and spirit, and that all was gray shadow within.

By the warm stove of the little post-house he sat late that night, changing words, short but hearty, with the station-keeper, with the moujik and Dimitri, as they grouped round the centre-table at a respectful distance, cheering their frightened souls with snacks of vodka and draughts of kvass. And he watched, amused too for a long while, the good-wife of the stanzia man, as she sat over against him, nursing her Nadine, her "inka," as she called it, a fat, stolid maiden of tender years. He had a few pleasant words, in his broken Russian, ready for them all.

The storm soon swept on far from them in the post-house, away over the distant steppes; and it was still and noiseless again amidst the snow without, and very warm and comfortable within. Gilbert sat on, and by-and-by they all left him, for the wooden settle by the stove-side was for his use, as the distinguished guest. Dimitri wrapped himself in his fur, and lay down across the threshold of the door-way that led into the inner and family sleeping-room; the moujik went off to rest in the straw by "his children, his angels," as he called his four little gallant steeds; and the lady of the mansion retired with her inka into the room behind. The host was the last to leave Gilbert; for before he went to his slumbers he had a sacred office to perform. He was a good moujik, with a warm heart, in which strong superstition and spontaneous kindliness were curiously blended with a strange religious creed that influenced every action of his life. He feared Bogu and the Chert; that is, God a good deal, and very much the devil; he believed the first-named, the great Deity, reigned in the clouds, thundered in the tempest, and lived beneficent in the spiritual flame that burned undying before the Riza in each peasant-house. Dignity, light, composure, and beneficence, he felt silently to be Bogu; and Chert, the black one, was all that was most contrary to this. He felt Chert to be restless, full of movement as full of mischief, haunting the midnight, rushing over the house-tops in the angry winds; he felt him vicious and unsatisfied, grasping and ready to take, and, above all, hungry—a being to be propitiated with gifts of black bread or a flask of kvass. And so, before the moujik postman laid him down to rest, he opened the lattice stealthily, and put on the window-sill, with care and solemnity, the portion for Chert, or his emissaries, saved from the evening meal.

Then he closed the window once more, and went contentedly to bed. In the morning they would seek the kvass and bread again; and as Chert did not often want it, it was generally there. But not always; now and then it was taken, and Chert was gratified, they said; and the day went well with them, their good deeds sheltering the household from that evil eye. So they said, and muttered their prayers and trimmed their Riza lamp, and went to their work again. So saying, but with a shrewd, unspoken knowledge in their hearts of what sort of Chert had come: straggling wayfarers, silent, mysterious travelers, who, veiled under the covering of the pilgrim's robe, sped sometimes over the snow by night, and lay in the shelter of some stable or wood-shed during the day; men who were followed and tracked and hunted down like the wolf from the mountains; fugitives who fled from exile, carrying their lives, not worth a moment's purchase, in their hands.

To shelter such a fellow-being might cost the postman his position and liberty; but the offering of a cup of kvass and a piece of bread, left there at midnight on the window-sill, risked nothing; while it would call down upon the donor, if haply picked up by a fugitive in pilgrim raiment and not needed by Chert, a blessing, as for a deed of virtue, from the great Bogu himself. So Petrush set the kvass and black bread, and then, confident and self-complacent, he went off to bed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A MIDNIGHT WANDERER.

Gilbert sat alone there. The wood fire still crackled, warm and comfortable, in the stove by his side, the iron lamp burned cheerfully, and the little glowing light before the Riza shone bright and clear. Intense stillness reigned around him, without as within. Dimitri lay upon the threshold, sunk now in slumber noiseless and profound. By Gilbert's side, piled up on the little wooden settle, lay his furs, his huge bear-rug, and his beaver-lined mantle, ready to be wrapped around him when he lay down to sleep. It was very late, and he was very weary. He had encountered immense fatigue and excitement during the perils of the day, but still he did not feel inclined for rest or slumber. His mind was full and active, and it was restless and awake from some curious instinct that impelled him to sit on there in the deep solitude of that night.

Many things crowded into his mind as the memory of the day's adventure and its sudden danger swept over him again and again. He had looked death in the face that day, and the moment kept recurring to him, bringing back the rush of strong thought which had swept over him in that fleeting moment. The view had flashed before him then of himself, of all his duties undone, his position deserted, and his mother desolate and unconsoled. And now, mingling strangely with these recurring thoughts,

came the memory of all the passionate frenzy of feeling that had fevered and devastated his heart during the past year.

Once more he seemed to stand in that garden on the côteaux slopes; once more that thrilling voice was falling in earnest accents upon his ears; once more he heard *her* describe a life in which duty towered above sentiment, and in which love implied the whole sacrifice of self. And now at last over the wide vacant expanse, in which his future had seemed to lie stretched before him unadorned and unattractive, because bereft of her love, there seemed to creep up the horizon, like the distant breaking of the morn, a quiet, still light from that source she called "duty," and it shed a pure lustre across his future way.

Zophée could never be his, but her teachings might be with him always; and her standard of sacrifice should be erected as the centre of his life. He must live without her; but he would go home now, and live in such a way that *she* should realize it was no craven heart he had laid down broken at her feet. "Farewell!" he was saying to her sweet image in his soul's depth that night, as he sat realizing his failures there. "Farewell, and forever!" came ringing, as an echo of the parting of that spring morning at the chalet, again and again. And "farewell!" he was still murmuring low and dreamily to himself, when something struck his ear, and, slowly and half consciously, he raised his eyes.

He was musing still, and nothing had been conveyed to his mind, but a soft, crackling sound had reached him; and though it scarcely roused his curiosity, it caused him thus instinctively to look up, and, as he did so, he started. The little, narrow window, outside which Petrush had placed the food and kvass, was just opposite to him. It looked out upon the broad and unbroken prospect; it was narrow; and from where Gilbert sat, only a small vista of snow was visible, with a minute half-circlet of the sky. As Gilbert looked toward this, he started, for the low, crackling noise reached him again. It sounded as if footsteps trod on bits of fagot that Petrush might have dropped by the wall. Footsteps certainly seemed to bruise something just outside the window; and, as Gilbert started and looked up, a shadow passed swiftly between him and the vista of sky and snow. He paused for a moment, transfixed with astonishment, and watching eagerly, Petrush's weird stories floating confusedly through his mind. He watched, and it came again, a dark shade falling across the room for a second, apparently creeping forward and then swiftly drawing itself away, and Gilbert sprung instantly to the window.

He could look out now, far away for miles and miles across the glittering and spotless plain. He could see, too, the midnight heavens stretching in wonderful and tranquil majesty above the steppes. It was a deep, intense blue, and cloudless, and forth from its wondrous depths came the tremulous sparkle of countless myriads of stars. High in the blue arch gleamed the moon, shedding a ray of silver lustre across the plain; and as Gilbert looked forth, there fell upon that pure, cold gleam of light a long shadow, dark and mysterious, moving noiselessly along. Gilbert watched and wondered. It was a novel excitement, and made his heart beat. The stillness of the scene was so intense, the solitude was so complete; and the sea of snow, and the arch of heaven in which that queenly moon held her lonely reign, were so grand and vast and still, as if utterly disdainful of life and action, or any disturbing influence from common things; while the effect of that swift and restless shadow, creeping to and fro, backward and forward, at once hesitating and quick, was most mysterious and fascinating, and altogether unaccountable and strange.

Gilbert watched, his eyes sparkling and eager, and again, with wonderful swiftness, the shadow came toward the house. It was close to him, and full in the moonlight ray, and for one moment, Gilbert could distinctly see it. It was no shadow, but a man. A long, spare figure, clad in the rough, dark robes of the mendicant zealots who wander from Pechersk to Solovetsk, from Archangel to Kief—a pilgrim, or some one disguised as such, one of the midnight visitors who creep up to the stanzia windows, and take eagerly the portion laid for Chert—or for them. One of these, no doubt, so Gilbert realized—a man, and no spirit either of evil or of good.

As the pilgrim, creeping stealthily, approached the window, Gilbert drew back into the shadow; and then across the moon-rays the figure drew nearer still, and Gilbert hid himself more carefully until the crackling noise on the fagots came again, and he knew that the man was standing outside the window just below the house. There was a silence then. Gilbert scarce ventured to move or look out, fearing to scare away the pilgrim. But there was no more movement outside the window for some moments, and at last he ventured to bend forward and to look toward the narrow pane. And then his gaze was enchained there—quite fascinated—he could not draw his eyes away.

Pressed against the coarse blue glass, he could see the outline of a human face, terribly haggard and worn. The dark features were flattened against the window. The wild, wolf-like eyes were glaring eagerly into the room; they were drinking in the aspect of warmth and comfort—the glow from the burning lamp, the chair by the stove, the settle, with the fur piled high, and the recumbent figure of Dimitri wrapped in his bear-skin and sunk in profound repose. With the famished expression of a wild beast of prey, the man gazed with hungry eyes into the quiet room, and Gilbert, from his hiding-place inspecting him, felt his heart throb with pity, and he turned impetuously to rush out and to draw the man eagerly in. But again he hesitated; he paused to scan the features, knowing well that this was probably no pilgrim, and feeling uncertain how to reveal his presence without frightening the poor wretch away. He paused; and, before he had resolved on a line of action, the face at the lattice was suddenly withdrawn again, and Gilbert ventured to bend farther forward and look out once more. He saw that the man was still quite close to him, standing upright now, and looking away, his long pilgrim's robe casting its shadow from the house-light behind him far over the plain. Gilbert saw that he had taken the food in his hands, and was preparing to raise the flask of kvass to his lips; and he saw, moreover, that the hand shook as it held the black bread, and that, instead of drinking from the kvass-bottle, the man, after fingering

it for a moment, almost let it drop from his hold.

