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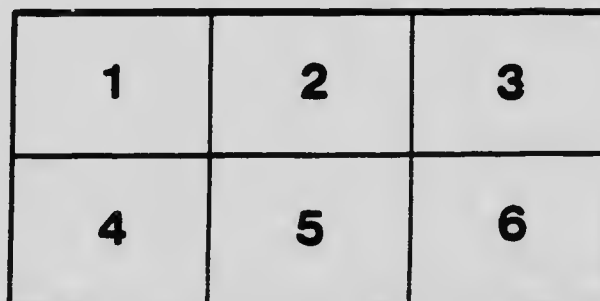
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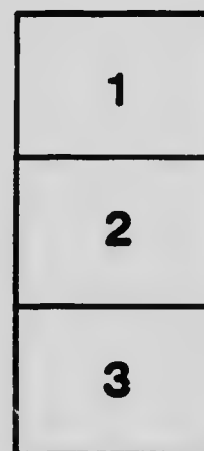
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EVE TRIUMPHANT

FROM THE FRENCH OF
PIERRE DE COULEVAIN

BY
ALYS HALLARD

TORONTO
McCLELLAND AND GOODCHILD
LIMITED
1912

PQ2611

A9

E32

1712

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BY
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THIS brilliant story was first brought into print in an English version in 1902, at which time it secured from reviewers and from cultivated readers of high-class fiction on both sides of the Atlantic, very favourable attention. The novel had, before being translated, gained the much-coveted title of being crowned by the French Academy. Since 1902, the works of the clever woman who writes under the name of Pierre de Coulevain have secured an extended appreciation from English-speaking readers. Her stories are recognised as not only graphic and trustworthy pictures of social conditions in France, but as typical of human nature throughout the civilised world. *Eve Triumphant* presents a study of international relations. The portrayal of the characters—French, Italian, and American—is exceedingly vivid. While the story may be described as a study of social problems, it is characterised by a delicacy of touch and a sense of humour which make it thoroughly readable.

NEW YORK, April, 1912.

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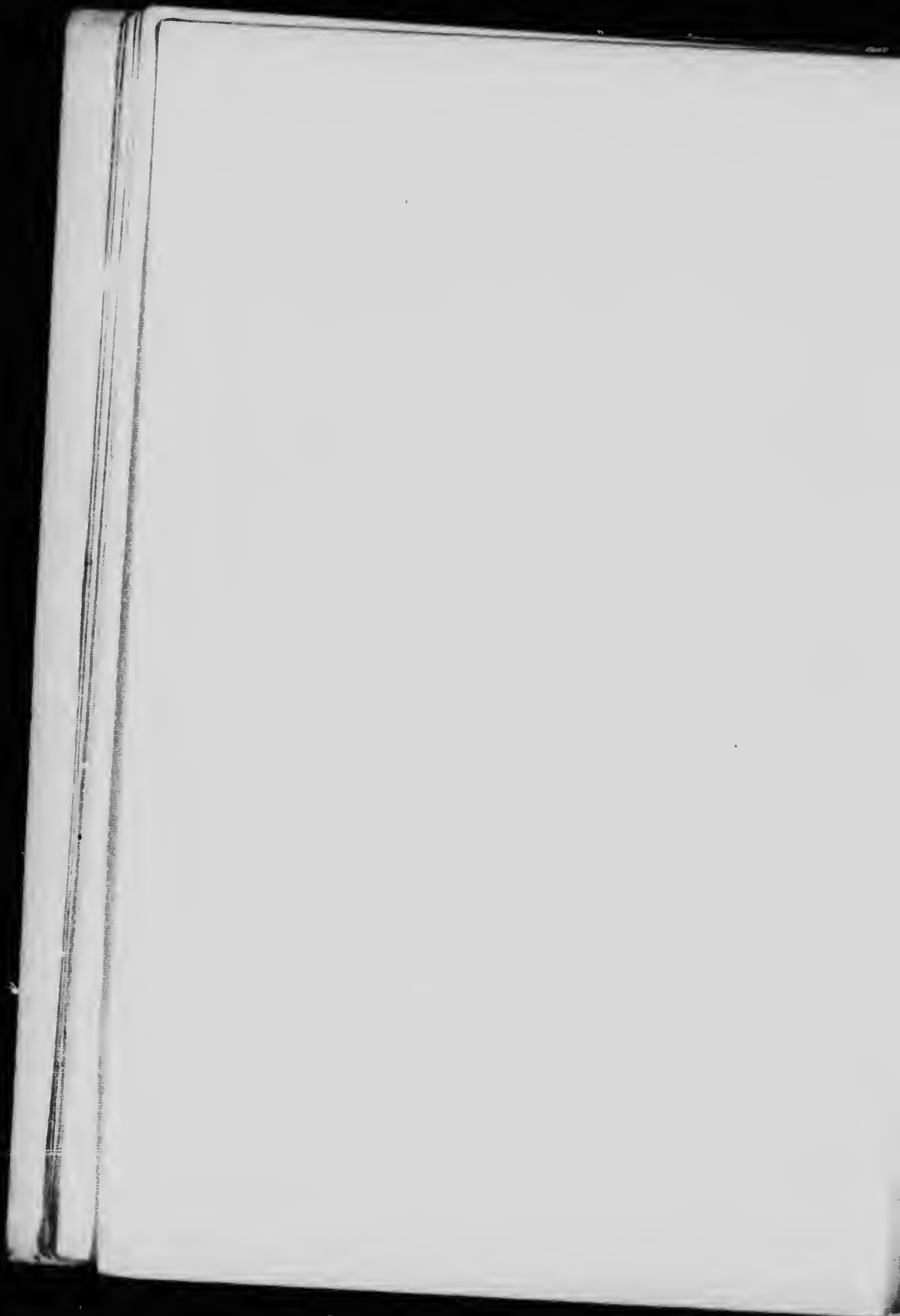
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Eve Triumphant

CHAPTER I

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

THERE is scarcely a society woman in America who has not some artistic hobby or some specialty in matters of elegance. One has a weakness for bronzes or ivories, another for tapestries or quaint old silks; some are noted for their china and silver, and others for their jewellery or lace.

Nearly all are enthusiastic collectors who come to France and despoil the Old World relentlessly of its relics. Thanks to these women, the art treasures of America are increasing with the most fabulous rapidity, and the vile dollar is constantly being transformed into rare and valuable objects.

Helen Ronald, the wife of one of the future celebrities of the United States, was considered an authority on matters of house appointments and decorations. She flattered herself that she could, if occasion should ever require it, make

Eve Triumphant

her fortune by offering her services in questions of taste to *parvenus*. Her house in New York was situated in that part of Fifth Avenue in which are the residences of the great millionaires. It looked out on Central Park, with its velvety lawns and stately trees. By the side of the Gould and Vanderbilt mansions it appeared somewhat small and unpretentious, but it was none the less a marvel of good taste and comfort.

Helen was always busy with her home, touching it up here and there like some work of art, altering the furniture in one room, and adding a picture or some ornament in another. She was delighted to show any one over it from garret to cellar, but the room in which she took the greatest pride, and upon which she had expended all the wealth of her feminine genius, was her own dressing-room. Some people might have considered it too luxurious-looking, but an artist would have delighted in it. The walls were covered with a greyish-blue shot brocade, and the floor with one of those Morris carpets which appear to be strewn with real flowers. The panels, picture-frames, and furniture were all of polished whitewood, as smooth and warm-looking as ivory, inlaid with salamanders, exotic birds and butterflies with variegated wings, the colours of which harmonised with the blue, pink, and yellow silks of the curtains, cushions, and chairs.

Against this background of soft neutral tint

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were hung water-colour pictures by the first masters, while on the mantel-shelf old-fashioned bowls and odd-shaped vases of Dresden china stood out in relief. Upon the dressing-table, with its large mirror, were laid out all the toilet accessories in gold, silver, and light tortoise-shell, the toilet-cover itself being of old Venetian point.

If by any possibility some European had crossed the threshold of this sanctuary, he would most certainly, at the first glance, have fancied himself in the boudoir of some celebrated Parisian *demi-mondaine*; but, provided he were endowed with that sixth sense which penetrates people and things like the Röntgen rays, he would quickly have recognised underneath all this suspicious-looking luxury and refinement the pure atmosphere and that unmistakable something which reveals a lady.

Mrs. Ronald was just the woman that a colourist would have placed in this brilliant and ultra-modern scene. It needed her, with her graceful figure, always exquisitely dressed even when in bedroom attire; her shapely head, with its fair hair glinting with all shades of gold; her delicate white skin; her large, soft eyes with the winning smile in them, and her beautiful clear-cut lips showing the perfect teeth. It needed just that head, which gave an impression of *blondeur* and light; that face of a charmer, a coquettish woman, ennobled as it was by the

pure, wide forehead, indicating intelligence and intellectual power.

One evening towards the end of March, Helen was dressing for the opera. Her gown was of a very soft shade of yellow, cut low at the neck, and showing to perfection her beautiful shoulders. Seated in front of her mirror, she was giving the last touches to her attire. Just as she was curling some stray locks for the second time, another figure, that of a tall man with black hair and blue eyes, was suddenly reflected in the glass. It was Mr. Ronald, who had entered the room by the door opposite.

"Ah, Henry!" exclaimed his young wife, stopping short in her curling operations, "you are late, are you not?"

"Yes, I have had a very busy afternoon."

They shook hands with each other in an affectionate way, and then the new comer threw himself into a rocking-chair which appeared to be his special property, and which was placed by the dressing-table, with its back to the light.

"Well, dearest, have you enjoyed yourself to-day?" he asked, in the kindest tone.

"Pretty well! Mrs. Barclay's luncheon was very brilliant and very lively. Quite a success!"

"Did you abuse us poor men?"

"We did not talk about you at all."

"That's worse," remarked Mr. Ronald, smiling.

"We were discussing a lot of interesting

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things. European women would never imagine that a ladies' luncheon party could be so lively."

"They have not yet learned to do without us."

"So much the worse for them," retorted Helen, with an expression that toned down the impertinence of her remark.

"We had a capital meeting for the inauguration of our Congress."

"Ah!"

"Rauk, of Boston, made a remarkable speech. He went through all the discoveries of modern chemistry, and gave us an idea of those which the future is reserving for us; and then he spoke of the rôle and the mission of men of science. I never heard anything so masterly."

Helen had been quietly following the thread of her own thoughts.

"Only fancy!" she said; "at Mrs. Barclay's luncheon there was Bohemian glass on the table cut according to her own designs, and there were serviettes and doilies embroidered by Syrian women in Constantinople."

"Were they pretty?"

"Yes, very original. Byzantine, but too rich-looking."

"Do you know, I am to speak at the Congress next week," said Mr. Ronald, going back in his turn to the subject which interested him. "I intend letting philosophers and literary men know what I think of them."

"But what have they done to you?"

"To me, personally, nothing, but their ignorance exasperates me. They cannot see that science is Nature and that Nature is science itself. They affect to treat it with contempt and have even announced its failure. They accuse it of having increased the ills of mankind. They are delighted when scientific men meet with any check, and they ridicule our researches and mistakes. It is perfectly idiotic! They ought, on the contrary, to take an interest in such work; to make known the discoveries, and to help in establishing the truth. They would, in this way, make the present evolution less painful, for all evolution is painful. There will be a fine turmoil one of these days, when we prove to them, precious idealists as they are, that love is nothing more than a fluid like ether, for instance, or light or electricity."

