

and rode away, followed by his cortege of gentlemen.

Raoul, surprised by the sudden termination of his adventure, was about to thank the unknown lady, but she stopped him with a gesture.

"Monsieur," she said, haughtily, "I know your name and address; I will let you know when I have need of you."

Sentinel motionless upon his horse, Sforzi watched for some time the course of the heavy vehicle. He remarked that several pages attended at the door, and that it was accompanied by a considerable escort of gentlemen. It was not until the carriage passed out of his sight that he pursued his way.

"Who can this woman be?" he asked himself. How beautifully her blonde hair and blue eyes harmonized with the brilliant whiteness of her complexion—what audacity and nobleness upon her brow!—what fire in her glances! Everything about her indicated illustrious origin! Shall I see her again?—will she remember me?"

During the remainder of his ride, the chevalier thought of nothing but of the unknown. On reaching the Stag's Head he perceived De Maurevert impatiently awaiting on the threshold of the hostelry.

"Well," cried the captain, "has the king complimented you on your good looks?" Sforzi took the giant by the arm, and drawing him into the room, related to him all that he had done during the morning.

"Thousand legions of devils!" exclaimed De Maurevert; "this is a pitiful beginning! To start by making enemies of Messieurs de Joyeuse and d'Epemon leaves you no chance! The meeting with the handsome blonde companion to a certain degree, it is true. There are few women in Paris who possess a coach, this must be some high lady. You must contrive to employ your handsome dress to good purpose before it becomes faded! Who knows!—from the moment the king advised you to use Castro soap, and authorized you to apply to his groom of the laundry, there is no doubt he was pleased with you. We shall see!—we shall see!"

De Maurevert was going on in this fashion, when, on hearing a modest tapping at the door, he interrupted himself to bid the person knocking for admittance come in. The landlord of the Stag's Head presented himself.

"Monsieur," he said, addressing Raoul, "here is a letter, brought by a servant, with instructions that it was to be given into your own hands."

The chevalier broke the seal, and after running his eyes over the contents of the missive, remarked:

"It is from the mistress of Phœbus, and informs me that she will receive me this afternoon at her house, at two o'clock."

"By Cupid, I'm delighted to hear it!" cried De Maurevert. "By the way, does this lady mention in her letter 'ho gratitude she owes you?'"

"Certainly she does."

"That's all right, then. Nothing could be better—I mean more promising." Raoul's thoughts had wandered, and his mind was filled with the remembrance of Diane. So deeply was he plunged in reverie, as for some time to be unconscious of the fact of the captain still continuing to address him. At length De Maurevert's voice aroused him with a start.

"My dear friend," cried the captain, "the anticipation of this rendez-vous appears to have a decidedly strange effect on you!"

"What rendez-vous, captain?" asked Raoul, absently.

"Well, that is an amusing question!" cried De Maurevert. "What!—has your mind been wandering so far in the fields of imagination that you have forgotten your appointment for two o'clock this afternoon?"

"I really had for the moment forgotten it," replied Raoul.

"Forgotten it!—and here have I been predicting the most brilliant results from your making violent love to the old mistress of Phœbus, who is evidently deeply smitten with you. Why, my dear Raoul, you have got here a splendid chance of making your fortune—if you will only follow my directions."

"My dear captain," replied Sforzi, smiling, "I am afraid you waste your time with me. I love mademoiselle d'Erlange with all the strength of my soul, but if ever I were so wild as to prove false to my sworn faith, it would certainly be without any thought of reaping advantage from my inconstancy."

"By the charms of the noble lady Venus!" cried De Maurevert, with a disappointed air, "I should never have expected, dear companion, so much ingratitude and simplicity on your part! Why, if such are your sentiments, have you given me your note of hand for five hundred crowns? Are you ignorant of the fact that nearly all the great lords at Court reap both honor and profit from the extravagance of women? Do you wish to affect singularity by such savage ways of living?"

"Captain," replied Sforzi, gravely, "you will infinitely oblige me by not continuing this discussion. I have the misfortune to be very stubbornly wedded to my opinion."

De Maurevert shrugged his shoulders with an air of vexation, and remained silent. However, ten minutes before the clock struck the hour appointed by the late mistress of Phœbus for receiving the chevalier, the captain went to him and said to him affably:

hastily arranged his dress and departed, promising the captain to return to supper.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A REPENTANT MADAME.