Then, suddenly, he leaned back, staggering against the lintel, supporting himself with eager struggles to maintain his footing against the wall. There he rested a moment, putting the bread and kvass once more upon the sill, and Gilbert could see him distinctly then, for his profile came against the glass of the little window, and the light flooding outward fell upon his face. A moment he rested thus; still a moment longer Gilbert watched him, and hesitated, and paused; then an exclamation broke through the stillness of the little room, and Gilbert started eagerly forward. For he had seen that the pilgrim, in struggling once more to move and take the food into his hands, had reeled, tottered an instant on his wayworn and failing feet, and then, throwing his arms up above his head with a despairing gesture, he had fallen forward, and lay prostrate in the snow. There the morning, breaking over the steppes, would have found him, his bread uneaten, his kvass untouched, his body frozen, and his spirit gone, had not Gilbert been there to spring forward with that loud exclamation of pitying horror, to rush to the door, to unbar it, to fling it open, and to plunge through the snow, round the house, below the window, till he reached the prostrate pilgrim's side.

It was the work of a few minutes to wind his strong arms round the unconscious form of the man, to raise him from the snow, and to bear him with a quick, impulsive effort of energy round the house, and in at the open door again, and to place him on the wooden settle, on a bed of his own warm furs. And there the pilgrim lay—a spare, long figure, clad in his rough robe—motionless and unconscious, worn out at last by hunger and fatigue and cold. And there Gilbert left him for a moment while he shut to the door, and opened the stove and piled up wood, and let the warm glow rush out into the room, till it reached the wooden settle, and melted the snow-flakes that hung round the pilgrim's robe.

Then Gilbert kicked Dimitri, in the hope of waking him, but failed utterly in this attempt. Dimitri only rolled in his sleep and groaned, as if the energetic assault presented itself to his slumbering imagination merely in the shape of an unpleasant dream. Beyond this he neither moved nor awoke for an instant, and Gilbert was obliged to desist in his efforts, and to turn his attention to doing all that he could for the unconscious stranger himself.

He bent over the man, and caught the echo of a faint respiration that convinced him that, at all events, he was not dead. Then Gilbert wrapped the huge bear-rug close round him, and, raising his head gently, supported it on a pillow improvised with his beaver coat. Then he hastily searched the room, and found a vodka flask, in which a few drops luckily remained, spared from the depredations of Dimitri and his moujik, and this he applied carefully to the pilgrim's lips.

A faint glow creeping over the pallid cheek was the reward of these efforts, and Gilbert, encouraged, stirred the stove-fire vigorously again. He stimulated to the utmost the warm temperature of the room, and then, silent and solitary, he sat down by the unconscious man's side, and, fixing his eyes upon the pale, lifeless features, he waited till he could venture to apply the vodka flask once more.

It was a strange scene, still and solitary. The oil-lamp had burned itself out now, and the little rough room was lighted only by the light from the Riza, and the glow from the fire in the stove. Dimitri remained sunk in stupefied slumber, and Gilbert watched long silently and alone. He did not call up Petrush to his assistance, for he had not traveled among the moujiks of the steppes without discovering that a midnight visitor, wayworn and hungry such as this one, was an object of sullen fear and suspicion to them.

True, pilgrims sought the shelter of the peasant roof, as the night fell, without hesitation, claiming, too, the warmest spot by the stove-corner as most rightfully their own. But pilgrims of this kind, who crept up to steal Chert's or the Domovoy's portion from the frozen window-sill, and who flitted furtively on their journey through the moonbeams over the snow—such pilgrims were to be sheltered but warily, with grim suspicion, with much disturbance of spirit and with fear. And this, especially by the Government stanzia-master, for he never could tell who might seek that pilgrim beneath his roof with the break of the morning, or how sternly he might be called to account.

So Gilbert, knowing this, watched through the hours in solitude, and called no one to help him to put the vodka between those withered lips. Time sped on, and, as the night passed, the glow of life began slowly to deepen on the man's worn cheek; the blood crept back to his lips, and sufficient power returned to him to draw in the fiery vodka from the flask. The strength of its borrowed life seemed to filter through his frozen veins at length; and the warm stove-glow reaching him thawed the icy fogs that choked the respiration in his lungs. He breathed, he moved, he turned his head restlessly on the fur pillow, and at last a tremor shook his drooping eyelids; he slowly raised them, and he turned his deep-sunk eyes upon Gilbert's face. A wild expression of wonder and perplexity flashed instantly from them. His lips parted, and words came. But, alas! they were incomprehensible words to Gilbert, as he bent low to listen.

In what tongue was he speaking? Russian—but not the people's Russian: that Gilbert was accustomed to hear. So he shook his head, and bent his gaze earnestly upon the man's face, and raised the vodka flask to his lips once more. This time it was drunk eagerly. Then the pilgrim sunk back again. He closed his eyes, and threw his head restlessly from side to side, as if memory refused to assist him, and as if struggling to recall its power. He evidently was very weak, and in that moment of silence seemed again almost to faint away. But a little force returned to him, and presently he opened his eyes once more. He met the gaze resting upon him, and the unfamiliar, kindly face turned toward him in the fire-light; his lips parted slowly again, and he strove to speak.

This time it was in German; so far Gilbert gathered from the broken words, but he still could understand nothing. Again he was obliged to shake his head, and the man paused once more, and looked at him with an expression of wonder and of scrutiny. Then a light seemed to break in upon his mind; he muttered something low to himself, and then, loooking up once more, he said distinctly, in French,

"I know—an Englishman! Where am I? Ah?"

"Hush!" said Gilbert, thankful to hear a language which he could understand. "Hush! You are with friends. Be at rest now; be still."

"With friends?" the man murmured; then closed his eyes again, and turned his head away, and Gilbert took his seat again beside him, and watched the prostrate form and pallid face once more. A mendicant pilgrim! Truly this was no member of that wandering band. This pilgrim came from other ranks than those which feed the stream to Kief and Solovetsk.

The clear-cut, handsome features evinced a man of high-sprung race, and the words that had dropped from the trembling lips were the utterances of education and refinement. This was no common pilgrim he had plucked from the midnight snows; no mendicant, though starving and wretched, and clad in this mean disguise.

And if not a pilgrim, what then? A fugitive! There was no mid-course for speculation between the two. A fugitive from the convict mines, and from Siberian exile; a wanderer struggling homeward across the steppes. And Gilbert thought of the dark band of outpost scourers that had that afternoon swept the horizon between them and the gathering storm. Doubtless the track of a fugitive had been found that day near Georgievsk or Alexandrovsk; and doubtless (again thought Gilbert, in his pitying heart) here was the fugitive and the wayfarer, the hunted and miserable man. Where had he hidden himself during that fearful storm? What wretched shelter had covered him while the Cossacks had swept over the snow-clad plains? Where had he come from to-night? Where had he been going when his strength had failed him so suddenly, and he had fallen down prostrate at that door? And who was he? What wonderful, adventurous history of exile, of daring, of revolution, of suffering—perhaps of crime—was hidden in the memory beneath that pale brow? What was the key to his past, and what fate of suffering and failure was implied by his exhaustion for the future! Surely all was over for him, Gilbert felt, as he watched the motionless and death-like form. He could tread no farther the weary path of his pretended pilgrimage; he could never cross on foot the frontier, or escape from the triple death that pursued him—from the Cossack soldiers, from the pangs of hunger, or from the fatal sleep of the frozen snow.

He roused himself from his sad and sympathetic reflections, to put the vodka flask, pityingly and gently, once more to the pale lips; and once more the man imbibed a few drops, and, gaining strength from it, opened his eyes and spoke a few broken words again.

"A good friend," he said, letting his wild eyes rest upon Gilbert; "a friend with a fiery vodka flask is a wonder, indeed, on this snowy way. It is better than Chert's portion out there at the window. But too late, my friend, too late."

"No, no; drink," said Gilbert, eagerly; "drink and rest, and you will get your strength again."

"No, no; it is over—it is over!" murmured the man, and very faintly this time, the flicker of force with which he had uttered the first sentence sinking instantly away. "I am done this time; but I have done them too—the flock of vultures! Did you see them sweeping along before the storm?"

"Hush! Save your strength, my friend. Drink, that is it; drink plenty, and to-morrow you will be again upon your way."

"On my way! And the snow drifting, and the spring storms coming up fiercer and fiercer across my path, and the vultures out, and the peasants craven before them, and nothing but the Domovoy's portion ever left for me. On my way—ah, on my way!"

"Yes, and far on your way too, my friend, if four good Cossack horses can take you. Get strength now; drink the vodka, and to-morrow will see you many versts on your way."

"Friend, and a good one," said the man, faintly again. And then he went on murmuring to himself; and wandering away into Russia, he talked low and rapidly in a feverish, restless way. Gilbert understood not one word, and the man soon ceased to notice him. He closed his eyes again and continued to murmur, tossing his head ceaselessly from side to side, and Gilbert watched and listened. He could make nothing of all the mutterings, except that here and there the name of a place would catch his ear—of places he had himself passed through within the last few weeks, and of which the Russian names and their pronunciation had become familiar. In his rapid murmurings, the man repeated some of these again and again.

Suddenly Gilbert started: in a low, vehement muttering way, the pilgrim was talking of Orenzitz, and the name G—tza, who was the old chief of the police commission there, came in mingled with his Russian words; and Gilbert started, for the recollection rushed over him of the last hour *he* had spent at Orenzitz, standing in the chief commissioner's office, speaking to him of a *fugitive*, of a convict who was missing, of a man who had escaped them, and for whom Gilbert had been inquiring with a persistency and interest that seemed to those he questioned to be very strange. Old G—tza's last words in answer occurred to him now.