Helen, who was busy putting her little tortoise-shell comb, set with diamonds, in her hair, had only been listening in an absent-minded way hitherto. The last words, however, roused her, and she stopped short in her occupation, still holding her arms up in her utter amazement.

"What! love a fluid like ether or light!" she repeated with a comic expression of horror.

"You are joking!"

"Not at all."

"Ah, then poets are quite right in detesting science! Not long ago it informed us that kisses were the means of transmitting infectious

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germs, and now it wants to proclaim the fact that love is a fluid! Why not a microbe, pray, while it is about it?"

"Because it is a fluid," replied the scientist, imperturbably; "a fluid which can be analysed, and perhaps even registered, and which moves along, touching an inactive cell here, an unsuspected fibre there, or a mute chord in order to produce in the individual the necessary effects."

"And what about free will?"

"Free will! Men who are vain enough to believe in that have never come to our laboratories. We are God's creatures entirely—His collaborators. We are not here on this earth to win for ourselves some paradise, but to continue His work—the work of the whole universe."

"Love a fluid!" repeated Helen, who had not yet recovered from her bewilderment. "Anyhow, I hope *you* will not be the one to demonstrate that: I should not care to be the wife of the man who will give his name to that abominable discovery."

"Why abominable? We are beginning now to understand the rôle of the most apparently insignificant creatures. Thanks to electricity, we shall be able to launch out, in the study of these great fluids, our conducting wires, the most powerful of which is love. Truth is more beautiful than fables. There will be some fine effects in all this for our novelists and dramatists, and it is science which thus opens out to them a

new and inexhaustible source of emotions and sentiments. What have all your philosophers and poets done for humanity? They have lured it on with Utopias, lulled it with false hopes, put an empty feeding-bottle to its lips. And this was all necessary, otherwise it would not have been so. But the rôle of men of science will become greater and greater. They will improve and beautify the human body, and will prolong life. They will discover new means of locomotion, so that, thanks to them, in the years to come it will be said: 'Man is a being who has walked!' They will do still more, these men of science who are accused of impiety,—they will reveal the true God to humanity, and will bring man purified, ennobled, and with true faith, to the feet of his Maker."

The expression of Helen's face would have proved clearly to any observer that she had not followed her husband in his intellectual ascension, but had left him on the road. This was often the case.

"Henry," she began, with a pretty expression of gravity, as she polished up the stones in her rings with a fine cambric handkerchief. "I feel inclined to start a league against luxury. That is one form of intemperance, after all."

"What do you say?" asked the poor savant in a bewildered way, as though he had been suddenly roused from a dream.

"That I should like to start a league against luxury, and bring simplicity into fashion."

"It would be rather original—that, coming from you," said Mr. Ronald, with a smile.

"Seriously, though, if we do not have a reaction, we shall sink hopelessly into extravagance and bad taste—if, indeed, we have not arrived there already. This display of wealth is beginning to sicken me, and sometimes I wish I could live in a cottage furnished with only the most necessary things, and wear plain linen and stuff dresses."

Mr. Ronald looked at his wife with an expression of mock alarm.

"A cottage, plain linen, and stuff dresses! You frighten me, my love. You must be ill to have such fancies."

"Oh, you can laugh at me if you like; but really and truly I feel tired, just like any one who has been gazing at something very bright for too long a time; I want to see old things—ugly things, even; and, above all, to get out of this mad whirlpool and breathe freely! Oh, I am so weary—wearied to death!" she said, putting on a languid expression which was very becoming to her. "Europe will do us both good, for you are overworked, too."

"I—not at all!" protested Mr. Ronald. "I never felt better"; and then, bringing his rocking-chair to a standstill, he added, in a confused, half-timid way: "Helen, you will have to re-

lease me from my promise. It is absolutely impossible for me to leave America for the next few months."

So astonished was the young wife that she let the large pearl she was fastening into her ear fall to the ground.

"What!" she exclaimed, a flash of anger in her eyes, "you want me now to give up my trip to Europe?"

"No, dearest; I am not as selfish as that. And the proof is that on leaving my meeting I went and booked your passage for the 8th of April on the *Touraine*."

"Oh, Henry, how can you think of such a thing! We have never been separated all the nine years we have been married," and the young wife glanced affectionately at her husband.

"It will be hard on me, staying here," answered Mr. Ronald, "but what can I do? My assistant has had no holiday for an age, and if I do not send him into the country at once he will certainly be ill. Besides, I am just on the verge of a most important discovery, and I cannot interrupt my work. Then, too, there is Dora's wedding. As she has no father I am almost bound to represent him on this occasion."

"Dora's wedding! Do you think, then, that she intends to keep her word?"

"I hope so."

"Well, then, she is just trying to avoid doing

that. She wants to put off the litt' event until the autumn, and come with us to Europe."

"It would be abominable of her if she were to disappoint Jack a second time. His house and yacht are quite ready."

"Oh, well, if I am not greatly mistaken, yacht and house will have to wait some time yet for their mistress. You know Dora prides herself on the fact that she has never yet sacrificed her own will and pleasure for the sake of any one."

"Yes, as far as feminine selfishness is concerned, she certainly is supreme."

"Come now, Henry, you will not let me go alone to Europe!" began Mrs. Ronald once more.

"You will have Aunt Sophie and your brother."

"And you will not be jealous?" asked the young wife, with her coquettish smile.

"No; for I have absolute confidence in your love and your honour."

"You are quite right," answered Mrs. Ronald, in a decided tone. "It upsets all my arrangements, though," she continued. "I intended sending the servants away to the country and shutting up the house."

"Do so, by all means. I could not possibly live here without you, and my mother will take me in."

"Ah, I see you have made all your plans!" said Helen, slightly annoyed.

"Yes; so that you should have no trouble and no scruples."

"And won't your family criticise me? Your sister is always up in arms against the American women who leave their husbands, in order to go off and enjoy themselves in Europe."

"As long as I consider it right, it is no concern of any one else. Don't trouble yourself about that, dearest."

"Oh, if I did not really need a change, I would put the trip off until the autumn; but my nerves are in such a state."

"I am aware of that," remarked Mr. Ronald, with a smile.

"You men have no idea what it means to keep house in this country of liberty and freedom. European women are surprised that we should want to get rid of our housekeeping now and again. I should like to see them in our place! Oh, the luxury of eating dinners without having to discuss the menu first, and to sit down to table without fearing some exhibition of bad temper from one's cook in the form of a spoilt dish! And then, how delightful to be waited on by those nice maids in their white caps!—all this is what we enjoy most in Europe, and it is just what I need."

"Well, then, love, go and have a little rest and change. Get in a good store of health and gaiety and buy plenty of pretty things while you are about it. No plain linen and no stuff

dresses, though, for they would not suit you at all."

"You don't think so?" asked the young wife, looking at herself in the glass with a serious expression on her beautiful face.

"I am quite sure about it. You are a brilliant woman, and you must have silk, and laces, and jewellery."

Helen, who was never proof against a compliment, rewarded her husband for this one with a tender glance and a smile.

"And don't think any more about starting the league against luxury. Buy freely—our grandchildren will be able to make a proper selection later on. We have no right yet to think of simplicity and rest—we must acquire, work, and create for the future," he added, in a tone of pride.

Just at this moment there was a knock at the door of the dressing-room, and before the words "Come in" had been pronounced, a young girl arrayed in evening dress—one of those womanly-looking girls so distinctly American—made her appearance.

"Dora!" exclaimed Mrs. Ronald, turning to the newcomer, "why, I hope it is n't half-past seven."

"Oh, I don't know at all," replied Miss Carroll, with a little laugh. "I have just been fighting a great battle and winning a victory. My wedding is put off until the autumn, and

my mother and I are going to start with you for Europe."

"There, now, what did I tell you?" said Helen, glancing at her husband.

"I hope you are joking," remarked Henry Ronald, looking suddenly severe.

"No, Uncle dear. Mother has to take the Carlsbad waters, and I cannot let her go alone. Every one else would surely approve of my wanting to accompany her, but Jack actually disapproves. I have had the greatest difficulty to make him understand that my filial duty compels me once more to postpone making him happy," said Miss Carroll, in the ironical tone which she usually adopted.

"It is abominable! You have as little honour as you have heart."

Dora threw herself into an arm-chair.

"I am taking a seat, so that I may not be knocked down by all the compliments you are about to fling at me."

"Jack is most foolishly weak. He ought not to have yielded to this new caprice."

"Oh, he did not yield willingly, you can depend on it. We had a famous quarrel, and I was just on the point of throwing his ring at him. He saw that, and, rather than risk losing me altogether, he gave in, and agreed to what I wanted. He would rather marry Dody later than never—I quite understand that."

"I can't."

"I am sorry for you, then. Well," continued Miss Carroll, "afterwards I was very nice, and we made it all up, and I have brought him with me in the carriage. He is in the drawing-room now, probably pulling his moustache,—tame, but not quite appeased."

"And this is the way you American women trifle with a man's dignity and affection! Upon my word, you seem to imagine that he was created to be your puppet. You worry him with your unreasonableness, and torture him with your coquetry; and then, when you have made a fool of him, you suddenly leave him in the lurch, and he takes to drink in order to try to forget you."

"Bravo, Uncle!" interrupted Miss Carroll. "What a pity you did not go into the Church! You would most certainly have taken your place amongst the great preachers."

Henry Ronald's cheek flushed slightly.

"It is quite true," he continued; "you treat your watches with more respect than you do men's brains—those brains which were intended for such important work, and to which you owe everything. You have less compunction about getting them out of order than you would have about the works of your watch. You are much too selfish, and too independent. Take my word for it, it is neither the right of voting nor the higher education which will raise women to our level; it is self-denial and abnegation. And

shall I tell you something else? These are the qualities to which the European woman owes her charm and her superiority."

"Oh, indeed! do you really believe that?" asked Dora jeeringly. "If I were sure of it, I would soon begin to practice those virtues."

"It would be very difficult, for you are absolutely spoilt by having had too much liberty and happiness. Last autumn you postponed your marriage on the pretext of your health, when there was nothing the matter with you; this spring you make your mother's health the plea. If you don't love Jack well enough to marry him, why, for heaven's sake break off the engagement! Be straightforward—hang it all!"

"That is just what I am endeavouring to be, my dear Uncle. I do like Jack. I have never met any one I have liked better, and I do not want to give him up to any other woman. But this is how matters stand: I do not feel quite fit to be married. I must have a little tour in Europe first. I am going with the sole object of attaining to that degree of perfection which is necessary for the future happiness of Jack. If this is not a proof of love and straightforwardness, why, I don't know what is!" said Dora, with a seriousness which belied the mischievous expression of her eyes. "*A fiancée retour d'Europe!* Why, it's like *Bordeaux retour de l'Inde*. Joking apart, though," continued Miss Carroll, "I could never have resigned myself to

be married during your absence; I should have looked too much like a poor, forlorn orphan."

Helen began to laugh.