Raoul speedily reached the house inhabited by the late mistress of the spangle, a solitary looking building, half hidden by the trees of a vast garden, and enclosed on all sides by high walls, presenting a severe and gloomy aspect.

At the first stroke of the knocker, the door was opened—the visitor was evidently expected. It was an old man-servant who received and conducted the chevalier up a flight of steps into the interior of the house, on reaching which he threw open a pair of large folding-doors and announced:

"Monsieur le Chevalier Sforzi."

The mistress of the house was seated in a large arm-chair. She rose, bowed to the chevalier and motioned him to be seated.

So greatly was the light which entered the room, intercepted by trees growing against the windows, that at first Raoul was unable to distinguish the surrounding objects. It was not until his eyes had grown accustomed to the half-light of the room that he was able to recognize the fact that he was in an oratory.

A large crucifix, exquisitely carved, was supported against the wall by a group of angels, and a massive prie-dieu and two arm-chairs composed the entire furniture of this sombre retreat.

As to the unknown lady, she presented in face and bearing the stamp of a melancholy grace and distinction, so remarkable as to make him at once feel for her a tender and respectful friendship.

She was incontestably beautiful; but the air of gentle and resigned sorrow exhibited in her features, instead of awaking admiration, evoked the beholder's sympathy.

"Monsieur Sforzi," she said, in a melodious voice, "if I hesitated before receiving you, do not accuse me of ingratitude. I live so completely out of the world, in such absolute retirement, that to give access to a stranger constitutes an important event in my existence. I beg you now to accept my thanks for the protection you so bravely and generously afforded me."

"Madame," replied Raoul, "I should be sorry if you were to attribute to mere curiosity a question I ask permission to address to you. The attack to which you were nearly falling a victim does not appear to me to have been made by chance. I attribute it to the hate or vengeance of some person. Do you not intend to take precautions against a renewal of the attempt against your life?"

"I thank you, chevalier, for this mark of interest. Yes, I have powerful enemies, eager for my destruction. As to taking my precautions against their designs, I have no intention of doing so; my life is in the keeping of heaven. Blessed will be the day when in its infinite mercy and goodness, it deigns to relieve me of my earthly burden."

These words deeply affected the chevalier. "When one believes in heaven, madame," he said, "one cannot despair on earth."

"Alas, chevalier!" replied the lady, with a sigh, "when memory serves but to call up remorse, nothing can assuage its bitterness."

"Remorse! Applied to yourself, madame, the word, it seems to me, can have no real application."

"You are mistaken, monsieur. It is remorse which is killing me."

The speaker burst into tears. "Monsieur," suddenly continued the lady, checking her sorrow, "I am called mademoiselle d'Assy."

Raoul bowed politely; but the name given him by the lady conveyed no information to his mind.

"What, monsieur?" she cried—"do you not turn your looks from me with horror? Ah, you treat me with too much generosity and indulgence."

"Madame," replied Raoul, more and more astonished, "you would confess to having committed some crime, but I cannot believe it of you. I recognize in you signs of goodness and virtue in which I cannot be mistaken. You are, I am sure, worthy of all respect and homage."

Mademoiselle d'Assy raised her eyes towards the crucifix suspended to the wall, and cried in a fervent tone:

"He ven be thanked that has willed to preserve my name from the ignominious celebrity it deserves!—Heaven be thanked!"

In spite of his strongly-excited curiosity, Raoul remained silent, while Mademoiselle d'Assy was absorbed in pious contemplation.

At that moment the door opened, and a charming little girl, about five years of age, with blonde curling hair, burst joyously into the oratory and clambered on to Mademoiselle d'Assy's knees, and throw her arms about the lady's neck.

"You promised me not to cry any more, mamma!" said the child. "You have not kept your promise. Why do you cry?"

Mademoiselle d'Assy smiled at the child through her tears and kissed her passionately. Sforzi looked at the child with as much astonishment as admiration. The face of Mademoiselle d'Assy's child called up a vague recollection, reminding him confusedly of the likeness of some one he had previously seen. This indecision of the chevalier's did not escape the attention of Mademoiselle d'Assy. "Monsieur," she asked abruptly, "do you know his Majesty the King of France?"

Raoul could not repress an exclamation of surprise. The child, presented, considering her age, an extraordinary resemblance to Henry III.