"Depend upon it," he had said, speaking of that missing convict, "he got south before the snow set in, and over to Cis-Caucasia; but the Cossacks along there are on the watch for him, and he will be clever if he gets over the frontier alive."

Those were the last words that Gilbert heard in Orenzitz, as he was starting in his teljéga toward the frontier, through the Transcaucasian snow. And now the man was murmuring of Orenzitz, and muttering in strange, terrified, and stealthy tones of G—tza, in his native Russian tongue. And Gilbert started, and once more he listened and waited. Suddenly the half-conscious man moved on the settle, turned restlessly round with the quick energy of fever, threw his arms up wildly for an instant, and then dropped them heavily again; and Gilbert rose to his feet, and stood watching the quick change that was taking place. The faintness had yielded to fever, and the paroxysms of fever were alternating with heavy stupor now, for his mutterings became feebler every instant, and his head sunk low and heavily upon the soft pillow.

Gilbert stood and watched silently, while curious thoughts crowded into his mind, and wonder at the weirdness of the whole circumstance

overpowered him, as he looked at the prostrate form, at this strange midnight visitor, who had come so unexpectedly before him across the moonlit plain, out of the silence of that desert of snow, out of space, out of nothing, as it were, to lie down upon *his* resting-place, warmed with *his* coverings, and revived by *his* care.

The man remained still, after that momentary paroxysm of feverish strength, and he lay in his changed attitude, a little turned round upon the wooden couch, his head fallen back, the pilgrim's robe dropping from one shoulder, wrenched open by the sudden violence with which he had flung up his arms. He had bared his neck, too, in the effort, and he lay now with his fine-turned muscular throat and chest uncovered, save by the ragged beard that hung down bushy and neglected, and by *something* that was in such a place curious to see. It was a narrow golden chain, wound closely round the neck, with the end hidden carefully away. It caught Gilbert's eye, and he knew the tale it told. The *fugitive* has ever some such treasure carried secretly, kept through every peril, and preserved against every temptation of hunger and want; while the *pilgrim* wears nothing golden, or of any value at all. The badge of the fugitive was always the secret treasure hidden away beneath the pilgrim robe. And there it lay upon the worn, bronze neck of Gilbert's fugitive now.

Presently the man moved again. He threw his arms up, turned and struggled upon his couch, his pilgrim's frock falling back from his neck and shoulders more and more; and suddenly the gold chain tightened painfully round his neck, hurting and restraining him. Half consciously he seemed to realize that it was there. He plunged his right hand into the folds of his pilgrim's robe, and with feverish, angry energy he pulled forth the entangled coils.

It was a long chain of woven gold, and, as he drew it out, he held clutched in his hand his cherished treasures—a small dagger, a leathern purse, a packet of crushed and weather-stained papers, and a large double-faced medallion, with a bright-tinted portrait on either side. The articles were all firmly attached to the ends of the strong gold chain, and he held them eagerly clasped in his thin hands for a moment, as if fearful that some one wished to wrench them away. Then fever rushed over him again: he lost all consciousness of concern; he flung them violently from him, and began struggling furiously with the golden chain.

Gilbert bent over him, and strove to give him help; but the coils were hopelessly entangled, and the man was past understanding. He thought Gilbert wished to weave the chain closer round his palpitating chest, and with angry force he pushed his hands roughly away. Then he seized the golden links again, and with the fearful and irresistible strength of his fever he tore them asunder, threw them from him with a wild laugh, and dashed them violently upon the ground. Then he fell back exhausted, and remained for some moments perfectly quiet and still.

Gilbert stood by him and watched; the stillness was so deep that succeeded his frenzied struggle, the silence so intense that fell upon the little room. The man lay back, and breathed low and hard, the outline of his features standing up sharp and clear in the light shed by the Riza lamp. It hung just opposite, high above him, in the corner of the wall. The intense silence oppressed Gilbert; he sighed deeply as he stood and wondered, and the man lay prostrate and quiet.

Then he turned, his heart full of pity, his mind full of crowding thoughts and curious pain, and he stooped and raised from the earthen floor the gold chain, with its bunch of curious relics, which so long and so carefully had been hoarded on that worn breast. He drew the links through his fingers till the cluster of the pilgrim's treasures lay in his hand. Then he paused; he did not look at them for a moment; he closed his hand slowly upon them instead. The man's secrets lay here in his clasp—the key to his history, the clear reflection of his past, his name and identity, his memories and the treasured relics of his love. And he had flung them from him in wild unconsciousness, all ignorant that he was casting down a full confession at a stranger's feet. And surely — so the thought came to Gilbert—he must reverence the secrets thus unwittingly flung to him by an unconscious man, reverence and *hide* them, for Dimitri, Petrush, and Nadine would not much longer lie asleep. He must hide and preserve the treasures for him to whom they rightfully belonged.

So he turned quickly to the corner of the room where lay his traveling knapsack, and he drew from it a case strongly clasped with steel. He opened this, standing beneath the light of the Riza lamp, and disclosed a velvet-lined interior arranged with little drawers and trays. He raised one of these, and then, still holding the leathern purse, the packet of papers, and the medallion close shut in his hand, he laid the jeweled dagger first in the depth of his case, and began slowly to wind the links of the chain closely round it on the velvet lining of the inner tray. It took him some moments to do this, and to arrange the long coils carefully, to make it go in; and then the leathern purse followed; then the papers, at which he scarcely glanced; and then, only the medallion lay on his broad palm, as he opened his hand wide, looked down into it, and let the clear lustre from the Riza lamp fall full and softly on—what he saw.

It was a portrait, and he glanced to the wooden bed instinctively as he traced the features, and caught the clear reflection of their likeness in the wasted face that lay pillowed there. A likeness only, however — no identity. This was not a portrait of his pilgrim-fugitive, but of some one like him—much older than himself. It was the countenance of a handsome, stern-looking man of about sixty that met Gilbert's gaze. It was a grand countenance; for while the features were like those of the unknown man who lay on Gilbert's settle, the expression was very different indeed. The type of the face was more Russian, the brow was broad and noble, and the eyes that looked steadily forth were wonderfully calm and keen.

It was a beautifully finished miniature. It allowed the half-length figure to be seen, and exhibited fully the splendid uniform of a Russian councilor of state, adorned with numerous orders and jeweled stars. It spoke afresh to Gilbert of the rank and precedence of the wayworn wan-

derer whom he had sheltered, this beautifully executed picture, and the nobility of the countenance it portrayed. The frame-work of the medallion was of richly chased gold, and it was decorated with jewels, like the hilt of the little dagger he had just put into his case. On the top of the oval frame a large coronet was worked, with the letters S. V. woven into a monogram below.

Gilbert gazed long upon the countenance, as if it enchained and fascinated his interest and imagination. He examined the monogram, he admired the richness and beauty of the gold and jewel work on the frame, and then, very slowly, as if his gaze lingered wistfully over that noble and unknown face, he turned the medallion round upon his hand, and the soft lustre of the Riza lamp streamed down again upon the portrait on the other side.

The light streamed down, and for a moment it illuminated the countenance upon which it fell, and revealed its fair outlines to Gilbert's eyes. Then—suddenly—he seemed to see nothing; a mist came between him and the bright-tinted picture; the earthen floor of the little cabin seemed to swing beneath his feet; the beating of his heart was arrested; and he was quite unconscious for one delicious moment of bewildering joy. He neither realized, nor felt, nor saw; only a low cry broke from his lips—a murmuring, wondering, half-affrighted cry. He glanced once more with wildly distended eyes toward the unconscious man who lay tossing beside him, and then the mist cleared suddenly away, his brain once more grew calm and clear, and he turned toward the lamp-light, raised the medallion close up to his eager eyes, and gazed and gazed, as men look their first on a beloved face after years of parting—as they look their last before they part again.

For it was the countenance of his dreams he saw imprinted there; it was the bright face of the one fair woman of his love; it was Zophée Variazinka, in the fair dawn of her beauty. Zophée, even as he had never seen her, before shadow or the weight of silence and suffering had been thrown across her years; in the days when she was the Sun-maid indeed of her old Russian home, a bright flower of the South among the snows of the North-land, the joy and the glory of old Serge Vododski's home. There she was thus portrayed before him — the soft eyes full of laughter, the full lips parting in a smile, the dusky hair swept back from a brow laden with richness of thought and intellect, and yet pure and fair and cloudless as a child's.

"Zophée! Zophée! my beloved one!" Gilbert murmured, as he gazed, still transfixed, upon her face. "Zophée," he continued, and a soft smile curled his lips. "Zophée, galoupka moja!" he broke out in the sweet, caressing Russian words he had learned to love. "Zophée! Zophée!"

His eyes suffused, and his cheek flushed crimson. He was quite unconscious of every other circumstance in existence; he felt nothing save that he looked upon her face once more, that he answered her smile, that he drank in the radiant light of her eyes, and that he could whisper fond, foolish words to her, and fancy them almost answered and heard. For a moment he was happy, quite free from recollection — absolutely and perfectly happy—without any reserve.

