

sed through the various grades of clerical education with the most distinguished success, and, when permitted to become a public preacher, soon placed himself in the first rank by his learning and his eloquence. Young, handsome, and highly gifted, he became one of the most popular persons about the court, and hundreds who had forgotten to listen to the dictates of virtue in their own consciences, flocked to hear them from the beautiful lips of the young Abbe de Rance.

Enviably as it might appear, his position was, in fact, one of extreme danger. Endowed with strong passions, those universal concomitants of great talents, possessing a nature extremely susceptible, and a heart overflowing with warm affections—gifted, also, with a person of the noblest beauty, and a voice of the most winning sweetness, he was exposed to temptations which might easily have overcome a spirit far more ascetic than that of the young ecclesiastic. To heighten the perils of his career, his father died ere he attained his twenty-fifth year, and Armand de Rance found himself not only free from control, but also in possession of a large estate. It was at that period of his life, when pleasure intruded itself within a heart formerly devoted to wisdom—that he first began to feel the weight of his sacred vows. His thirst for fame had been slacked in the stream of court favour, and the allurements of society now offered themselves to him at the moment when his heart turned in weakness from the empty honours he had achieved.—But the morals of the time were not such as to compel him to the practice of much penance and self-denial. His holy office was but a slight barrier to his passions, and however the cowl might conceal, it certainly did not prevent their indulgence. Living in the daily observation of the most flagitious scenes, and surrounded by those whose rank only served to emblazon their vices, the Abbe de Rance soon became as well known for his reckless dissipation as for his talents, and while he still continued to utter the most eloquent ex-

hortations from the pulpit, his daily conduct evinced how little effect the lessons of virtue had produced on his own heart. Passionately devoted to the chase, he would frequently spend several hours in hunting, and then, travelling with all speed some ten or fifteen leagues, to reach the spot where his duties called him, he would sustain a disputation in the Sorbonne, or deliver a sermon to the people with as much tranquility as if he had just issued from his closet. His fine powers of conversation rendered him so desirable a companion, that he was constantly engaged in some wild frolic, and, listening only to the dictates of his unbridled passions, he was ever foremost in scenes of riot and excess.

Among the beautiful women who composed the brilliant circle of Versailles, the Duchess of Montbazou was pre-eminent in loveliness. Her dazzling complexion, so rare a charm in the native of a sunny clime, her splendid eyes, her fine hair, her superb figure, the symmetry of her delicate hands and feet, were claims to admiration not likely to be overlooked in so voluptuous a society, and Adele de Montbazou had listened to the voice of adulation, until its music had become wearisome to her ear. Moving in the gayest round of fashion, breathing an atmosphere of enjoyment, and surrounded by all that a mere votary of pleasure could desire, she had already begun to feel the satiety which ever waits upon indulgence, when she accidentally encountered, at a masque, the gifted Abbe de Rance.—The charms of his brilliant wit, and the musical tones in which he uttered those sparkling *bon mots* which form the zest of conversation, attracted her attention, before she was aware of the personal beauty hidden beneath his mask and domino. Pleased with the mystery of the affair, the romance of Armand's nature was awakened, and he determined to win her heart by the magic of intellect alone, ere he discovered to her the features of her unknown admirer. They met frequently at the many entertainments of the court, but by avoiding her near presence in general society, he