

"Now see," said Xavier, his good-humored voice tinged with bitterness, "we generally say to ourselves and others, when we are throwing money right and left, that 'we are leading a jolly life.' But it is false. We do not get the worth of our money. We eat highly spiced food and drink wines that ruin our digestion. The doctors live at our expense. Our horses do not always come in first on the turf. The cards deceive us. We pass our nights talking nonsense or dealing out bits of pasteboard. The jewellers laugh at us. At thirty we have no fortune, no horses, no illusions. One chance remains to us. Worn out and *blasé*, we marry some young girl who does not understand us, and would despise us if she could know our past life. Too often even this is only a means of retrieving our fortunes, that we may pursue the same career. In a few months we begin to neglect our wife, and there is one more unhappy woman added to the long list. For my part, I followed the example of those savages in some part of Oceanica. They have idols to whom no sacrifice is too costly. They load them with gifts, sending up ardent prayers all the while; but if it happens that the idols do not grant the desires of their worshippers, if they receive their offerings without repaying them in pleasure, martial glory, or happiness, the savages snatch them from the altar, spit upon them, insult them, trample them under foot, and end by setting fire to them or throwing them into the sea. I have done likewise. My idols deceived me. I laughed them to scorn and broke them."

"And are you happy now?" said Benedict.

"Perfectly," said Xavier. "I have sleep, health, good temper. I take an interest in a hundred things that I never knew the value of before. I was a worthless spendthrift, now I am good for something."

"But who worked this miracle?"