Then a sound broke in upon his trance, a sound that roused him up to recollection, to bewilderment, to realization; and he turned, closed his hand fast over the medallion, and looked toward the low wooden bed. The man who lay there was moving and muttering again, tossing back the rough hair from his forehead, and throwing himself with feverish restlessness from side to side. And Gilbert paused, and silently watched him for an instant, while, like a great wave, revelation was breaking slowly over his inner consciousness of who this wild fugitive must be. The recollection of the muttered name of the place from whence he was flying, of the old chief commissioner, who was the pursuant he most dreaded there; the recollection of a thousand things, and perceptions, too, of countless links in the chain of circumstance and evidence, came rushing into Gilbert's mind; and here now—the crowning proof, the portrait of Zophée Variazinka—of her who had been Zophée Vododski for one fleeting day. The portrait in this man's possession announced him, beyond every possibility of doubt, to be *him*—her lawful husband; the exile from K—— on that hateful day of her marriage, and of the effort upon the emperor's life; the convict of the mines; the man who was being tracked and hunted; the man whose existence had fallen like a black shadow across Gilbert's life; the man for whom he had searched through months of hopeless travel and toil; the man whom he had never thought to find now, whom he had never thought to see.

There he lay—for it was him undoubtedly—Metträi Vododski, the son of the Grand Councilor of the Russian Empire, and the destined husband of Zophée Variazinka, indeed.

Strong, wild thoughts rioted through Gilbert's mind as he looked at the man and realized that it was he. Dark, confused feelings rushed over him, and bewildered him with their pressure and their contradiction. Pity and resentment, hatred and commiseration, fought and struggled madly together in his heart.

He stood gazing on Vododski's pale face. Ah, the sin and the suffering hidden there—the fighting and the failure buried in that miserable past! Ah, the sorrow inflicted in one short passionate history, lived out wildly and unrestrained! The bleeding father's heart, the lonely life on the côteaux of the Pyrenees, the suffering in Gilbert's own past, and the long sentence of unmerited pain lying upon his future. All had been the work of *this man*, all the results of his vain and unprofitable existence, all the fruit of his misguided deeds; and here now he lay. Here, helpless and unconscious, wrapped in Gilbert's coverings, wooed back into life by his care, thrown upon his protection, at his mercy, owing the existence of every moment to his solicitude, and retaining life and freedom at his will.

The situation was strange and bewildering; and as Gilbert stood there and realized, his breath came fast and strong with the intensity of his emotion and excitement. He held the precious medallion close clasped in his hand, as if passionately to retain it against every possible claimant, every intervening right; and he struggled with himself for composure, and set his teeth tight and firm, and looked at the fever-tossed man as he lay there, quite unconscious of his surroundings or of his fate.

The sight of him seemed to madden Gilbert at last. The heat of the small room suffocated him; his heart beat so fiercely, and his brain burned like fire. He turned away from the settle again. He opened the hand that inclosed the medallion; he looked at Zophée's portrait again, and at the calm, handsome features of Metträi's father, painted on the other side; and then he examined the links of the chain carefully, and found he could detach the pendant with a little harmless force. And he did so, murmuring to himself, "More right than he, surely. She was never his; and I love her—I love her; I have more right than he."

A little effort, and the gold-framed portrait-case lay loose upon his hand. He closed up then his leathern box; he locked it, and fastened the steel clasps securely one by one, and he restored it to his portmanteau — a sacred charge, as he felt, from man to man; not to him from Metträi Vododski, but just from the pilgrim-fugitive whom he had rescued in the snow. All these should be restored again one day to him to whom they rightfully belonged; but the medallion with the portraits? He thrust it deep into his bosom, still holding it tightly clasped in his hand; and then, pressing it close to the throbbing pulses of his heart, he turned and went to the house-door. He felt he could not breathe in there any longer; and he could not think, for the fire of his passionate excitement so tortured and bewildered his brain.

He opened the door and went out, and he stood there, closing it fast behind him, and then he leaned back against the door-post, and lifted up his eyes to the blue archway of the sky. The clear shimmering stars gleamed down upon him, and the moon cast her silver rays across his face. It was intensely cold, but the night was still; he could bear it for a few minutes as he stood panting and drawing in deep draughts of the pure, fresh air. The expanse of snow stretched vast and calm before him, the passionless stillness of the moonlight resting upon all. The air cooled his brow, and the night brought tranquillity to his brain; and he looked up and gazed, and lost his way amidst the myriads of the sparkling stars, while the omnipotence of creative majesty seemed to reach him, to still his struggling spirit, and to soothe the feverish promptings of his heart; and standing there, in silence and amidst that mighty solitude, in the deep and hidden places of his soul he prayed, hard and strong and ceaselessly, as a man prays who feels the Dark One pressing close upon his footsteps, and that evil is coming nigh unto his life. He prayed that his heart might remain brave and true against every thing, and that the fearful temptation which was possessing him might pass away safely from his soul.

He held her portrait there, fast clasped against his beating heart, and his love was so deep and so strong for her that the sight of that pictured countenance had unnerved him, and the storm of passionate longing that swept over him had annihilated all self-control. He loved, and he longed so bitterly, so utterly, with every strong pulsation of his eager heart; and there, on that wooden settle by the stove-fire, which he himself had heaped to warm him, lay that man, hated while yet unknown to him, who had cursed his life and hers. And this man Gilbert had nursed into life again that night; this man he had rescued and borne in his arms from out the frozen snow; and there the man lay at his mercy now, to *do* with him according to his will.

Do? It was merely requisite to do—nothing. To stay out there, while the cold allowed him, in the still night air, or to creep back and take a rug from the fur-heap on the settle, and to lie down by Dimitri's side, and the man would die. The morning, which was already breaking over the far horizon, would not, when it reached its fullness, find him there; the sunrise would shine in at the narrow window upon Metträi Vododski, lying harmless and dead.

This Gilbert knew, and thence the fierce temptation, the poisoned words in which the devil told him to let Metträi *die;* told him that his should not be the hand to bring him succor, his the voice to recall that worthless life; that *he* need not strive and watch and toil all the night through to draw him back into existence, since he had slipped already so very quietly and so very far away. It needed but to leave him, to let him alone, and then the letters and the portraits would be his indeed, and all the full evidence which they carried that he had seen Vododski die. And in the future, what more might be his? O God! O God! and he loved her so!

Thus the spirit of fierce temptation came, sweeping again and again in that swift-fleeting moment over Gilbert's soul, stimulating and feeding his fevered pulses as he held her portrait to his heart.

How he fought it, how he struggled with the memories breaking over him of so many things, how *he conquered*, God and his own conscience only can ever know. But he turned at last, cast one lingering look at the soft light rising far away in the horizon, shedding a fair, fresh glow from the coming day; and then he went into the house again, shut to the door, walked calmly across the hot, close room, and bent over the settle by Metträi's side.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ESCAPED.

Wrapped in his pilgrim's robe, Metträi was now quietly sleeping. He seemed surely better, a glow as of returning color rested in a faint flush upon his face. He breathed softly, and seemed to have passed from his stupor into a quiet sleep. Gilbert sat down beside him once more, and gazed, as he had done during hours of the past night, on the unconscious countenance. His own had grown very pale, but he was quite composed now, and a calm light gleamed in his eyes.

Presently he rose again, and lifted Metträi gently in his strong arms, and smoothed the heaped-up bundle on which he had pillowed his head. And then, with a curious expression gathering upon his face, he laid the medallion softly upon Metträi's pillow, and he pushed it nearer and nearer, until the vivid coloring in the girl's portrait lay close against Metträi's cheek. Then once more he watched and waited.

The morning came breaking in at length as he sat there, flooding with crimson light the expanse of untrodden snow, and with the morning awoke

Dimitri, and with his awakening came his outburst of wonder and consternation to find a stranger lying couched among the furs by the stove-corner, and his master sitting upright by his side. Fast following Dimitri came Petrush, and his good wife, and the inka, all waking early to meet the sunrise, and rising to live eagerly every instant of their short bright day.

They crowded into the house-room, and great were the wonder and the turmoil that ensued. It was in vain Gilbert struggled to suppress them, or to hush the mingled voices; in vain. They were suspicious as well as curious, their tongues wagged loudly, and all at once, in speculation and dismay. Fierce tumult prevailed immediately.

They roused Mettrăi, and the fever returned to his pale cheeks in consequence, and delirium mounted once more to his brain. He began to mutter incessantly in words and sentences revelations which Dimitri was well able to understand, and before long the latter shook his head, and glanced with consternation at Gilbert. He made him agitated signs, and exclaimed in French at last, as he listened to the low, quick-muttered words, "No pilgrim this, sir. Whom, in the name of Heaven, have we here?"

And Gilbert shook his head in answer, and glanced at Petrush and his wife, and whispering to Dimitri, "I will help him, whosoever he may be," he bent over the wooden bed once more, listened to Mettrăi's murmurings, and caught many names that made his heart beat, and thrilled him with strange excitement again. For Vododski ceased to mutter at last of Orenzitz, and of G—tza, the old commissioner there, or of any of the hard months of his flight from Siberia, or the latter periods of his life; and his mind and fevered memory seemed to take a strange turn, for he was murmuring now in gentler accents of other and far older scenes. Gilbert could catch other names mingling with his confused talk—memories of youth and boyhood, surely, of far-away and happier times; and while he listened, four sad, sweet lines he had read somewhere came echoing through Gilbert's mind:

"When the last fight is o'er, and life is done with,
And we wander in the spirit and the brain,
We drowse back in dreams to the days that life began with,
And their tender light comes back to us again."

After a time a deep sadness came falling over Gilbert; the ceaseless echoing of that rambling, unconscious voice was too much for him; he was worn out and unnerved, and the whole scene overcame him—the noise of the chattering family, busy over their morning arrangements, boiling the samovar, and trimming the little Riza lamps, and the ceaseless painful sound of the feverish tones growing every moment more faint. And then Gilbert felt as if he could endure it no longer. He called to Dimitri to take his place, and he went out to the door again. The morning had risen now, fresh and beautiful, over the snow plains.