"Do you now understand my remorse, Monsieur Sforzi?—I was betrayed, my innocence abused—the wickedest means were employed to make me fall into the abyss. My crime was not in my fall. It was in the love that followed it—love, which I still feel for the author of my dishonor. May the confession I at this moment make of my sin serve for my atonement."

"Madame!" replied Raoul, deeply touched, "your humility raises you in my eyes—where you are worthy of all admiration and respect! I can now explain the crime to which you were so nearly falling a victim. Your beauty, your love, your virtue, have given umbrage to Mademoiselle de Joyeuse and d'Epemon. Have I not guessed aright?"

While the chevalier was speaking, mademoiselle had fallen into deep meditation. At the name of d'Epemon she hastily raised her head, and replied in a tone of alarm:

"He has sworn to kill me!"

"And me also, madame," replied Raoul, with a sad smile.

Mademoiselle d'Assy placed her child upon a velvet cushion at her feet, and said to her:

"Place your head upon my knees, Henriette, and remain quiet. I want to talk with this gentleman."

"I will go to sleep then, mamma," replied the child, kissing her mother's hand.

She kept her word; for her head had hardly rested on her mother's knees before she closed her eyes, and sank into a tranquil slumber.

Mademoiselle d'Assy then continued the conversation.

"Monsieur Sforzi," she said, "we have met but twice, and the first time you saved my life; the second, you gave me the ineffable pleasure of which I have so long been deprived, of speaking of him! Like all unhappy persons, I am superstitious. It seems to me that your visit will be fortunate to me—that heaven itself has guided you upon my path. You and I, monsieur, have a common bond of misfortune! Have you a sister, chevalier?"

"Alas! madame, I have no family."

"If the fault which I have committed does not render me an object of abhorrence in your sight," continued Mademoiselle d'Assy, bowing her head—"if you believe, chevalier, that a creature who has descended so low may have preserved some little goodness of heart—accept me for a sister!"

Sforzi, by a spontaneous movement, rose from his chair and bent his knee before this unfortunate royal victim.

"Madame," he cried, respectfully kissing her hand, "I cannot tell you how much joy your offer gives me. I will justify your confidence by my devotion and gratitude."

"Monsieur Sforzi," said Mademoiselle d'Assy, "since you have so generously accepted the offer of my friendship, I owe you certain explanations, certain confidences. If I have loved the king, believe me it was not only because he was, at that time, the most brilliant gentleman of his kingdom: it was, on the contrary, his weakness which attached me to him. I thought it would be possible, if not to ennoble, at least to excuse my fault, by saving his majesty from the pernicious counsels of the courtiers who surrounded him. Having once entered on the struggle, I ought to have made any sacrifice to continue my influence over him. But it is now too late."

"D'Epemon controls him, and d'Epemon is not a man to give up his prey. I admit that, in affairs of State, he has high qualities. His subtlety, his tenacity, the straightforwardness of his judgment, his foresight, his ready and bold expedients, raise him far above all the men about him. At the Court he is a giant in the midst of dwarfs. To have such a man for an enemy is to play a dangerous game. He turns to his own profit the boundless influence he possesses over the king, but I admit that he would never sacrifice to his own interests those of his master, for whom he feels an unutterable attachment. If Henry were to lose his crown to-morrow, if all his servants turned traitors or perjurers, Monsieur d'Epemon would be the only one who would remain faithful to him. It is an inexplicable mystery of the human heart."

In the course of the conversation, which was continued for a considerable length of time, Raoul, at the pressing request of Mademoiselle d'Assy, related the affairs of his past life, the circumstances of his love for Diane, and his anxieties on account of her safety.

"Ah, chevalier," she replied, sadly, "in spite of the distress you are enduring from the uncertainty you are left in as to the fate of your beloved Diane, how much less you have to complain of than myself, how preferable your lot is to mine! It is better a hundred times to suffer persecution from the wicked than wane under the weight of remorse! The desperate position of Mademoiselle d'Erlange dictates your line of conduct. You must, notwithstanding the enmity of d'Epemon and De Joyeuse, see his majesty again. His majesty must listen to you, and render you justice. Do you know no one, chevalier, who can aid you to gain renewed access to the king? Have you no powerful friend in credit with Queen Catherine? The king still fears his mother, and Catherine, alarmed at the daily increasing ascendancy of the Duc d'Epemon, is secretly endeavoring to undermine the favorite's credit. Catherine, as I have too well learned by experience, is a resolute woman, who would shrink from no means for the attainment of her ends. If you could secure her support—out of hatred

for d'Epemon she took your case in hand, you would have a great chance of success."