"Oh, you are really good, both of you! Here's Henry, who has just informed me that he cannot leave this summer; and one of the reasons he gives for not accompanying me is your wedding."

"What! Henry is n't going to Europe!" exclaimed Miss Carroll, her face suddenly brightening. "So much the better; we *shall* have some fun, then!"

"Thank you," remarked Mr. Ronald, in a dry tone. "I'll go and find Jack," he added, getting up, "and tell him he would do well to accompany you."

Dora sprang to her feet, and, with a bound, placed herself in front of her uncle.

"No, no, please!" she begged, holding him by the lapel of his coat. "That would be taking a mean revenge, and quite unworthy of a great man like you. I am very fond of you, and you know that very well indeed; but you are rather a wet blanket when we want to be frivolous, and I should like to enjoy my last few months of liberty. After that, I will come back and get into harness, and you will see I shall trot along steadily and without stumbling, side by side with Jack."

The idea of Dora trotting along steadily and without stumbling, side by side with Jack, brought a smile to the savant's lips. He could

not resist his niece's nonsense any more than the others could. She saw that he was half appeased and, to complete her victory, she put her arm round his neck.

"Now, be nice," she said coaxingly, accompanying him to the door; "go and pacify Jack, and try to get him in a good temper. Do it for Dody's sake," she added, giving him a hearty kiss, like a child.

"There, I've settled two of them!" she said, throwing herself into her uncle's rocking-chair. "Oh, dear, how hard life is!"

"It's Jack who might say that," remarked Mrs. Ronald, smiling. "You are treating him badly. I don't believe you intend ever to marry him."

"Oh, yes, I do; I'll marry him some day or other, but what am I to do? Marriage seems to me like a sort of noose, and I'm in no hurry at all to put my neck in it. I am quite sure that I shall never be as happy as I am now, so what is the use of being in a hurry?"

"If you really loved Jack you would not reason like that."

"Oh, I certainly don't feel for him anything like the love one reads about in French novels. I wonder if such a thing exists in reality? Anyhow, men in our country are too matter-of-fact to inspire us with it, and we are too busy to have any time to experience it."

Mrs. Ronald appeared to be considering the question.

"No," she said, at last, "I don't fancy that we are capable of *la grande passion*."

"So much the better, for women who are do only idiotic things. As for me, I am very fond of Jack, and my affection for him is strong enough to endure a lifetime; but for the last two years, ever since our engagement, we have seen each other nearly every day. I am too used to him now, and after five or six months of separation he will seem newer to me again, and have more effect on me. Men never know what is good for them."

"Oh, Dody, Dody!" exclaimed Helen, laughing, "you don't know what you are talking about."

"Oh, yes, I do, perfectly well, and '*Honi soit qui mal y pense*.' By the bye, I am very much astonished that Henry should send you to Europe alone. It is against the principles of the Ronald family!"

"Oh, he is so unselfish! It seems that he is just on the point of making some great discovery, and if I refused to leave him he would accompany me so that I should not be deprived of this trip. But I know him; all his thoughts would be in his laboratory and he would not enjoy anything. On the other hand, I really am tired and as nervous as I possibly can be; I feel that I am getting quite disagreeable, and, for this, Europe is the only cure."

"There's no doubt about that. We shall both

of us feel much better when we have spent a few thousand dollars on gimeraeks and finery, visited a few churches and museums, and lived five or six months in apartments more or less hideous and uncomfortable in the various hotels," remarked Miss Carroll, with her satirical sprightliness. "I am reckoning, though, on varying the programme a little. In the first place, we will take our bicycles with us so that we can go on excursions here and there; then your brother can take us to the theatres, the concert halls, the Moulin-Rouge, and to Loiset's. All my friends have been there. It is said to be the most shocking place in Paris, and I really need to be shocked!"

"It is not at all certain that Charley will consent to taking us to such places."

"Oh, well, we'll take him, then," replied the young girl, imperturbably.

"I hope the De Kéradiéus and the d'Anguillons will be in Paris this time," said Helen. "On my former journeys I have always missed them. It was just as though it was on purpose. With two friends married in the Faubourg St. Germain, I have never yet seen the inside of a French home."

"And I was unlucky enough not to be at Newport last summer when this famous Marquis d'Anguillon was there. Do you think Annie will invite us?"

"Certainly."

"What fun! but for heaven's sake don't say anything before Jack about going into society there. He would imagine that I would let some Frenchman make love to me, and I should not have another moment's peace."

Mrs. Ronald had taken her jewellery-box out of a safe hidden in an elegant piece of furniture. Her slender fingers moved about for a few minutes among the gems spread out on the white velvet, and then she selected a magnificent set of pears and diamonds. When she had fastened the necklace she turned towards Miss Carroll.

"Am I all right?" she asked.

"You are perfectly adorable!" answered the young girl, with an accent of sincerity. "I am like a spider beside you," she added, crossing over to one of the long glasses, which reflected a slight, graceful figure with a very modern outline, dressed in white silk, a small head with brown hair, a face with rather sharp features and of somewhat dark complexion, but embellished with light grey-blue eyes which beamed with animation, veiled as they were with dark, thick, curly lashes.

"I ought never to come near you," said Dora, pulling up her pearl dog-collar.

"Don't talk nonsense! You know you would rather be yourself than any one else, and you are quite right, too. Come along; let us go and join the gentlemen. I hope Jack won't be too bad-tempered and spoil our evening."

At the first glance both women saw that Mr. Ronald had not succeeded in instilling resignation into the young man's mind. There was a sad look in his eyes which caused his *fiancée* some slight remorse.

Mr. Ascott was a very fine-looking young man. His type of face was not strikingly intelligent, but his dark, bright, expressive eyes, his gay smile, and his kindly manner made him generally liked, while his indefatigable liveliness caused him to be one of the favourites in New York society.

"And so they are treating you badly, poor old Jack!" said Mrs. Ronald, holding out her hand to him. "Believe me, I have nothing whatever to do with this new caprice of Dora's."

"I am sure of that! She is one of those American women who cannot see a friend packing her trunks without being tempted to imitate her. Europe is the perdition of our wives and the ruin of our homes!"

"Oh, no; don't be unjust. For one reason, I am glad your wedding is put off until the autumn. It will enable me to be present at it."

"If it ever takes place!"

"Oh, it will take place quite soon enough for your peace and tranquillity," remarked Mr. Ronald, laying his hand affectionately on the young man's shoulder.

"That is just what I told Jack," added Dora calmly.

At this moment dinner was announced.

"We must hurry up," said Helen, "for I do not want to miss Tamagno's arrival on the scene, and that first sentence of Othello, which is like a shout of triumph, and which always makes me feel the thrill of victory."

CHAPTER II

TRAINING FOR SOCIETY

ONLY a few years ago, in America, married women lived a staid, retired sort of life; they went into the background, as it were, and remained there more or less contentedly.

In those days divorces were rare, but in that country of rapid evolutions, customs change almost as quickly as fashions. Unmarried girls, more and more desirous to escape from maternal supervision, asked married women to chaperone them to balls and theatres, coaching and yachting excursions, picnics, and all such dangerous dissipations. The married women did not need much persuasion, and, under the pretext of satisfying Mrs. Grundy by their presence, they came back on the scene themselves. At present they appear in the most beautiful toilettes; they exact plenty of homage, presents of flowers, and tributes of admiration. They flirt with an audacity and a science which make their rivalry dreaded. They are beginning to patronise the unmarried girls, and will perhaps succeed in

dethroning them. In Washington they have already done so.

Salons are the synthesis of an epoch. There are none now in Europe, and in America they have not yet existed. Some women, however, have succeeded in attaining a certain amount of individual prestige, and Mrs. Ronald was one of these. She entertained in a most sumptuous way, but everything was in good taste. In Paris her style would have been considered somewhat too luxurious, but in New York it was quite modest. Her invitations were coveted, and looked upon as great favours. Sympathy and admiration were essential to her, and she spared nothing in order to win them. Unlike the majority of her compatriots, her manners were always even and gracious, and it was to this more than to her position that she owed her triumphs as hostess, and the influence which made her one of the undisputed leaders of New York society.

Mrs. Ronald could decide the fate of an artist, start a fashion, change a custom, hold in check a *parvenue* who had become too encroaching, or send a most prepossessing divorced woman to Coventry. She was the ruling spirit of several philanthropic societies, and, as the climax of glory, had been elected president of the Colonial Ladies, the most characteristic of societies imaginable.

The younger sons of aristocratic English

families, and the Dutch who went to seek their fortune and freedom in America, severed their ties with their mother-country without ever wishing to renew them. When once they had become rich and independent, they would willingly have allowed their ancestors to sleep in peace under the vaults of European cathedrals or churches, without claiming descent from them. The women would not permit this, and consequently once more lost an opportunity of proving their superiority. Instead of creating in their country an aristocracy of intelligence, education, and talent, they were ambitious to claim that of birth. By means of the various relics brought away at the time of their exodus, and the old Bibles, on the blank leaves of which were inscribed the births and marriages, they have traced out their origin and made the most of their family names. They pride themselves more on being branches of old rotten trees in Europe than of belonging to the vigorous new shoots which have sprung up in America. They are prouder of the unknown ancestor who frequently was a mere good-for-nothing, and sometimes even a vicious man, than of the grandfather to whom they owe everything.

Possessed by this mild form of madness, a fair number of these women go searching the archives of the British Museum and the church registers, and all who are moderately ingenious manage to bring back with them proofs of their long descent and even of their armorial bear-

ings. In order to protect the integrity of their caste, the women of the American aristocracy conceived the idea of founding a society of Colonial Ladies, members of which must be able to show their pedigree for two hundred years back, and to prove that they are descendants of *émigrés*, and not of emigrants. The presidency of this ultra-exclusive clan seemed to belong naturally to Mrs. Ronald, for she was incontestably of good birth. Her mother belonged to one of the best families of New Orleans, and her father, Commodore Beauchamp, traced his descent from the famous Beauchamp who went over to England with William the Conqueror, and whose name is inscribed on the doorway of the ancient church of Dives.

Helen was not only of good birth, but she had been well brought up. Her mother having died several weeks after her birth, a sister of her father's, one of those delightful old maids endowed with a maternal instinct, had opened her arms and heart to the helpless baby and to the elder brother, Charley. Little Helen was one of those children who, by their beauty and precocious power of fascination, manage to win over their parents and those in authority over them. Miss Beauchamp, thanks to her strong sense of duty, was firm enough to insist on a certain amount of discipline for the young girl and, although she could not prevent the development of Helen's vanity and innate coquetry, she

managed, at all events, to bring her up well, and to instil into her mind certain principles which should act as a counterbalance, and leave on the young girl's character the impress of her own rectitude and integrity.

Helen's school career was most brilliant; her friends feared, in fact, lest she should take it into her head to become a doctor or a lawyer. Her beauty saved her from this, as she soon saw that there was more gratification in being a woman than a feminist. At the age of seventeen, on leaving the schoolroom, she had a regular court of admirers, and more invitations than she could possibly accept. All at once she was seized with one of those fits of distaste for everything, which she was destined to experience somewhat frequently as time went on, and which in reality proved her superiority. She announced to her father and her aunt that she wanted to go to some convent in Paris for a year in order to improve her French, music, and singing.