Low in the horizon lay broad streaks of golden glory, heralding the rising of the sun; and, clear as an expanse of burnished silver, the glistening snow lay beautiful under the flush of the morning, as the face of a Venus lighted with the smiles of love. The extent of the view seemed unlimited; and, as far as the eye could reach, it was spotless and unbroken, save in one distant corner—far away. But this little, far-off corner arrested Gilbert in one moment. He fixed his gaze scrutinizingly upon it, he watched, he drew his breath, and the sunrise and the scenery were forgotten.

The object, dark against the rose-flush of the sky, was "no bigger than a man's hand," as the cloud might have been of old that foretold the storms and rain-fall. But he had seen it before; the small dark band, sweeping like a flock of vultures across the horizon, scouring swift as storm-birds on the wing coming out of the distance, turning toward the sun, rushing like the whirlwind over the snow—whence came they? Whither were they fleeting on their swift, wild way?

He stepped in and called furtively to Dimitri, and passed out with him again, heedless of Nadine's entreaties, that he would drink of the morning chai, and hearing only the feeble moans from the settle that greeted his ears painfully as he paused a moment in the room. The muttered words seemed hushed now, and there was only that faint, sinking moan.

"What is *that*, Dimitri?" he exclaimed, when he had drawn his servant outside the house. "What is that?" he said, pointing in the direction of the dark specks that were passing swiftly against the sky; and Dimitri started.

"Cossacks! soldiers!" he cried, immediately. "An outpost band—scourers—on the track of a fugitive—after somebody of whom a scent has been found! Ah!" he added, drawing his breath and shaking his head mysteriously. "Ah!" and he pointed silently behind him across his shoulder toward the post-house room.

"Heavens!" said Gilbert, suddenly, "do you think really it can be he?"

"I am sure of it," said Dimitri. "However, poor devil, does it matter? Not much, sir, as far as I can judge; though, if they found him, with the breath of life in his poor body, God knows if they would leave him in peace to die."

"The hounds!" Gilbert muttered, fiercely, as he watched the dark band of scourers sweeping hither and thither—track-hunting across the snows.

"Yes, hounds indeed! So they scent a man like a wolf or any ravening beast of prey—scent him, and track him down—curse them! God help me, I never failed to give a fugitive a strengthening hand; but he—ah, twenty times he muttered this morning they should not take him alive. But if they come—and good God! they are coming!—just Heaven, help him, and defend the suffering! They are veering, the vultures. See—see, sir; watch the curving of their ranks now, as they sweep to and fro. They have found the track, they are coming. See; they are bending in this direction; they are coming this way."

And truly, as Dimitri spoke, the black curving line seemed to come toward them nearer and nearer, swift as the rushing tide, until, from black specks and lines and masses looming against the glowing curtain of light, they grew before Gilbert's eyes into compact little companies of horsemen, galloping with frantic speed across the snow.

An exclamation broke from Dimitri, and he rushed back into the house, and the tidings of

the coming band broke from him in Russian in his strong voice, loud, resonant, and clear; and perhaps the dull ear of the half-conscious man on the settle heard him, perhaps the cry smote his fluttering heart with a death-blow, as it roused his dormant senses to a momentary energy of life, for he sat up and looked wildly round him; and as Dimitri sprung to the couch and bent beside him, he uttered quick, broken words in Russian, and in tones wonderfully strong and clear.

He called his father's name and Zophée's; his hand felt instinctively for the missing links of his golden chain, and then fell, feeble and unconscious, on the medallion that lay on the pillow beside him. He called out, "Russia! Russia! my country, I am coming!" and "Freedom! freedom!" he uttered in failing accents again and again. Then, as Petrush and Nadine turned pale and trembled, and as the sound of confusion, and of the jangling of horses' trappings, and the noise of loud voices reached their ears, he fell back, and Dimitri's outstretched arms received him as his head sunk down.

Gilbert, closely followed, sprung at that moment in at the door. He reached the couch, and seized something that lay upon the pillow, and only just in time. Grim faces crowded behind him; cruel and relentless eyes glared into the room, all hungry and impatient for their prey. But it had escaped them. They had hunted him down at length—the poor fugitive—but too late. As they rushed in, dressed in their curious trappings—a band of Cossack soldiers of the Cis-Caucasian steppes—they saw at once that they were too late, and angry curses broke from them all.

Metträi Vododski lay sleeping calmly in the safe, quiet haven of—death; his marble features peaceful as they had rarely been through all his feverish life of futile and passionate struggle, his worn countenance expressing rest. And the Cossack soldiers turned away, muttering in loud oaths their disappointment. There was no victim for them, no booty—absolutely nothing at all. For Metträi Vododski lay dead there, and the precious jeweled medallion, containing Zophée Variazinka's portrait, was hidden away, close pressed once more against Gilbert's fast-beating heart.

CONCLUSION.

MI-CARÊME.

Every body said "it had been a quiet winter that year at Pau." All sorts of people had been missing who were generally there. The St. Hilaires had come little to town, and Madame Variazinka had not once crossed the valley from the côteaux the whole season through.

That good-looking young English huntsman, Sir Gilbert Erle, who had been first in the field and gayest in the ball-rooms all the year before, was reported "coming" during the whole of the season, and still never came.

Morton de St. Hilaire was married, and had gone off somewhere with his Jeanne. Several well-known faces had been missing in the American set, and the influx of English visitors had proved "heavy families" this year.

Altogether there was little excitement, and people discovered suddenly that Carnival was nearly over, and that they had done next to nothing at all. Then Lent came upon them, and they were still saying what a dull time they had had of it, when, about the second week of that "fasting season," a reviving impetus was suddenly given to society by a large and unexpected arrival which took place.

In a special train, accompanied by his wife and family, and with an enormous suite, our old acquaintance, the Russian Grand Duke George, returned once more to Pau.

He came, as he had promised, to revisit the Pyrenees; and, as the only fitting residence for such august visitors, the old château was lent to them for the time. In this picturesque and historic residence they all soon settled themselves.

A curious party in a curious place, Pau said of them, at the same time delighted to see them there. They brought something to talk about, something to look at, and, if Lent had not intervened so inconveniently, somebody to entertain.

And first, Pau did talk of them; and on the Place, and along the Boulevard, and in the club, most wonderful things were related by people who felt qualified to know. And by-and-by people saw them—first, their old acquaintance, the Grand Duke George himself, promenading the Boulevard on a Sunday, two days after his arrival, leaning on the arm of his aid-de-camp, Count Chellaveff, and talking affably, as the public were pleased to perceive, with Sir Alexander Maynard, that kind friend and adviser of the new-comer of every degree.

It was a lively Sunday altogether, for there was plenty to discuss and see; while the Duke George promenaded and smoked a cigar, as he passed up the Place Royale, and paused to converse with the Princess and a knot of ladies whom he found grouped round the pedestal of Henri IV.; and finally, as he went into the club and had himself there enrolled. Evidently the grand duke had retained pleasing recollections of his visit of last year, and meant now, on his return to Pau, to be particularly gregarious and sociable.

Then next day numbers of people had to tell each other of a string of funny little children who had been seen filing out from under the portico of the château, and trotting through the prim gardens over pathways where many royal children had trodden in the old times before; passing round Triquetti's pretty statue, and going down below the park, over the grass, westward to the site of the Kiosk of Isabel, and to the green secluded spot where Marguerite de Valois had meditated often by the Font d'Écus. And that same afternoon there was more to talk about; for a few fortunate loiterers by the huge old gates of the château had been privileged to see a large barouche drive out, which contained the Duchess Olga herself. She looked distinguished, people said, "and rather interesting, and very evidently she was dressed by—Worth."

The carriage passed down the Place Grammont, and went swiftly over the bridge, through Jurançon, and away along the road toward the Gelos côteaux; and people said that "she had gone to visit the odd little Russian over at St. Hilaire, whom Erle had been so mad about last

year;" and, strange enough, though "people" said so, it was true!

Finally, having looked at this party, and talked about them till there was little more left to say, Pau was delighted one fine day by the circulation of the rumor that at Mi-Carême (Mid-Lent) the préfet and Madame de Frontignac intended that they should be entertained. And as time went on, and Mi-Carême drew near, the interest and the excitement of the rumor increased tenfold, until it ceased to be a rumor at all; and cards were issued, and Pau burst into a whirlwind of wild enthusiasm, and a fervor of expectation and delight; for Madame de Frontignac not only announced herself "at home" on the night of Mi-Carême, and requested that every body who was any body at all would come and "pass the evening with her;" but in the remote right-hand corner of the invitation-card was inscribed the announcement that it was going to be a "fancy ball." Moreover, the guests might be masked or half-masked, if they pleased; but they would in that case be required to unveil their countenances and reveal their identity to the private secretary of the préfecture on their way upstairs.

Altogether, the prospect was magnificent, and the excitement waxed high and keen. The invitations had also announced, among all these other things, that the guests were invited specially to meet S. A. I. the Grand Duchess Olga and the Grand Duke George.

This intimation gave, of course, a certain zest to the proceedings. For the whole time intervening between the invitations and the night of Mi-Carême, people talked of their costumes, and much greatness of imagination and ignorance of biography were displayed. Also, though much mystery was brought to bear upon the preparations, and no one was intended to find out what any body else was going to wear, the important secrets were confided confidentially on so many sides and to so many people, that long before the intervening weeks had gone by the prospects as to general costume were universally known. But this only served to stimulate anticipation. People were really exercised in their minds to conceive how Mrs. Vere would look as the Panther Queen; what sort of figure Mrs. Carder would make as a Spanish duenna; and how that very proper Mrs. Derford intended to personate the charming but rather questionable character, Gabrielle d'Estrées; and, then, who was to be her Henri? People were much engaged, too, in agreeing that Mr. Dalton Hart was absurd in thinking himself sufficiently good-looking for Monte Cristo, or Miss Coddrington in imagining she had the fine coloring or lithe figure of a Contadina Romana.