"Alas, mademoiselle!" replied Raoul, "I am alone and isolated in my weakness! In all Paris I can count but one friend, and even this one enjoys but little credit. Yet now I think of it—oh, no," he added, "that is a mere dream."

"You are thinking of some other friend?"

"This morning," answered the chevalier, "while I was quarrelling with Monsieur Favotte, a lady in a carriage—a lady of quite like beauty, proud bearing, and biting and ironical tone of voice—stopped her carriage, and boldly took my part. She treated the Duc d'Epemon not only with hauteur but with indescribable disdain. She told him to his face that she was his enemy, and that she made my cause her own, and as she drove away she assured me of her protection. But to count on such a promise would be folly."

"Why so, chevalier?—On the contrary—did you remark the livery of this lady's servants?"

"No! I only observed that her suite was numerous."

"It must be she," said Mademoiselle d'Assy, half to herself.

"Do you know this lady?" inquired Raoul, eagerly.

"I am not sure, chevalier. Your description answers perfectly to one of the highest ladies in the kingdom. If I am not mistaken in my supposition, be assured that no accident could have served you better. The boldness of this woman shrinks from nothing—not even before the royal authority! If, as she has declared, she makes your cause her own, I do not despair of your triumph. Still I must warn you, Monsieur Sforzi, that in spite of the deep interest with which the unmerited misfortunes of your Diane have inspired me, I cannot join my efforts with those of your powerful protectrice."

"The tenacious and implacable hatred which this woman bears towards the king, the criminal project which she meditates and openly avows, forbid me to have any dealings with her.—One last word, chevalier, I do not for an instant doubt the nobility and loyalty of your character. I am sure you are incapable of committing a shameful action, and yet I tremble to think of the dangerous ally with whom you are about to unite yourself. Be on your guard—this woman is endowed with irresistible powers of seduction. I repeat, be on your guard."

Singularly interested by what Mademoiselle d'Assy had told him, the chevalier was reflecting how he might gain from her complete intelligence as to the character of this mysterious protectrice, when the waking of little Henriette put an end to the conversation.

"Dear mamma," cried the child, kissing her mother, "I have had such a beautiful dream."

"What have you dreamed, my darling?" asked her mother.

"I dreamed that I was at the Louvre, in a room all gilded. The king held me on his knees, called me his child, and offered me oranges and hyacinths. When I am grown up you will take me to Court—will you not, mamma?"

"Never! never!" exclaimed Mademoiselle d'Assy, with an indelible impression of terror in her voice, and pressing her daughter almost convulsively to her bosom.

Sforzi rose and took his leave.

"Monsieur Sforzi," said Mademoiselle d'Assy, "I hope to see you again soon. Meanwhile, I shall pray for my beloved sister Diane d'Erlange."

Raoul was passing out of the oratory when Mademoiselle d'Assy called him back.

"Chevalier," she said, "man's courage is nothing without the support of heaven. Accept, I beg, this reliquary; it contains a piece of the holy cross. I shall be less uneasy, knowing that in the midst of dangers you are under the protection of this relic."

To refuse such a present, offered in such a manner, was impossible. Raoul accepted it, and mademoiselle took from her neck a chain of gold and transferred it to his.

Half an hour later he reached the Stag's Head.

(To be continued.)

AN ISLAND DYING UP.

The Island of Santa Cruz is drying up. This gem of the West Indian Seas was a garden of freshness, beauty and fertility twenty years ago; it was covered with woods, trees abound everywhere, and rains were profuse and frequent. One fourth of the island has now become an utter desert. Forests and trees have been cut away, rain-falls have ceased, and the process of desiccation beginning at one end of the island, has advanced gradually and irresistibly upon the land, till for seven miles it has become dry and barren as the sea shore, houses and plantations have been abandoned, and the advance of desiccation is watched by the people, wholly unable to prevent, but knowing almost to a certainty the time when their own habitations, their gardens and fresh fields, will be part of the waste. Indeed, the whole island seems doomed to become a desert. This sad result is believed to be owing entirely to the destruction of the trees upon the island some years ago.

The death of John Stuart Mill brings up the anecdote of the Philadelphia publisher, who advertised certain new books as follows: "Mill on Political Economy," "Ditto on the Flows."