"If I do not disappear from the scene for a time," she added, with that practical common-sense which never abandons the American woman, "my coming-out will be a perfect failure; every one will have seen too much of me, and I shall make no sensation whatever."

Mr. Beauchamp and his sister protested energetically at first, but finally recognised the fact that the young girl was right, for, as they ac-

knowledge to each other, her early success would in the end be detrimental to her. They therefore consented to what she wished, only objecting to her entering a convent. Helen, however, held her own, as the ordinary boarding-schools at Passy and Neuilly did not appeal to her in the least. What she wanted was a *chic* convent, as aristocratic as possible. Convent life had always seemed to her so extraordinary, that she was extremely curious to know more about it. The idea of imprisoning one's self between high walls, of obeying the sound of a bell, of submitting to severe laws, and of living among French people, with girls of quite another race and education, appealed to her imaginative mind, ever on the lookout for something new. As a result of this whim, strange enough in a frivolous girl such as Helen was, she and Miss Beauchamp started for Paris. After various inquiries, they had given the preference to the Convent of the Assumption at Auteuil, where there is plenty of air, space, and verdure. Aunt Sophie was determined not to forsake her niece. She would not upon any account have left her in the hands of foreigners and Catholics. Governed, as usual, by a strong sense of duty, she put aside her own Protestant scruples, and took rooms in what is called the Little Convent, a house of retreat, and a favourite refuge for society women in search of rest and oblivion. Helen had a room in the convent itself.

Americans who have lived some time in Parisian boarding-schools declare that Frenchwomen are badly brought up, and that they are perverted and hypocritical. Frenchwomen, on their side, look upon Americans as perfect heathen in matters of religion and ethics. These false impressions are due to the fact that they have a totally different conception of life.

From time immemorial, Catholicism has used its influence with the Latin race in turning its attention towards the Hereafter. It teaches the young girl that she has been placed in this world merely to win her way to heaven. It endeavours to inculcate in her contempt for human happiness and all the vanities of this world, disdain for her body, and a love of suffering. It has in this way obtained sublime sacrifices, and the most exquisite purity of soul. This idea develops in the nascent woman the inner life; and that kind of isolation, to which she is condemned by the customs of her country, makes of her a concentrated being in whom the sap, being driven back, produces dangerous dreams and a wild growth of unwholesome ideas, morbid desires, and strange feelings.

The American woman, on the contrary, believes that she has been created for the purpose of enjoying all the good things in this world, of developing her intelligence, and of taking her part in the universal activity. She has no anxiety about the other world, and no ambition for

eternal happiness. She feels that she is in the hands of an all-wise Providence, to whom she yields herself up joyously; her mind is open to all ideas, and her body fortified by the virtues of plenty of water, fresh air, and exercise. She will stand before her glass looking at herself critically, glad to be beautiful, and she will take the greatest trouble to remedy any physical defects. Her purity is not that of ignorance, but of self-respect. What we should call *evil* and *sin* she would term *inferiority* and *vulgarity*. In this distinction is to be found all the difference which exists between the psychology of the Old World and that of the New World, between the psychology of the past and that of the future, perhaps.

The pupils of the Convent of the Assumption at Auteuil belong chiefly to the provincial aristocracy and to the upper middle class. Helen did not feel at home amongst these European girls. They were a continual subject of astonishment to her. The liberty which most of them took with the truth, and their eagerness to penetrate the mysteries of life, horrified her. Love, which she looked upon as one of the most beautiful things in the world, and for which she was content to wait peacefully, appeared to be, in the eyes of these French girls, a forbidden fruit, a kind of sin, around which, nevertheless, all their thoughts and all their conversation turned. They even delighted in reading over and over

again in their prayer-books the few verses of Solomon's Song which are contained there, and they used to dream of the "Well Beloved."

The more devout among them prayed with mystic fervour, and denied themselves in all kinds of ways for the sake of pleasing God. All this appeared to the American girl the very climax of foolishness. There was in the souls of these *pensionnaires* a craving for self-sacrifice, and there were aspirations which made them seem to her the most extraordinary and romantic creatures possible, and yet at times she felt a perfect child beside them.

She, in her turn, was misunderstood and criticised mercilessly. Her frankness was taken for rudeness; her independent character seemed a proof of her faulty education. Her precocious elegance, her underclothes of silk and cambric, although exciting much envy, were considered an indication of sinful coquetry. Her beauty brought her plenty of ardent admiration, which did not fail to flatter her, but during her stay at Auteuil she did not make one true friend.

Among these French Catholic surroundings in which she found herself, Helen unconsciously laid in a store of impressions which later on were to be revived, and to aid in the working-out of her destiny. On Sundays she went to the Protestant Church in the Avenue de l'Alma, and in the afternoon, with her fine American eclecticism, she attended vespers and even sang in the

choir. The ceremonies of the Catholic Church were to her merely a spectacle; but, at the same time, she was aware that the spectacle was elevating.

The odour of the incense, the mysterious language of the liturgy, the benediction of the Holy Sacrament, appealed specially to her. Every now and then a thrill of religious fervour would pass over the surface of her soul, but without stirring it to its depths. The Chapel of the Assumption had a strange attraction for her, and she often asked permission to help one of the nuns in decorating the altar. She did this irreverently, moving about quickly, laughing and talking too loudly, unconscious of that Presence which made the nun so timid and so respectful in her attitude. On the days of the market near the Madeleine she would come back with her carriage full of flowers, and would take the most beautiful ones to lay at the feet of the Virgin. This was the homage which, like a true American, she was ready to offer to her own sex. She approved of Catholicism because, as she said, with all the irreverence of a heretic, "it possessed a goddess, and it was the only one of the Christian religions which had erected altars in honour of women."

Helen had determined to make the best of her time in Paris, and she kept her resolution. She attended French literature and history classes, and took elocution and singing lessons from a

celebrated Italian professor. Her voice was extremely pure and beautiful, but it wanted soul. She felt this herself, and was in despair. It was all in vain that she evoked one after the other the faces of her numerous admirers. Not one of them thawed her, as she jokingly said; she was eighteen years old, and was obliged to drag out the pronunciation of the sentimental words in the songs in order to put any expression in them.

Miss Beauchamp chaperoned her niece so cleverly that she had no opportunity of making the acquaintance of a single Frenchman. She could only see at a safe distance those counts and dukes about whom she had heard such dreadful things, and who on that account excited her curiosity.

This year of rest and study did much for the young American girl, and she brought back with her from Europe an undefinable something which added a new charm to her beauty.

Helen Beauchamp's *début* created a great sensation. She became one of the most triumphant belles of New York society, one of those pretty, brilliant creatures, possessing that secret power which transforms them into conquerors. All homage is paid to the acknowledged belle of the season; she is besieged with flowers, and her smiles are coveted. Hostesses vie with each other in securing her presence, while all the men, out of sheer vanity, become her courtiers and

slaves. This loyalty lasts two or three seasons, during which the *Grand Prix*, in the shape of position or wealth, must be won. The belle who does not succeed in this is considered a failure. She ages quickly, and passes for ever into the background. "*Sic transit gloria mundi!*"

Helen's fortune was not in accordance with her tastes, in consequence of which she had declared that she would either make a wealthy marriage or remain an old maid. She had been created, she used to say, to have horses and carriages, elegant toilettes, and a luxurious home, and all this was absolutely necessary to her. She had had offers from several *parvenus* who were worth millions, but she refused them without a second thought in the most offhand way. She had no small amount of ambition, for she wanted a man of good family, intelligent, and who either was or would become a celebrity.

An American woman is generally anxious that her husband should be a credit to her, either on account of his capabilities or his commercial power. If he should be a tall man she is specially proud of him, and keeps repeating with almost barbaric vanity, "He is six feet without his shoes."

Henry Ronald seemed to be Helen's dream personified. He had everything she had desired—good looks, great ability, and wealth. Although he was not as well born as she was, he could claim three generations of wealthy and

honest ancestors of the upper middle class, and this, in every country in the world, constitutes a certain nobility. Henry was the great match of the very season in which Miss Beauchamp came out.

The sight of Helen awoke in him all that he had of poetry and youth. Her hair, of such wonderful colour, her brown eyes, sparkling with animation and life, and her graceful figure photographed themselves instantaneously on his brain, and remained there for ever. From the very moment Helen felt that he was in her power. She began by playing with him somewhat cruelly, but she was too intelligent not to realise his superiority and to respect it; and, as frequently happens with women, love soon followed.

Mr. Ronald's mother and sister, who were rigid, austere women, tried to set him against the brilliant young girl, whose frivolity and worldliness alarmed them. The forces of Destiny were against them, however. For the first time, their words and remonstrances had no effect on him, and by the end of the season he was engaged to Helen.

The wedding was delayed by the death of Commodore Beauchamp, and only took place some eighteen months later. From that time until the present this had been one of the happiest of marriages. Mr. Ronald was now the proprietor of one of the most important scientific reviews of America, and his works on toxi-

cology had made him famous at home and abroad.

In Europe, savants and literary men spring, for the most part, from families which belong either to the working or middle classes, where the life and strength of nations are to be found. They have not received that education which polishes and defines the individual. They are at the same time above and below the higher ranks of society.

In the United States they belong more to the wealthy class, and consequently have the same habits and customs. If this were not so, it would not much matter, as their wives would soon instruct them.

Mr. Ronald had a laboratory just as one might have a racing stable. He was one of those athletes of Harvard University whose muscles and senses are exercised by continual training, by means of those sports which increase the strength of a man tenfold; which make him graceful in repose and formidable on the field; and which, in spite of what French educationalists may say, can be carried on at the same time with intellectual studies, as is proved in England and America.

In the interval between two chemical experiments, Henry Ronald would go and have a game of cricket or football; and at thirty-eight, his age when the episode we are about to relate commences, he was so vigorous and agile that with

a few days' training he would have made one of the best of soldiers. Helen loved her husband, not passionately perhaps, but as deeply as she thought herself capable of loving, whilst she herself was his joy, his pride, his vanity, and his only love.

Among the wealthy classes of the United States there is very little home-life. Women who imagine themselves intelligent feel it their duty to cultivate their minds. Like Ibsen's heroines, they want to develop their individuality, and their dream is to be independent of men. They plunge wildly into all kinds of studies, pass their time at literary or scientific clubs, leaving their houses and children to the mercy of Providence. The more worldly-minded ones think of nothing but pleasure.

The husbands are occupied all day long with their business, but on returning to their dwellings at night there is no quiet home-life for them there. They are not allowed to come out of the shafts, but only to change their harness, and it often happens that the heaviest they have to wear is not that of their daily work.

Mr. Ronald gave up his club in order to be with his wife while she dressed. He loved to see her among all the beautiful bright silks which made up her attire, and during this hour of *tête-à-tête* they both spoke of whatever interested them, as married people do. He would talk art, science, and politics, while she, in her

turn, would tell him all the incidents of her day as a society woman, and all the gossip gleaned here and there. Helen would have been very much hurt if her husband had not taken her into his confidence about all which concerned his intellectual life, although she usually listened to him in an absent-minded way. Fortunately, neither of them was aware how very rare a thing it was for their minds to be in touch with each other.