So, for many days, it went on; and, indeed, before the eventful night arrived, nearly every one had had a glimpse of every one else's dress; and so recognition was not quite impossible, though the effect was most bewildering when they met together finally—the whole, little, gay community—to admire, to laugh at, to exclaim at each other, in the long salon of the Préfecture on the evening of Mi-Carême.

The Préfecture is a quaint old building. It is plain enough externally, its only distinctive feature being the national flag, which hangs ever over the huge gate-way that incloses the old-fashioned court-yard.

But within the house is picturesque, and its salons richly decorated; and when lighted up and filled with a gayly dressed crowd, as on these festive occasions, the scene is brilliant and effective.

There is one long ball-room, furnished in pale-gold color, with paneled and decorated walls, and with copies of Rubens's portraits of Henri and of Gabrielle flanking the handsome old carved fire-place on either side. A smaller salon opens off each end of this, one of which was arranged for general *tête-à-tête* and flirtations, while the other was set aside for the ducal party, and for other great personages to-night.

Many of our old friends were there: the Baron Keffel, resplendent in a white waistcoat—as usual, caustic and inquisitive; Bébé Beresford, who had been out to America to fetch Miss Netley, whom he had captured and brought back again; Madame de St. Hilaire, in a lovely toilet, and many others.

Every body was there, as particularly requested, early, awaiting the arrival of the august guests, and the scene was very marvelous indeed. It was like a dazzling and bewildering dream. Every age of the world, and every clime and country ever heard of, seemed to have sent the homage of its quaintest dress.

The variety of strange costume was quite extraordinary, and the variety in the manners in which people bore their change of appearance and personality was more extraordinary still. A motley, brilliant crowd they were—our gay Pau friends—that night, as they stood together, or sauntered up and down, laughing, chattering, wondering over each other and themselves, awaiting the arrival of the ducal party to allow the dancing to begin. There were many curious combinations, too, among the promenading couples, that heightened the quaintness of the whole effect. A Dresden shepherdess on one side paced slowly, hanging on the arm of a white musketeer; a stately lady, in a splendid Venetian dress, followed just behind them with the Emperor of China. Mary Queen of Scots was gayly laughing a little farther on, and glancing up archly at Mephistopheles, as he bent to whisper in her ear. A graceful Neapolitan sailor escorted a "Northern Winter" with an evident harmony that was remarkable. Elizabeth Gunning walked with a Hungarian huntsman. Madame de Vismes leaned on the arm of the Earl of Surrey from the court of Henry VIII. Schaffhausen peasants strolled with courtiers from the age of Queen Elizabeth; and Undine floated past, with Charles Surface in her train. Moonlight, Starlight, Summer, Autumn, and May-queens swept to and fro in airy procession, with mountaineers from every range of Europe and boatmen of every sea. Mexican nobles, Spanish brigands, and English tars conducted such varieties of marvelous costumes as you would imagine they could have met only in their dreams! The scene in the old Salle of the Préfecture was curious and brilliant indeed.

At the entrance-door stood the préfet and Madame de Frontignac, waiting to receive the Russian guests. Near where they stood sat the princess; a Maori chieftain stood close behind her; Romeo leaned over her chair; Grimaldi

shook his bells just in front of her; and the Maid of Athens sat by her side. Several Basque and Pyrenean peasants had been scattered through the rooms; and these, with a group of the Hunt Club of Pau, in their red coats, had been drawn by Madame de Frontignac round the door to receive the grand-ducal party as they entered. And this elect few, not being of the most sober and reverential portion of the Pau community, were just getting tired of this part of the ceremonial, and a little restive under it, when the band suddenly ceased tuning their instruments, and, at a signal, struck up the Russian national air. The portières were flung back, and Madame de Frontignac went forward toward the corridor, and the préfet disappeared. The Princess rose, and every body stared and waited, and a buzz of expectation ran through the room.

Then the préfet re-entered again, leading the Duchess Olga, and, as people made their salutations, a murmur of satisfaction arose. The grand duchess had thrown herself into the full spirit of the entertainment, and had come to the *bal travesti* in the beautiful national costume of her race. It was a dress similar to that of the Tsaritsa, which is preserved in the Winter Palace, with the crown of the empire, and the imperial sceptre of all the Russias, with the Orloff diamond at its tip—a costume the Tsaritsa wears sometimes at popular national fêtes. It was very picturesque: a high cap towered upon the duchess's head, a vest of crimson velvet contrasted richly with the dark-hued kaftan reaching to her knees; the skirt was short, and the whole costume was embroidered in a graceful scroll-work, of which the pattern was marked out, and set round thickly with brilliants and seed-pearls. A superb girdle, woven in chain-work, inclosed her waist, and two long tassels fringed with diamonds hung from the jeweled clasp. The dress was brilliant and effective, and, like the Tsaritsa's in the Winter Palace, regal in the splendor of its composition, if rustic in its original design.

The duchess, moreover, was half masked, by which she signified that she came *incognita*—in her private character to a private entertainment—and that all etiquette and formula might be dispensed with from the time she entered the room. For this the community were much obliged to her; or at least they would have been, if they had realized half the requirements of Russian etiquette, and the strictness and rigidity with which it is enforced.

The Duchess Olga entered, gave her hand to the Princess, and took the seat by her side to which Madame de Frontignac invited her. Close behind her stood two *attachés* in imperial uniform, and two ladies of honor, attired very differently from herself. Both were dressed in black lace, and one of them, like the duchess, was partially masked.

The figure of the unmasked lady of honor was tall and stiff-looking; there was nothing in her appearance to engage the attention or attract the eye; but with the other it was different. In that slight, graceful, lace-draped figure, standing just behind the Duchess Olga's chair, there was something singularly attractive, something that caused the scrutinizing gaze to wander upward to the half-concealed face, to linger on the beautifully turned chin peeping from beneath the mask, to trace the lovely contour of the head and neck, to note the beauty of the delicate ear, and the soft line with which the hair swept back from the forehead; something that made one long to draw that hateful mask away.

The lady stood perfectly still and silent, speaking only when the grand duke passed round and addressed her a few words, and moving only when, presently, the Princess rose and left her seat vacant, and the great Russian lady, who was pleased to decline to dance, turned and signaled to this young attendant to come round and sit down by her side—which she did; and they talked rapidly together in Russian, the duchess speaking much and familiarly, stooping forward often to lay her hand upon her young friend's with an eager, impulsive clasp. They were left to talk together; for the national hymn of Russia was over presently, and the first bars of some dance-music were heard. And the grand duke bowed gravely to Madame de Frontignac, and the préfet led forth the Princess, and a young Italian prince stood next them, with a bright little American for his partner, and a real Spanish grandee for his *vis-à-vis* on the opposite side; and they danced a quadrille—with much grace and high ceremony; and it was a very fine sight indeed.

Every body else began dancing at the same time, and all down the huge room they twirled and glided, and did "ladies' chain"—Dresden shepherdesses, Grecian brigands, Scottish chiefs, and New Zealanders, all dancing amicably together in delightful confusion, and with a marvelous and bewitching effect.

Then the ball went on much like other balls, and people forgot their history, and arranged their minds, and grew quite accustomed to seeing Amy Robsart waltzing with Caractacus, and Boadicea polkaing calmly with Captain Macheath. It all seemed quite natural long before the cotillon came on.

There was some fear expressed at one time that there would be no cotillon, some persons considering the ceremony of the occasion too high; but such fears were soon dissipated. The hour arrived; seats and benches came clattering in as usual, and people scrambled and squabbled, and rushed about in the frantic efforts necessary to get themselves seated round the room. The opinion was moreover circulated that the grand duchess was very anxious to see a cotillon, as it is danced in all its perfection here. And, sure enough, she showed no sign of withdrawing, but took her place, with the Princess and Madame de Frontignac and other ladies of distinction, at the centre of a row of very gorgeous, golden chairs. Her stately-looking lady of honor stood silent behind her, and the grand duchess drew her little friend of the black-lace dress and half-masked countenance down into the chair by her side.

The cotillon was led that night by Morton de St. Hilaire at one end, dancing with Madame de Frontignac's married daughter, who wore the English dress of the White Lady of Avenel; while at the other end was Freddy Vere, who had chosen for his partner Morton's little dark-eyed bride. Off they all started, with the polonaise figure first—danced in honor of the Russians—beginning thus as they do at St. Peters-

burg, and going on to all their other figures of the scarfs and the bows, and the bells and the bracelets, the flags, the kneeling quadrille, the grand-rond, and all the rest of it. The fun grew fast and furious, though just a very little bit tempered, perhaps, by the presence of that illustrious party at the head of the room.

It went swimmingly on, full of *en train*, with intervals breaking in for refreshments and for transitory repose; and every one of the august persons on the golden chairs watched it with admiration and keen zest for a long time.

But, at a certain point, it was remarkable that the attention and the gaze of *one* of that party wandered, suddenly, and entirely from the dazzling crowd that was waltzing and undulating on the ball-room floor, and seemed conscious, indeed, of the whole gay scene of the ball-room no longer. It was the pair of eyes that glistened, dark and luminous, behind the mask worn by the lady who sat by the Duchess Olga's side; and these eyes were turned suddenly toward the outer door-way, and were fixed scrutinizingly and wonderingly upon some one who leaned against the wall just there.

