

and ponder," cried my guardian, thinking to enlighten the assembly by this piece of drunken gravity.

"True!" said the secretary to the Embassy.

"True!" exclaimed the priest, each meaning quite differently.

A doctrinaire, who escaped being elected by a bare hundred and fifty votes out of a hundred and fifty-five, rose next.

"Gentlemen," said he, "this phenomenal manifestation of the intellectual nature is one of the most strongly marked instances of an exception to the normal condition of things, the rules which society obeys. The decision, therefore, on an abnormal case should be an extemporaneous effort of the conscience, a sudden conception, a delicate discrimination of the inner consciousness, not unlike the flashes of insight that constitute perception in matters of taste. . . . Let us put it to the vote."

"Yes, let us put it to the vote," cried the rest of the party.

Each was provided with two billiard-balls—one white, the other red. White, the color of virginity, was to proscribe marriage; red to count in favor of it. My scruples prevented me from voting. My friends being seventeen in number, nine made a decisive majority. We grew excited and curious as each dropped his ball into the narrow-mouthed wicker basket, which holds the numbered balls when players draw for their places at pool, for there was a certain novelty in this process of voting by ballot on a nice point of conduct. When the basket was turned out there were nine white balls. To me this did not come as a surprise; but it occurred to me to count up the young men of my own age among this Court of Appeal. There were exactly nine of these casuists; one thought had been in all their minds.

"Aha!" I said to myself, "there was a unanimous feeling against the marriage in their minds, and a no less unanimous verdict in favor of it among the rest! Here is a fix, and how am I to get out of it?"

"Where does the father-in-law live?" one of my school-fellows, less crafty than the rest, asked carelessly.