Mrs. Ronald had all the activity of her compatriots. The more visits, amusements, and events she could crowd into her day the more satisfied she was. In spite of this, she sometimes felt the emptiness of her life.

After long intercourse with American women, one recognises at a glance those who have Latin or Celtic blood in their veins. There is more dreaminess in their eyes, there is more fascination about them, and more physical sensitiveness. Their character has more light and shade and less strength.

Mrs. Ronald's great-grandfather was a Huguenot from Toulouse. There were, in her, elements foreign to the Saxon race, and these elements, unutilised, produced a certain inward agitation, a sort of unaccountable discontent which she called nervousness. Worldly pleasure had never entirely satisfied her. She had studied all kinds of extraordinary subjects: Buddhism, the occult sciences, social questions—studied them, of

course, after the manner of women. When she read in a French novel the analysis of some *grande passion*, she was annoyed that she had never experienced anything similar. It seemed to her as though she were being treated like a child, and she felt quite injured. She wondered whether the European soul had more chords to it than hers, or whether with her those chords had not vibrated. The love with which her husband had inspired her seemed to her commonplace, and she blamed him unconsciously for never having stirred her to the depths of her being. "He is too perfect," she would say to herself, shrugging her shoulders.

In a Frenchwoman, curiosity of this kind would have been entirely sensual, and a good Catholic would not have failed to confess herself afterwards to her priest. When an American woman is roused in this way—and she often is so roused—it is mere intellectual curiosity with her. Helen simply wanted to know; she did not care at all about feeling. She regretted never having experienced the tortures of jealousy, the struggle with temptation; she fancied herself so strong, so thoroughly proof against any moral fall, that she would have liked to play with all these dangerous things. After two or three years of overstrain caused by her social duties she was tired out. She took a dislike to everything, and longed for rest and more simplicity of life. In this state of mind

she turned towards the Old World, to the mother-country, with its soothing influence, for she had never failed to come back from there refreshed and healed in body and mind.

Hitherto Mr. Ronald had always accompanied his wife, but these periodical journeys, never particularly interesting to him, had begun to bore him extremely. The few conversations he managed to get with his colleagues in foreign countries did not compensate him for the loss of his books and laboratory. He could not help shuddering when he thought of those aimless wanderings about Paris; of the irregular meals, delayed by the trying on of dresses; the evenings spent in the worst-ventilated theatres in the world; the invasion of their rooms every morning by the various tradespeople, the exhibition of hats and dresses spread out over all the furniture. The hundreds of disagreeable things to which an American husband must always submit when in Europe were so vivid in his imagination that he was not sorry to have a good pretext for remaining in New York. For a long time, Helen's secret wish (so secret that she had not even owned it to herself) had been to go to Paris alone. She fancied that it would be great fun to feel thoroughly free and emancipated. The danger of the experiment tempted her without her suspecting it. The puritanism of Mr. Ronald could not fail to put a certain amount of constraint upon her. He did not enjoy the lighter

sort of theatres, and although he thoroughly understood ordinary French, there were certain subtleties of the language which escaped him altogether. From the expression of the faces, he guessed those vulgar allusions which were distasteful to him, and his young wife, feeling this, could not laugh at them herself. Whatever may be said to the contrary, the moral standard of the majority of Americans is below that of Europeans, but there are men among them who are incredibly pure-minded and austere in their mode of life, and more scrupulous in their conversation than women.

Mr. Ronald belonged to this superior class. His high-mindedness inspired Helen with involuntary respect. In his presence, she was more guarded in her speech. At the theatre in Paris it had often happened that she had translated, specially for his ears, phrases in certain pieces which were somewhat daring. She had never ventured to ask him to take her to the Moulin-Rouge and to the café-concerts, and she naturally desired to go there. The prospect, therefore, of a visit to Paris with Miss Beauchamp, and that most easy-going of mentors, her brother Charley, caused her such delight that she could scarcely conceal it. She was not really sorry that Miss Carroll had postponed her wedding, for she looked upon her as an addition not to be despised with regard to liveliness and gaiety. Dora was Mr. Ronald's niece by a half-

sister. She belonged to that type peculiar to America, known as "the society girl," and for this there is no exact translation in any language. The society girl is generally rather badly brought up, and is more brilliant than intelligent. She is by turns polite and impolite, generous and mean, kind and disagreeable, a devoted friend and a merciless enemy, a desperate flirt—altogether a perfect living medley of all sorts of faults and qualities. As a characteristic trait she plays the banjo, tosses off champagne after the manner of a Parisian *demi-mondaine*, and later on keeps up her gaiety with cocktails. The society girl ignores punctuality and correctness under any form whatever. She is always a button or hook short somewhere, and, in spite of having the best of maids, her dress is frequently finished with pins. She seems, in fact, to have been sent into the world to create disorder.

Miss Carroll had a fairly large number of these characteristics; but they stood out, as it were, against a background of such straightforwardness and sincerity that they were bearable. Then, too, she had been brought up in the country, and the open air had left something wholesome about her which her successes, her giddy life, and her flirtations had not succeeded in effacing. From childhood she had been accustomed to no restraint. Every one had yielded to her wishes: her parents first, then her friends,

and, finally, the world at large. Was it through weakness on the part of her people, or her own superior strength of will? Be that as it may, she had grown selfish from the mere custom of expecting everything from others, and sacrificing nothing for them. She played the banjo well, like a true artist; and she drank champagne very moderately, flattering herself that she was independent of that for her liveliness and wit. She certainly did seem to have an inexhaustible supply of both, for she was ever ready with her sallies of wit and keen shafts of irony, the originality of which completely disarmed the victims at whom they were hurled. Miss Carroll was not pretty, but, as she said jokingly, she had been born *chic*. She had one of those graceful, lithe figures which withstand all the ravages of age or maternity, and which made her an excellent horsewoman. Her one dream, as a young girl, had been to lose her money, and to go and exhibit her exceptional talent in the ring of the large circuses of Europe—for fabulous pay, of course. As a matter of fact, after seeing her in the saddle, looking as though she and her horse were one, a keen sportsman would have fallen desperately in love with her.

It was not at all surprising that she had turned Mr. Ascott's head, and many another man's besides. Jack had proved himself the most devoted and the most persevering of her

admirers, and he had succeeded in awaking within her something which resembled love. He alone knew what sacrifices and torture this conquest had cost him. As he possessed a large fortune, he had deemed it unnecessary to take up any career, and on leaving Harvard University had lived the life of a society man—a life which is more aimless and empty in America than in Europe. He had made a display of his carriages,—many and various,—had taken all the prettiest girls out driving in grand style, hawked about from one society gathering to another hundreds of nice little stories which he told well (a talent very much appreciated by women), and the rest of his time he spent at his club, going into all sorts of political questions between sundry cocktails and other restoratives.

The American woman is too active herself to have patience with an idle man; she has the most utter contempt for him, and in his own country considers him out of place and ridiculous. Miss Carroll having declared to Mr. Ascott that she would never be the wife of a man who did nothing, he had gone into partnership with one of his friends who was a banker, and, thanks to his hereditary qualities, had by the end of a few months proved himself to be a splendid business man.

Dora, touched by this conversion to work, had finally accepted him, and then, as though furious at having been persuaded to give up her

liberty, she did not fail to make him pay dearly for his victory. She was most exacting, capricious, and fanciful with him; and then, when she felt that she had tried his patience to the utmost limits, she would go to him like a little child, with a charming, penitent air which she knew was irresistible, and say: "Jack, I am good now, I am, really." She never had the grace to say, "I will be good," as she did not care about binding herself beforehand, and the good-hearted young man always forgave her. As she had owed to her uncle, Dora had never met any one she liked better than her *fiancé*, and she would not have cared to give him up to any other woman. In two or three words she had herself declared the measure of her love, and such love could very well wait. As a matter of fact, when she heard that her uncle and aunt were going to Europe, she began to regret having fixed her wedding for the month of June. After the regret came the desire to postpone it. She fought against this new whim for some time, and one day she even wrote to order her dress from Doucet's; but by one of those phenomena which serve to lead us in the way we are to go, a whole series of pictures rose at once in her mind—she saw the Rue de la Paix, with its shop windows all sparkling with jewellery and diamonds, and its shops full of artistic finery of all descriptions. Fascinated irresistibly by this tempting vision, she threw down

her pen, tore the letter she had commenced into bits, and said aloud in her most resolute tone: "I will go and choose my wedding-dress myself."

In order to spare Mr. Ascott's feelings, rather than in fear of being blamed herself, Dora declared that on account of her mother's health she was obliged to accompany her to Carlsbad. Mrs. Carroll was delighted at this arrangement. The American woman, on whom, nevertheless, the conjugal yoke sits very lightly, always prefers seeing her daughter escape it, and keep her freedom. Jack was desperate at his *fiancée's* latest caprice. He made the mistake of getting into a temper, and of accusing her of going to Europe in search of a husband with a title. She, like a true woman, was offended at his suspicions, and finally brought him round to beg her pardon. Helen and Dora imagined they were going to Paris solely to enjoy themselves and to buy finery. In reality, they were being sent there by Providence, the one in order to receive the baptism of fire, the other to learn a great lesson; both of them to fulfil their destiny.

CHAPTER III

THE UBIQUITOUS STRANGER

MRS. RONALD, with her aunt and brother, and Miss Carroll, with her mother, had been in Paris a fortnight. They had taken one of the large suites of rooms at the Hôtel Continental, and the magnificent salon which looks on the Rue de Castiglione and the Rue de Rivoli was decorated with flowers, and full of the pretty things they had picked up here and there.

On leaving her husband for the first time, Helen had felt as though something within her were being torn asunder, and she had suffered keenly. While making her preparations for the voyage, she had experienced a sort of oppression at her heart like a presentiment of coming evil. She had had pangs of fear and regret, and, as though seized with remorse, had even said one day to Mr. Ronald:

"Are you quite sure that you do not mind this trip?"

"Quite sure, dearest," he had replied, with his usual kindness, "since it is for the sake of your health and enjoyment."

When the moment came to leave the kind and loving companion of her life, she had clung to him like a child frightened at some one or at something. Henry, deeply moved, had clasped her closely to his breast, and then gently loosened her arms from his neck.

"Good-bye until September," he had said; and then, making an effort to smile, he added: "Do not ask to extend your leave of absence, though, for I could not exist any longer without you."

"I should hope you could n't," Helen had answered, with a last fond look. "I wish I were coming back now instead of going."

Dora, on her part, had felt a certain amount of regret for her conduct towards Jack. She had even been tempted to say to him, as she had so often done: "I am good now; I am quite good," and then give up her journey; but the allurements of all the anticipated enjoyment had acted on her imagination, and so she had started.

All the impressions which both women had felt at the parting had been quickly dispersed, and nothing troubled them at present. They wrote long letters by every mail,—the one to her husband and the other to her *fiancé*,—telling most scrupulously all that they were doing; and when once this duty was accomplished, they felt at peace with their consciences.

The Parisian season had commenced, so that they had plenty of choice as regarded amuse-

ments, and Charley Beauchamp took them everywhere they wanted to go.

Helen's brother was one of those bachelors such as are to be found only in the United States, and whom American women can claim as their own especial creation.