It was evidently a new-comer, for the costume was one that had not yet been observable in the motley crowd: and perhaps that alone had attracted the gaze of the dark eyes that glistened behind the mask. At all events, the costume and its wearer seemed to interest her. And yet this was not strange; for to any of the Russian party the sight of that dress must have been familiar, and full of association. It was a peasant dress from the northern valleys of Vladimir, a moujik's festive national attire. It was the masculine dress, in fact, corresponding to the one worn by the Duchess Olga, and not, like hers, a decorated representation of a costume, but the real thing itself. It was picturesque; and the man who wore it was tall, broad-shouldered, and handsome enough to do credit to any attire. He wore a thick, brown beard flowing over his chest, a long mustache quite covered his lips, and his peasant hat was drawn far down over his brow and eyes. There was almost nothing to be seen of his countenance, and yet he attracted the eyes from behind the dark mask, and seemed to fascinate and to enchain their gaze.

Suddenly, as the cotillon proceeded, the Duchess Olga observed him, this moujik, in national costume, leaning idly against the door. The bouquet figure was beginning, and the baskets of fresh-scented flowers were being borne into the room; and it was just then that the duchess exclaimed, in French,

"But, mon Dieu! dear Madame de Frontignac, there is a countryman of ours standing in the door-way, and he has not danced once. Where is he come from? When did he arrive?"

"A countryman!" said the grand duke, laughingly, in answer, "or some one, at all events, wearing our national costume. You forget you are at a *bal travesti*."

"No, I do not," cried the Duchess Olga; "but I mean he is our countryman, for the moment at least, and should be my *danseur* for the night. See, he is in the dress of the same province from which I took mine. I say he should make himself presented to me; we should stand up side by side. And his dress is very good," she went on; "just the real thing. Do you not find it so, Zophée?" she added, caressingly, in Russian, turning to the masked lady, her chosen companion, who sat still by her side. "Does it not bring back to you old memories? Is not that just the dress that Vanoushki (little Ivan) used to wear at the Maslianitsa—the Carnival fête-days in Vladimir, when you were a child? Ah! is it not so? Look at him! look at him! Is it not so?"

"Ah! your highness is kind and good indeed to cherish these sweet old memories," murmured her friend, in a soft, musical voice that we seem to know. And she drew her breath quickly, and apparently she could say no more. Her head drooped for an instant, and then she raised it again, and she turned her gaze once more, as the grand duchess had begged her, upon that manly figure leaning easily, and, as it seemed, so indifferently, upon the door. Poor Zophée! she could, in truth, say no more just then, and indeed throughout the whole ball, and especially during the cotillon, she had found it almost impossible to speak at all.

That ball, to which she had come only in obedience to a command which was irresistible, had been all bitterness to her; the gay scene mocking the desolate sadness in her heart; the very music sounding chords of memory within her, and awakening echo from associations that were pain almost keener than she could bear.

Only at one other of these gay, brilliant balls had she been ever present during all her long secluded residence at Pau, and at that ball—he had been. Then, though for so long she would not dance with him, she had watched him all through the evening, amusing and enjoying herself in following his quick, agile movements about the room. He had been there through the whole night, and at the end had been this bouquet figure just then as now. Ah! how the memory came rushing back to her, for the scent of the violets and white lilac was even at that moment surrounding her again; and she seemed to see him, as he had bent before her and extended his flowers to her with an upturned, pleading face. Then came the memory of her dance with him, and of their short walk home together through the glory of the Pyrenean night; and then she thought on and on, of many walks that had followed after that one, and of many quick succeeding blissful hours and days. How well she remembered it all! and was it over for them forever, and must it be again no more, no more? Were sunshine and love, and the quick, living thrill of conscious happiness, gone from them both, for all their lifelong in the future, and would the joy of reunion never more be theirs? Ah! why had she been brought here? To sit sad and silent amidst this brilliant crowd, to be mocked by its gayety, and tortured by these sweet strains of music that echoed in her ears? Why the re-awakened memories of the ball-room? And why, above all, why the haunting fascination that impelled her to gaze at that door-way? Whence the strange resemblance which kept her eyes enchained irresistibly there?

The moujik stood, apparently unconscious and indifferent, looking idly round the room. And he watched as the bouquets were brought to the party on the golden chairs, and from them presently carried quite round the hall, and out even

to the door-ways and corridors, where non-dancing people were lounging idly about. The moujik remained quiet until they were carried to his corner; then he took one bouquet from the basket which a pretty Neapolitan flower-girl held up to him, but he shook his head indifferently, as she urged him to take another. "Was *one*, then, enough for him?" she said, archly, as she smiled at him and passed on. He bent over his flowers while the waltzers whirled round him on every side. The ball was at its height just then, and the spirit and enthusiasm quite exuberant.

The moujik paused a moment, and gravely eyed the crowd; and then he made up his mind, apparently, for he threaded his way across the top of the ball-room, and went with curious directness to his point. He bowed low, and he offered his flowers at the feet, not of the Grand Duchess Olga, whose national peasant dress corresponded so harmoniously with his own, but of the little friend who sat so quietly beside her—that slight, graceful woman whose head was covered with a lace domino, and whose face was half hidden by her mask. It seemed impossible that any one could have recognized her. And yet before her the moujik bent. He waited determinedly, and for some moments it seemed that she declined to receive his flowers, and that he would wait in vain. For she trembled so, and her heart beat so violently, and such strange, wild thoughts of possibilities came surging through her brain, that she could not speak, nor move, nor notice him. But he still waited; he bent his head low before her, his face unseen, his shaggy beard covering his breast. Evidently he would take no refusal, and was determined not to be driven away. Yet Zophée could not speak to him. She could only shake her head, and raise her hand deprecatingly, as if entreating him to go.

At last, as he waited and bent low again, still offering his flowers, the Duchess Olga laughed, and the Princess turned and said to Zophée, just as she had done once before, "Always the same Zophée, ungrateful and ungracious. She never smiles on any cotillon knight who pays her his pretty homage of flowers. Ungrateful, Zophée! ah, really it is a shame!"

"Will you not dance?" said the duchess, lightly. "See, so patient and devoted a cavalier, he deserves a reward."

But Zophée could answer nothing; her heart seemed to stand still, and her lips were sealed. She could only gaze at him bewildered, as he stood before them; and the Duchess Olga went on laughingly, in Russian, again:

"And so excellent a moujik, too! Ah, my good comrade," she added, suddenly, addressing him, "we are from the same country. Are you genuine, eh? Do you speak the language of your race?"

The young moujik bent toward her then in answer, and murmured her name in low tones, using the method of address and the title which a peasant of Vladimir would have used in speaking to her. And the grand duchess was delighted, and laughed aloud, while a great tremor seized Zophée's frame as she heard his voice; a film seemed to cover her eyes, a faintness rushed over her heart, and "Gilbert!" she exclaimed, the name rising to her lips and breaking from them. But it was unheard, for the duchess spoke loud and cheerily again.

"Ah," she said, "very good, very well said; but I detect an accent—not a moujik, after all, but a capital representation of one, I confess. Why do you not offer your bouquet to me, instead of to that ungrateful little lady, who keeps you waiting there? We surely should promenade together, for our dresses truly suit each other well. Give your flowers to me, young countryman, and so be revenged on that little *incognita*, who sits so silent behind her mask there, and who treats your offering with such indifferent scorn. Give them to me, and you will be revenged."

"Ah, pardon me, your most gracious highness," murmured the young moujik, in Russian, again. "Pardon," he went on, "but my flowers are all only—for her." And he bowed once more before the duchess, and then stood upright, removed his broad peasant's hat, and looked straight across at Zophée, with his clear blue glistening eyes. And the Duchess Olga laughed again, and the Princess started and turned pale, and Zophée rose slowly, but quite steadily now, and, murmuring, "Pardon me, with your highness's permission," she passed out from among the group on the golden chairs, and in another instant she was on the fringe of the great, dazzling, and whirling crowd, standing alone, and for a few seconds silently, by Gilbert's side.

They had got a new waltz down at Pau just then—the "Manolo," of Waldteufel—and people were wild about it, as they had been in London and in Germany all the season before, and its full, undulating, poetic strains were floating through the ball-room like a song from dreamland, while Gilbert and Zophée stood there side by side. They did not dance, of course; they only stood together for some moments, when he had drawn her away a little out of the crowd, and the silence of intense and overwhelming joy was upon them; while the dancers whirled before their eyes, and the sweet music, floating through the air above and around them, seemed to flow over their spirits, and mingle with the rush of feeling and the flood of thought.

"Gilbert, Gilbert," murmured Zophée at last, softly, her head drooping, and her hand clinging to his arm. "Why did you do it? Why did you come to me like this? I am so glad! but it is too much, Gilbert—it is more than I can bear."

"Ach, ti dusha moja!" (Ah, thou soul of mine), he answered, a soft, passionate, Russian expression of tenderness he had learned to understand. "Ah, have I frightened you? Have I come too suddenly? But I arrived in Pau only as the ball was beginning, and I could not help it. I heard you were here to-night, and I had this dress with me to put on, and so I could not, I could not, stay away. My Zophée, my little Sun-maid, my love!"

"Gilbert, hush, hush!" she murmured, in broken tones. "Gilbert, remember! do not be cruel to me. My friend, do not pierce and grieve my poor heart anew. I am so glad that you have come back; but spare me, spare me! Remember, Gilbert, my dear, best friend!"

"Ah, Zophée, not my friend," he exclaimed in answer; "but my love, and my darling, and my own."