In most of the countries of Europe, a wealthy unmarried man has usually an acknowledged mistress—some woman whom he has discovered and brought out, or whom he has won from another man. He keeps her in more or less luxurious style, and has the same sort of pride in her as in his horses or his carriages. Women of his own class do not consider this any crime. On the contrary, they look only too indulgently upon the "favourite," and they admire or criticise her beauty and dress. The generosity which her jewels and equipages go to prove gives him prestige.

The American woman does not condone these little delinquencies. She will not allow any rivals either in the house or in the street. According to her way of thinking, rare flowers, jewels, priceless laces, and all the beautiful things in the world belong by right to virtuous women. This is a principle the application of which she insists on as much as possible. The man who should venture to make a parade of a *liaison* would find all houses closed to him, and would be ruthlessly boycotted. For want of worse, masculine vanity is compelled to feed

itself upon the favours of society girls and women, and these favours are only to be obtained at a high price, so that certain men have to spend a fortune every year in flowers, jewellery, boxes at the theatre, and pleasure parties. The American, although more chivalrous and disinterested than the European, is not perfect. One pays for all, as a rule, and these Pachas in silk hats are pampered, fêted, and lauded to the skies by the others. They are closely watched, and are not allowed the leisure to think of marriage, so that without being aware of it themselves, they gradually dwindle into old bachelors.

Charley Beauchamp was one of these soft-hearted, easy-going creatures. He had quite a bevy of women friends, whom he took out in his carriages or yacht, and to whom he offered exquisite dinners in his bachelor abode—dinners which were presided over in the most correct way by his aunt, Miss Beauchamp, or by his sister. He liked to be surrounded by pretty women. This was his one weakness, and vanity and his princely generosity had won for him a popularity which made him blissfully happy.

Charley was a man thirty-eight years of age, with brown hair which was beginning to turn grey, a slight, muscular figure, and refined, regular features, which were very clearly cut. His whole appearance gave the impression of energy, activity, and strength of will. His face, the lines of which were somewhat harsh, was soft-

ened by blue eyes, wonderfully set,—a characteristic of the American race,—eyes which had always made Helen envious. In his expression, as in his sister's, there was something of that Latin charm which both of them had inherited from their ancestors.

Mr. Beauchamp was making one of those colossal fortunes which are the astonishment of the Old World. The struggle in which he had been engaged for the last ten years, and from which he could not withdraw, had not failed to tell on his constitution. Like most of his compatriots, he scarcely ever came to Europe except when his strength was exhausted and he felt that his brain was about to give way. He would then throw a few things into his trunk, and leave by the first steamer. He was passionately fond of pictures, and the atmosphere and silence of the museums took instantaneous effect upon him, and produced a sort of relaxation which refreshed him in the most wonderful manner. He never looked out for the well-known pictures which every one talked about, but it was his delight to discover unknown works of art, and the collection which he possessed testified to a true perception of art and beauty.

This stay in Paris with his sister, whom he adored, and Miss Carroll, who amused him as no one else ever did, was a thorough enjoyment to him, and under the influence of all this he began to look quite youthful again.

As for Helen and Dora, they enjoyed themselves like two schoolgirls during the holidays. Every fine morning they started off cycling, escorted by Charley, spinning along in the direction of some little country town or village in the suburbs of Paris, and returning for luncheon at the Armenonville pavilion.

In the evening, while Aunt Sophie and Mrs. Carroll remained quietly at the hotel, Mr. Beauchamp took the others to dine at one of the large restaurants, and afterwards to the theatre. On leaving the theatre they had supper, or else went in to one of the fashionable cafés under pretence of hearing the Tzigane band. The grain of perversity which was in the nature of the two American women made them feel a certain pleasure which they did not analyse in this atmosphere, heavy with cigar smoke, the odour of spirits, and women's perfumes. While nibbling the fried potatoes out of the little baskets, they never tired of watching the *demi-mondaines* and of examining carefully their toilettes. They would estimate the value of their jewellery and their furs, and do their utmost to discover the charm to which these women owed all their costly things. These studies of Parisian manners and customs were prolonged till one or two o'clock in the morning, and yet this was the rest in search of which Mrs. Ronald had come to Europe! Often she would go to the Colonne and Lamoureux concerts, or visit picture galleries,

when the artist within her would experience the keenest pleasure. In fact, everything interested her. The American, as we have said elsewhere, is, as a rule, merely a sightseer. Helen, however, was something more, as the shape of her forehead indicated clearly. Like the majority of her compatriots, she knew what French taste was, and also French wit such as is provided at the theatre, but the French soul seemed as foreign to her as the Oriental soul. Curiously enough, what she had seen of it when a young girl at the Convent of the Assumption came back to her mind, and made her wish to penetrate still more deeply into it. She never lost an opportunity of talking to any workmen whom she employed, and she was delighted with their refinement. She discovered in them delicate and often exquisite sentiments, which she had never recognised in England or Germany in persons of the same station. She had noticed the delicate, almost affectionate way in which milliners, dress-makers, or seamstresses handled the work of their fingers—a way which revealed the artist in them. Even the servant-maids at the hotel seemed to feel a certain amount of pride in fulfilling their various duties. In the Champs Élysées, Helen often stopped to watch the children playing. She did not consider them as pretty as the English and American children, but she was always struck with the depth of expression in their eyes. She felt, without being

able to give it a name, that power of idealism, that spark of divine fire, which is the occult force of France.

The society men whom Mrs. Ronald saw in the Rue de la Paix, in the Bois, or at the theatre, interested her extremely. When they were talking to a woman the expression of their faces always made Helen want to know what they could be saying. One of them in particular had roused her curiosity. She kept meeting him all the time, and had seen him in the Bois, at several picture galleries, at the restaurant, at Voisin's, and Joseph's. He was a man of about sixty years of age, tall, and strongly built; his hair was almost white, and his dark eyes must formerly have been dangerously eloquent; but they only reflected now either a great sorrow or else utter weariness, except when lighted up now and then with an enigmatic smile. On observing him closely, one fancied that his ancestors had worn silks, feathers, and laces, had commanded armies, and served the king and women. That something rare, that something which will ever distinguish men of the aristocracy, could be discerned in this stranger, and gave him a special fascination, which acted unconsciously but irresistibly on Mrs. Ronald. She surnamed him the "Prince," and she would keep her eyes on him as long as she dared, fascinated by his dignified bearing. On his side, the old nobleman looked at her with visible pleasure. Charley had

made this the subject of plenty of jokes, declaring that if this admirer were twenty years younger, he should feel it his duty to warn his brother-in-law.

One evening Mr. Beauchamp was inspired to take Helen, Dora, and one of her friends, Willie Grey, a young American artist, who was studying under Paul Laurens, to the Café de Paris. The "Prince" happened to be there, and the newcomers were placed at a table quite near to his. He was not facing them, but could see them in the glass opposite him. He had undoubtedly just arrived, for Helen heard him order his dinner, and a regular connoisseur's dinner it was.

"Our neighbour knows how to eat," she said in English.

"With a back like his, that does not surprise me," answered Miss Carroll, in the same language. "I could have guessed his menu from his back."

Instead of seeing any harm in the young girl's words, as Europeans would not have failed to do, Charley and his friend laughed heartily and unreservedly.

"What has the back to do with one's manner of dining?"

"Everything," answered Dora, with a wise air. "It has a great deal of expression. This one," indicating by a jerk of her head the "Prince's," "is—how shall I say it?—an old sinner's back."

"Would my back come under that category?" asked Mr. Beauchamp, turning his head, and trying to see that part of his person.

"No, no, my dear Charley; don't disturb yourself. You have a virtuous back," answered Miss Carroll, with a shade of disdain in her voice.

Just at this moment Mrs. Ronald, who had glanced round at the stranger, met his eyes in the glass, and saw on his lips a smile, the expression of which made her colour up violently.

"Hush!" she said to the young girl; "I am sure our neighbour understands English."

"No fear! Only the Frenchmen who have married our countrywomen can speak it a little. When this man was young, America was certainly discovered, but not the American girl."

Helen was not by any means reassured, and in order to change the subject she began to talk to the young artist about his picture in the Salon of the Champs Élysées, which she had seen the day before.

During this time Dora was looking round, half closing her eyes, after the manner of cats, and then opening them wide when they had seized an impression. It was a habit peculiar to her, causing her to make a sort of little grimace which, far from being disagreeable, had a certain charm.

"Ah, I know now why it is that Frenchmen look so queer!" she exclaimed suddenly, in the

triumphant tone of a person who had just made a discovery.

"Look queer!" echoed Willie Grey. "I always think they are very interesting, for my part!"

"Yes, certainly, they are interesting; but that does not prevent them from looking queer; and the reason of it is that their moustaches belong to another epoch."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, they belong to the Middle Ages, or to the eighteenth century; they are royalist, imperialist, swaggering, heroic, witty-looking. They always appear to be rebelling against some one or something. They are the nicest moustaches in the world, but they do not go with the modern costume at all—no, not at all," repeated the young girl, after examining the various men who were dining there.

"There is some truth in what you say, Miss Carroll," remarked the young artist, rather astonished at such profound observation; "then, too, Frenchmen dress so badly."

"You are right," remarked Mrs. Ronald; "their clothes never look as though they had been made for them. In England it is just the opposite; the men are admirably well-dressed, and the women very badly. I wonder why it is?"

"Because the Englishman, who is generally well-built, inspires the tailor, whilst the Eng-

lishwoman—hem! . . . One would think that the Creator had used up all the clay in making the man, and that there was not enough left for her. She looks unfinished——”

The two American women coloured slightly, and then smiled.

“Go on—go on, Mr. Grey,” said Dora; “it is very clear that you have become quite Parisian.”

“Have I shocked you? I thought that was what you had come to Europe for; at least, you owned that you had.”

“I prefer being shocked by foreigners, though, and not by my countrymen.”

“I like that distinction,” remarked Mr. Beauchamp, in a bantering tone. “None of our shortcomings are ever overlooked, and we are never allowed to take any liberties.”

“Oh, it is much better to be a man in Europe than in America,” added Mr. Grey.

“That is flattering for the women in your own country,” said Miss Carroll. “If I repeated that in New York, you would be nicely received on your return!”

“Do you know,” began Mrs. Ronald again, “what in my opinion does not suit France?—it is the Republic. Each time I come over here I find less elegance and less courtesy.”

“There is no denying that a court has a considerable influence over the tastes and manners of a country,” said the artist. “In the little

provincial towns, for instance, where there is a royal castle, such as Fontainebleau, the homes in the neighbourhood are less commonplace, less *bourgeois*. I have known women of the lower class, who, after making money in some little business, have bought curious pieces of old furniture, and not for the sake of being *chic*, but from that sense of the artistic created in them by the models which their grandparents or they themselves had been accustomed to seeing."

"I am like Helen," said Mr. Beauchamp; "I cannot help regretting that France is not either a monarchy or an empire."

"Certainly one or other of these modes of government would be more decorative, and would have more prestige; but I fancy, after all, that Republicanism is in the blood, for you see that the French have come back to it three times. On reading their history, one is surprised to find that there are any candidates for royalty left. Never fear; France, although Republican, and perhaps on that account, is very powerful."

"Not as powerful as England, though," said Mrs. Ronald.

"Yes, it is. The greatness of the one is in width and extent, while the greatness of the other is in height and depth. That is just the difference."

"Do you know" said Charley, "I believe that the great force of France lies in her *raison d'être*. If certain nations were wiped off the

face of the globe we should scarcely notice any difference; but if France were to disappear, there would be a precious lot less light, and gaiety, and beauty in the world."

"That is what I have often thought. I am a loyal *habitué* of the Rue de la Paix. It has an irresistible attraction for me, and I stand like a woman, gazing at all its windows. The pieces of goldsmith's work at Boucheron's are my delight. It has required centuries of effort, of work, and of research to obtain such marvellous softness of outline and form, and to arrive at idealising matter in this way. I know how far behind we are, and how much there is to do before we can attain to this perfection; and I think that as long as France will produce these little masterpieces, these exquisitely wrought ornaments, she will never perish, for she is destined to keep up the taste and to launch the ideas of Providence. The nation which has received this mission can fearlessly brave death under any form, for it bears within itself that which is indestructible."

"Mr. Grey," said Dora, with her usual mischievousness, "it is easy to see that your picture has been accepted. Continue praising the French, and it will be bought by the State."

"The acceptance of my picture has not influenced my opinions; do me the honour of believing that," answered the young man, with dignity. "I have lived here three years, and I

have had both time and opportunity to get a clear idea as to the worth of people. For instance, a few months ago I was at a restaurant in Brussels. Four Frenchmen were dining at a table near; they were common-looking, badly dressed, and wore awful neckties. With their serviettes fastened under their chins, they were picking bones, and appeared utterly to ignore the art of eating in a civilised way. All at once I was struck by their conversation. One of them, in the most exquisite language, was speaking of the new astronomical discoveries. He advanced the theory that there must be some means of communication between the planets of the same solar system. 'We shall find it—oh, we shall find it!' he affirmed; and then, like a poet, his eyes sparkling with animation, he spoke of the emotion he felt when, with the telescope turned towards the sky, his gaze wandered amongst the stars, and, in presence of the Infinite, in the silence of the heavens, he heard the ticking of the sidereal clock counting the seconds of the Earth. 'What excitement!' he said; 'it makes one turn dizzy and takes one's breath; one is terrified, positively terrified! It is quite true,' he added, striking the table with the flat of his hand, 'there are no nights of revelry equal to those nights at the Observatory!' His companions spoke in their turn of the chemical agents lately discovered. 'We shall delay the final destruction, we shall transform the soil, we shall

discover the origin of man—his true origin,' they said. I listened to them perfectly dazed and fascinated, stupidly surprised to find that men of such careless appearance should be able to grapple with such stupendous ideas, forgetting that concentration is to thought what heat is to the plant, and that it cannot be weakened by preoccupation about matters of toilette and elegance. While listening to these *bourgeois*, who had come to represent their country at a scientific congress, I understood, as I had never done before, how it is that in France the men of the aristocracy have ceased to be the governing classes."

"Oh, as for them, they have nothing left but their moustaches!" said Dora, with her unconscious brutality.

Again Mrs. Ronald glanced at the mirror. She saw a flash of anger come into the eyes of the "Prince," and, convinced that he had understood, she pressed her foot on Miss Carroll's.

"Do take care," she said, in a low voice; "I am sure he understands English."

"So much the worse for him; he should not listen then."

"Really, you seem worse in Europe than you did in America."

"Thanks! Well, let us talk politics." And in order to change the subject, the young girl started a conversation about affairs in her own

country in a way which proved that she was well informed.

The "Prince," after finishing his dinner, sipped a cup of Turkish coffee and, after lighting his cigar, rose from the table. As he passed by the Americans, he glanced at Miss Carroll with such severity and dignity in his expression that she was quite abashed, and could not help the colour coming into her face. Helen begged her brother to ask the waiter who their neighbour was.

"It is the Count de Limeray," he answered, "and a true count he is—one of the right sort."

"The Count de Limeray," repeated Helen. "I knew he was an aristocrat. It is to be hoped we don't meet him at Madame d'Anguilhon's, or at the De Kéradiens'. I should sink underground with shame."

"I shouldn't," said Dora, who had recovered her self-assurance.

CHAPTER IV

AS OTHERS SEE IT

MRS. RONALD had from her earliest childhood known Annie Villars the wealthy heiress who had married a Frenchman, the Marquis d'Anguillon.

Her friend's marriage had been a great trouble to Helen; she had criticised it severely, and, like all the people in her own set, had considered it as a sort of defection. It had robbed the country of a young girl of good family and of immense wealth; and although American jingoism had not yet developed in all its beauty, as it was destined to do at the time of the late war, still these two great losses had been bewailed on the ground of patriotism.

Four years had passed by, and the young wife had not once returned to New York. Every one had blamed the Marquis for not showing more eagerness to visit the country which had supplied him with the money he was spending. Comments on the subject continued, and it was all in vain that Annie's mother showed her daughter's letters to her friends. Every one persisted in believing that there was a "snake

in the grass." A conjugal catastrophe was predicted, and was perhaps even desired, in order that heiresses might be edified as to the success and happiness of Europeo-American marriages. The preceding summer the Marquis and the Marchioness had made their appearance at Newport. Mrs. Villars had rented one of the most beautiful houses of this celebrated watering-place, in order to entertain them, and their visit had been the event of the season.

At the first meeting, Mrs. Ronald was captivated by the face and manners of Jacques d'Anguillon. She turned the current of public opinion in his favour. He was declared fascinating, and his success was a triumph for Annie. To the great disappointment of all the society women, at the end of three weeks he started off for Canada with his friend, the Baron de Kéradien, another Frenchman who had married an American woman.

During her stay at Newport, Annie saw a great deal of Mrs. Ronald. She begged her to come to Paris the following spring, so that she might have the pleasure of entertaining her. This was one of the reasons why Helen had fixed the date of her trip for the month of April, as she had the greatest desire to explore that famous Faubourg St. Germain, which seemed to her a sort of holy ground. The Marchioness d'Anguillon was in delicate health, and therefore stayed as long as she possibly could at the

Château de St. Michel at Cannes. The De Kéra-diens, who had been spending the winter in Rome, lingered on there, so that neither of the two families returned to Paris before the first week in May. The very day after her return, Annie called on her compatriots, and asked them to her Thursday dinner-party—a Franco-American gathering, to which she only invited her best friends. Mrs. Ronald, Dora, and Mr. Beauchamp accepted; but Mrs. Carroll and Aunt Sophie, who did not care about foreigners, declined on the pretext of their health.

Mrs. Ronald had not seen the Marquis since meeting him at Newport, and was anxious to hear his impressions of America, and to have some conversation with him again. He had interested her greatly, and she had felt flattered at the marked attention he had paid her.

On the way to the d'Anguillhons', Helen begged Dora for the hundredth time to be careful and not to say everything which came into her mind. The young girl, good-tempered though she was, naturally took offence at last.

"By the way you talk," she said, "any one would think I had come from the Far West."

"No, but you are rather startling, you know, and French people misjudge you. One ought to endeavour to be a credit to one's friends, as Annie would be vexed if people thought you vulgar."

Miss Carroll shrugged her shoulders, a favour-

ite habit of hers when she could not find anything to answer.

The Marchioness d'Anguilhon was delighted that Mrs. Ronald should see her in her own home, the aristocratic abode to which her destiny had conducted her in spite of wind and tide, and of which she was in reality very proud. She knew that the description of it would be sent to New York by the next mail, and would, through Helen, be sure to reach that select clique, the Colonial Ladies. She took the utmost pains about all the arrangements for her dinner, well aware that from that her compatriots would not fail to draw their conclusions about many other things. With the De Kéradiens, the Prince de Nolles, the Viscount de Nozay, and two other friends, she had invited Marquis Verga, a Roman who held one of the highest offices at the Italian Court, and his wife, a remarkably pretty American.

This dinner-party of only twelve guests was one of those exquisite entertainments which Annie had learnt to give. Mrs. Ronald and Miss Carroll had expected more splendour, but they were both too much accustomed to nice things not to recognise on closer examination the great luxury which there was under the apparent simplicity of the table appointments and decorations. The Marchioness had confided Dora to the care of the Viscount de Nozay, feeling sure that these two most original and independ-

ent characters would find each other extremely entertaining.

"She is a sample of the up-to-date society girl," she had told him. "Do not misjudge her, though, for she is, at bottom, very *comme il faut*."

To the great relief of Mrs. Ronald, and to the disappointment of the Viscount, Miss Carroll did not talk much, for she was too much occupied in studying her host and hostess. Belonging to a younger set of girls than Annie, she had not known her well; but as their mothers were great friends she had frequently heard of her. On seeing her quiet elegance, her dignified manners, and her extreme correctness she said to herself that the Marchioness was a credit to America. The master of the house interested her still more. She looked at him as long as she dared, and kept glancing at him continually. It was the first time she had met a man of ancient lineage, and, strangely enough, she, who was so ultra-modern, experienced the fascination of it at once. The Marquis, with his refined type of face, his golden-brown eyes with their far-away look in them, could not fail to mystify her. He was nervous and singularly preoccupied, so that his wife was often obliged to repeat two or three times the same question, which she did with a charming sweetness of manner; and then, on coming back to himself, he had always an affectionate look for her, and a few charm-

ing words of excuse to offer. All this was not lost on Dora, by any means. After dinner, Mrs. Ronald took Jacques to task.

"Do you know," she said, "that people have not forgiven you yet for leaving Newport so soon. Did n't you like it?"

"To speak frankly—no, I did not. There is too much luxury, too much noise and show. The Indians, who called it the 'Isle of Peace,' understood it better. That is just what it ought to be—an isle of peace. Society life seemed to me out of place there. Those mansions and marble palaces without any open space, surrounded by walls, on a beach which is as crowded as a street, appeared to me utterly meaningless. When one thinks that only a few miles away from there one has the most wonderful scenery, shady trees, and perfect quiet——"

"Perfect quiet!" interrupted the Baron de Kéradien. "You forget that Americans do not need that yet."

"That's quite true. How absurd of me!" owned Jacques, with good grace.

"Is not Newport something like Trouville?" asked the Viscount de Nozay.

"Yes, but it is infinitely more brilliant," answered Henri de Kéradien. "It is the great Vanity Fair of the United States; the place on our planet where one can get the most enjoyment out of life in the way of worldly pleasures and flirtations."

"And where one sees the most pretty women," added the Marquis Verga.

"I quite agree. In Europe, Brighton alone would compare with it; but then, too, at Brighton there are crowds of people who are poor and badly dressed, while at Newport everything is luxurious; there is no dark side to the picture. Unless," added Jacques, "it be the sight of the workers who provide everything, and whose wan faces are painful to witness."

"That is so; but then, who thinks about that? For my part, when I have spent a fortnight at Newport I feel the same sort of weariness as a grown-up person who has had to endure for too long a time the noise of children at play. Last summer d'Anguillon and I were thankful to get away to Canada, which seemed as delicious to us as a glass of Apollinaris water after a too generous dinner."

"Canada certainly did give me a feeling of restfulness which I shall never forget," added the Marquis. "Quebec, with its big roofs, its convents, and its churches, seemed to me like a bit of our old provincial France."