"Hush, for God's sake!" she murmured. "Hush, Gilbert! control yourself—spare me; for Heaven's sake, dear friend, be calm! Listen

to me. I have much to tell you. Indeed, indeed, I am thankful—in my heart's depths so glad and thankful—that you have returned. But listen, I have much to tell you—"

"And I have something," he answered, gravely, "to tell you, my Zophée, my own one, mine, mine, forever mine. I have indeed something to tell you. Will you come with me? Will you come away out of all this bewildering medley? Will you come, Zophée? Let me take you home."

"I think I *must* go," she answered. "I feel so faint and strange. I do not think I can stand this any longer. I must indeed go home. But stay, I must ask the grand duchess's permission. I am with her, you know. Ah, do you not remember, Gilbert," she added, with a little sweet, sad smile, "do you not remember the Duke George?"

"I should think I did, indeed!" said Gilbert, grimly. "But, after all, I don't hate him as I used to do," he added, "for he told me something once it was well worth my while to know."

"Take me up to the grand duchess, then," said Zophée. And together they walked quietly back to the precincts of the golden chairs. By that time the Princess had quite recognized Gilbert under his long beard and in his Russian disguise, and she greeted him cordially, but with furtive and dismayed glances into Zophée's face; and the grand duchess laughed gayly as she challenged them with "being old friends."

Then Zophée murmured her petition; and the Duchess Olga answered, "Certainly she might go home; was she tired? Well, no wonder. And would their countryman take her to the carriage? Ah, that was well. Certainly she might leave them." And lightly kissing her finger-tips to Zophée, she smiled her adieu.

Then, just again as he had done once before, Gilbert led her from the gay ball-room, and they passed down the old staircase, escaping quite unnoticed, while every body was absorbed in the last cotillon rounds. And they got away, without observation, through the crowded corridors, and out into the quaint old court-yard, where the carriages stood massed together, waiting patiently in the dawn.

For it was spring-time now, and it was four o'clock already; and the blue night, with its spangled canopy of brilliant stars, was fading and rolling away before the break of the morning, and the old court-yard was softly flooded with the light of a coming day. The air was sweet and cool, meeting them as they stood on the threshold. They paused, glancing simultaneously into each other's face, and Zophée drew her mask away.

"Ah! and you thought that that thing would disguise you?" said Gilbert. "Did you expect that I could be for one moment deceived?"

"I did not expect you to be *here* to induce me to attempt deception," she answered, smiling up at him a sweet, wistful, welcoming smile. "Will you call up the carriage?" she added.

"One of those great lumbering carriages, is it?" said Gilbert, presently.

"Yes," she answered; "the Duchess Olga was to set me down. Vasilie and Ivan, with my little brougham, are not here to-night."

"This morning, you mean; there is not much of night remaining now," he said.

"No; and what a lovely morning it is going to be!" she murmured.

"Lovely!" he exclaimed, impulsively, and then, very hurriedly, he went on: "Zophée, will you not *walk* home with me? You did it once before. They will not be done with the cotillon for an hour yet, and every one of these coachmen is sound asleep. Come, will you not walk? Why get into that old coach? Look what a morning it is going to be; and see, it is quite dry under-foot. Come, walk with me; will you not? It is such a little way."

"I should like it," she said, softly. "But will you promise me—all the way from here to the Hôtel de France to—to—say nothing I do not want you to say. Because," she continued, as she let her hand rest quietly on his arm, and allowed him to draw her across the court-yard and out at the great iron gates, "because," she said, "I am so glad, so very thankful to have you back again; but you must remember, dear friend, there are some things you must never, never say to me; some things that must make me drive you from me; that I must never hear."

"Hush!" he whispered, softly. "Come on a little way with me. I will say nothing, nothing whatever, to you now."

And then they went on, treading the narrow pavement together, walking, as he wished, in silence along the Rue de la Préfecture, through the little narrow Rue St. Louis, past his old haunts of the English Club and the Rue de Lycée, and on to the Place among the trees, where the lamp-lights were glistening like pale stars, and fading away before the break of day. And they passed down the inner avenue till they reached the great entrance to the hotel. Then Gilbert spoke again, and now in a changed and very grave, quiet tone.

"Do not go in, Zophée," he said; "come a little farther with me, just down here, to look once at the mountain view. I have something to say to you," he added; "come." And she let him draw her on till they reached the terrace, where they stood side by side. They leaned on the low parapet for a while, and gazed silently upon the mountains, for they were very wonderful in the dawning light.

A soft mist lay over the côteaux, and a great stillness rested upon the whole scene. The view was sombre to westward; but away to the east, where Gilbert and Zophée's gaze turned instinctively, amidst the liquid dews of the morning and the golden and amber tint of the rising sun, stood the Château of Bisanos with its stone-pine clear drawn against the background of the sky.

"Gilbert, Gilbert, how lovely it is!" murmured Zophée, her eyes sparkling with intense feeling; and she let him draw her along till they reached a bench at the far corner, just under the huge hotel. They sat down together. "How glorious it is!" she continued. "Oh, why am I so happy? What is it I feel? I am so glad, so pleased to see you again! And here—oh, surely this morning it is beautiful as a glimpse into the opening heavens!"

"My darling," he whispered, "God grant it may be mine forever to keep that sunny morning-light shining over life for you."

"Hush, hush!" she answered. "Look, Gilbert, is it not exquisite? Look there, and do not think of me."

"But I *do* think of you. Look round, look up at me, Zophée! Tell me, do you love me still?—do you love me after twelve long months, as you let me *feel* you loved me, even though you drove me from you, that bitter day last spring?"

"Ah, Gilbert, do not!" she urged him. "Ah, must I drive you from me again? My dear friend," she continued, earnestly, turning quite suddenly upon him, clasping her hands together, and fixing her dark, pleading eyes upon his face, "is it not over yet—all *that*, dear friend? May we not meet? Must I drive you from me? Is it not over and forgotten yet?"

"Not over, and never will be over while my life lasts," he uttered; "neither forgotten nor ever to be forgotten."

"Ah, then," she sighed, with a sad shade falling over her face, "then, dear friend, farewell. Take me in, I must go—take me in, Gilbert. And God bless you, dear friend, and God grant some day we *may* meet—some day—once more as really friends. Till then, alas! I can still only say to you farewell."

"Never," he exclaimed then: "Zophée, while we live, I will never say that bitter word again to you. I shall never leave you, you shall not drive me from you; for you love me, and my heart has been worn out with longing all these weary months for you. And, my darling, my own beloved," he cried, his voice breaking suddenly with passionate intonation, as he wound his arms irresistibly round her and drew her to him while he spoke, "my dear love, there is *no one* standing between us now, believe me; not the faintest shadow lies across the brightness of our path. Dear, won't you look at me, and see how wayworn and travel-stained I am? And think you, Zophée, that I took that long, hard journey in vain?"

"Gilbert, Gilbert, what mean you?" she cried, and her eyes turned upon his face again, questioning it with eager scrutiny, and she drew her breath fast and strong, her heart beating with strange, wild wonder, and sick with vague and undefined fear. "Gilbert, Gilbert," she panted, "what mean you?"

"My love, I mean *he* stands between us no longer. You are mine now, as indeed you ever were, but now really and truly and only—only mine. Look, look, Zophée, I have this to give you—see! I stood by him and took this from his pillow. I saved it from being the booty of the Cossacks; and, Zophée, before Heaven, I vow in sacred and solemn oath, I vow it, I saw him—die!"

"Gilbert, Gilbert," her voice came breaking in then upon his words, wistful, incredulous, full of wonder, full of strange fears and dismay. "Gilbert," and her fingers trembled violently as they closed round the gold-framed medallion he had placed quietly in her hand—"Gilbert, speak to me; I do not seem to hear you; speak again. What is this? My God! tell me quickly, quickly, tell me, for I do not understand."

And then he told her, drawing her drooping head to rest on his strong shoulder as he spoke; told her of his long journeying, of his weary search, of his bitter failure, and of all his deep despair; and then of that strange night on the far-off steppes amidst the snows of Cis-Caucasia—of the storm and the post-house; and of the pilgrim who came to fall down upon the threshold of the door. Of all he told her—of the long, quiet watch of that weird-like night, of the words that had fallen from the pilgrim's lips, of the names he had uttered, of the places of which he spoke; and, finally, of the break of that snowy morning, of the finding of the portrait, of the agony of his own tempted soul, of the coming of the Cossack vultures, and of the timely rescue by the kind, strong hand of—Death.

And she listened, resting quietly, her hands clasped firmly in his, her eyes wandering sometimes away toward the golden horizon of the morning, but drooping often, weighed down with quick-springing tears.

For there was much to pain her in his long narration; much to call forth whispered words of pity and bitter sorrow for the fate of the wandering lost one, and for this last crushing blow that must fall yet on his father's bruised heart.

Over Mettiäi's miserable end, and at the thought of her beloved guardian, old Vododski, and of the soul-piercing bereavement that had come upon him, Zophée wept softly again and again.

And yet the happiness was intense and deep of these two, as they sat together, and talked low and quietly, and the morning light grew above their heads. And, as we leave them—with that sunshine flooding gloriously around them, and all the tumult and strong suffering that had been woven into their life's romance becoming quickly a memory and gliding into the past—the lines of a French writer recur to our minds, and we stop, just realizing—"Que l'amour aussi a son aurore, quand la nuit est passée, et le soleil du bonheur se lève; mais il est plus facile à d'écrire ses tempêtes, ses souffrances, et ses tumultes, que de parler de ses jours de calme parfait."

THE END.