"You hear that?" said Annie, laughing. "Isn't that truly French? These two gentlemen take a seven-days' sea-trip for the sake of seeing something fresh, and at the end of a month they begin to look out for places which resemble their own country."

"It is quite true," confessed Jacques; "and

nothing gave me so much pleasure as to hear the Norman accent amongst Canadians. I was quite touched more than once on finding how strong their love of France is still."

"One day we had a delightful surprise," said M. de Kéradiou. "We were out riding, and were some distance from Quebec, when we came to the iron gateway of a large estate, and we both uttered an exclamation of amazement on seeing inscribed, in huge letters on the pillars, the name, 'Milly —, Lamartine's home.' Evidently some woman lived there who loved and understood the poet. This showed us how far Canada is behind the France of to-day. The former is still no farther than sentiment, while the latter has arrived at sensation. Jacques and I, moved by the same thought, lifted our eyes to the unknown woman, and to the memory of our compatriot. We should have been laughed at, probably, on the other side of the St. Lawrence, but you see we are French," said the Baron, with a smile at Annie.

"I hope, Monsieur d'Anguilhon," observed Charley Beauchamp, "that you did not admire Canada only, and that you did not have a bad impression of America."

"A bad impression! On the contrary, my visit to the United States helped me to understand modern life better than all the books I could have read. If I was not always charmed by what I saw, I certainly was astonished.

Chicago, amongst other things, amazed me; the height of the houses, the boldness of the buildings, gave me an impression of greatness and of fragility which I shall never forget, and I said to myself over and over again, 'How beautiful it is, and yet how ugly!'"

"Did you go to what we call the 'Far West'?"

"Yes, and that interested me more than anything else. The expenditure of force and energy which I met with there roused me so effectively that I was tempted to try my muscles. I helped to fell trees and to launch rafts, so that my hands were hard and rough for long enough afterwards, and I was very proud of my blisters."

"I should not be surprised," said Annie, "if my husband were to take a ranch somewhere. It would be newer than a racing stable."

"And more wholesome, too," added Jacques. "The fortnight De Kéradiou and I passed at the house of a friend in the State of Nevada will always be one of my best memories. We lived in the same simple, frugal way as our host, and rode miles and miles in pursuit of the horses. At night, when I was smoking my last cigar out in the open air in the bright starlight and silence of the prairie, society life, the Bois, and the club all seemed to me stupid and paltry. In that vast expanse of pure air, laden, as it were, with the sap of life, one feels refreshed both physically and morally. It is just what we need,—we

poor, ultra-refined creatures. For my part, I shall go as often as possible to renew my strength there."

"And what effect did our Eastern cities have on you?" asked Mr. Beauchamp, who, like most Americans, was curious to know the opinion of Europeans.

"They amazed me. Your universities, your colleges, your hospitals, the institutions due to private initiative, do you the greatest credit. There is no doubt about it, your work is colossal."

Mr. Beauchamp's face beamed with satisfaction.

"There are very few foreigners who render us this justice."

"Because they make the mistake of expecting to find in your country what it has not yet, instead of looking at what there is."

"Ah, there are two beautiful things in America!" added the Marquis Verga—"the Baltimore women and the Kentucky horses."

"Is n't that just Italian!" said his wife.

"How can I help it, my dear? It is no good expecting a man born between the Vatican and the Quirinal to understand a country as upsetting as yours. The three months I spent there my breath was taken away every minute, just as it is in your terrible lifts—those lifts which do not simply take you up, but which carry you off bodily. The whole of the time I felt in a constant state of bewilderment, and it always

seemed as though people were treading on my toes."

"Well, that's a new impression, anyhow," said Mr. Beauchamp good-naturedly.

"By the bye, I was not very much edified with regard to your political customs. They are worse than ours, and that is saying a great deal."

"It is the same with us as with you—honest men are, unfortunately, selfish," answered Annie, with her usual frank way of speaking. "Instead of fighting against ambitious intrigues and unscrupulous men, they leave the field free to them, and so corruption and bribery are to be found everywhere."

"You are right," owned Mr. Beauchamp; "but there! it is perhaps impossible to find among people who have made their way and are independent the motive power necessary to give impulse to the affairs of a great country."

"Well, it is a pity, then," said Helen; "honesty ought to be a propelling force more powerful than that of personal ambition."

"Ah, Mrs. Ronald, you ask too much from human nature, more, even, than a merciful Providence does," said Jacques; "it is incredible that you should all have this instinct of combativeness."

"*À propos*, Monsieur d'Anguilhon, what do you think of American women, on the whole? You promised to tell me."

"They seemed to me admirably suited to their country. They have the qualities which characterise it—youthfulness, daring, vitality."

"That is quite true," said Charley Beauchamp.

"Then, too, they are very pretty," continued Jacques. "To my great surprise, I found again in the United States the feminine type of the eighteenth century which has disappeared in Europe. I saw many faces which resembled those painted by Latour and Greuze. In all sincerity, I have never met so many beautiful women."

"Surely," observed Dora, with her sarcastic expression, "after all these flattering things, we may expect a modifying 'but' which will interest me."

"Well, then, mademoiselle," said Jacques, with his significant smile, "I will add, 'but' before American women will ever have the charm and finish which produces harmony they will have to be a hundred years older."

"I should prefer being a hundred years younger," replied Miss Carroll.

"You are quite right; youth is a beautiful defect."

"If that is the only one with which you have to reproach us, we will not complain," said Mrs. Ronald; "and you, Annie,—what impression did America make on you after six years' absence?"

"Do not imagine it is affection on my part if I confess that many things jarred upon me.

I was struck with the nervousness of every one. The moral standard seemed to me to be lower—considerably lower. In my time, there were girls who were fast; but I found plenty who were—*‘rapid,’* and I noticed that divorces were talked about quite as much as marriages. The excessive noise and activity, unaccustomed as I now am to both, tired me out. The houses of our millionaires made me appreciate certain French homes, and it was with the greatest delight that I came back again to our dear old Blonay. I should never have thought it possible”; and then, with a pretty little air of wisdom, she added: “I believe, after all, that life is merely a series of lessons, and I have already learnt a few. . . . Ah, Monsieur de Limeray!”

At that name Helen, who had her back to the door, turned quickly round. At the sight of the “Prince” she coloured slightly, and glanced across in distress at her brother and Dora.

“I was afraid you were not coming,” said Annie to the new arrival. “It would have been a pity, for to-night poker will be a serious affair, —America is in full force.”

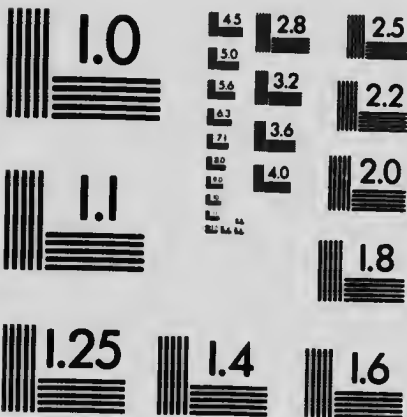
Thereupon the young hostess introduced the Count de Limeray to her guests. On meeting thus at the house of a friend the stranger who had roused his interest, the “Prince” looked both surprised and pleased.

“I little imagined the good fortune which was awaiting me to-night,” he said, bowing low to



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Helen, "but I had hoped for it, nevertheless. I have noticed that in the end one is apt to make the acquaintance of people one frequently meets."

"You have often met Mrs. Ronald?" said the Marquise very much astonished.

"Yes, several times. Chance—is it chance, though?—has led us to dine in the same restaurants. Only yesterday we were neighbours at table at the Café de Paris."

Helen's embarrassment increased so much that it was noticeable.

"Do you understand English?" suddenly asked Miss Carroll, boldly enough.

"Perfectly well; my mother was Irish. I have never been so glad to understand it as yesterday evening," said the Count, with a somewhat mocking smile.

Guy de Nozay, one of those terribly short-sighted persons whom nothing escapes, noticed it, and guessed that the young girl had been guilty of some indiscretion in her remarks.

"I hope for your sake, my dear friend, that you heard only agreeable things," he said maliciously. "It is rather rare, though, when people happen to overhear things not intended for them."

"I heard some agreeable things, some severe ones, and, above all, some that were very instructive. I learnt that one can guess the character of an individual, and even the menu of his din-

ner, merely by the sight of his back; and that Frenchmen's moustaches belong to another epoch than themselves, which fact causes them to look odd—like living anachronisms."

"Indeed! I would wager that it is Miss Carroll who has discovered that," said Guy de Nozay, with a gleam of mischief behind his eye-glass.

"Yes; you are quite right," answered Dora, who never allowed herself to be disconcerted for a trifle. "I know that in France a well-brought-up girl is not supposed to talk about any one's back or moustache; but I am a foreigner, and as I am allowed to say what I like, I take advantage of that."

"You are quite right," said M. de Limeray. "I am not complaining, for my part. Your original remarks amused me immensely."

"I am very glad," replied Dora graciously.

"Is it in the American boarding-schools that you are taught to understand the expression of the back and the moustache?" asked the Viscount, who delighted in teasing.

"Oh, no; they never teach anything there as useful as that. It is information that I acquired entirely alone—the result of my own observation."

M. de Nozay bowed and smiled. He felt himself somewhat nonplussed. He was taken aback by the outspokenness of the young girl.

"You have a friend, Monsieur," said the

Count de Limeray, addressing himself to Charley Beauchamp, "who thoroughly understands our country. I have never heard so true an estimate from any foreigner."

"Oh, but he has lived in Paris for three years!"

"One may live here twenty years—all one's life even—and yet not understand the French mind as your friend appears to do."

"It is just that Willie Grey is an artist. I should not be surprised if, one of these days, America were to be very proud of his talent. There is a picture of his now in the Champs Élysées Salon, *The Meditation of Jesus*, which reveals great power. If I had room I should buy it."

"I will go and see it. I am very fond of pictures myself, and I should be delighted to make the acquaintance of Mr. Grey."

"I could take you to his studio if you liked."

"It would give me great pleasure."

Annie invited her guests to take their places at the card-table, and poker commenced. It was a most animated game, thanks to the Americans, who, as usual, played with great spirit. When it was over, the Count de Limeray had a long talk with Helen, whose great beauty and refinement had from the first meeting won his admiration and sympathy.

"You seem to be enjoying yourself in Paris?" he said.

"Immensely!"

"And your husband is in America?"

"Yes; unfortunately he could not accompany me."

"And you regret that very much?" asked the Count, in a tone which revealed the impertinence of a doubt.

To her great annoyance, Helen felt herself blushing.

"Certainly I do," she answered, looking full at her interlocutor.

"Excuse me; but, like all Europeans, I cannot help being astonished at the confidence with which American husbands allow their wives, and often very pretty wives, too, to come alone to Paris."

"Oh, they know that we are to be trusted!"

"And that you have n't the *tempérament*," said the Marquis Verga, somewhat brutally.

"But I should hope that even with the *tempérament*, a well-brought-up woman would not fail in her duty."

"And you think, then, that education would prove a safeguard against temptation?" asked M. de Limeray.

"I am sure of it," answered Helen, in a positive tone.

The Count looked at her with an expression of curiosity and surprise, mingled with the regret that he could not put her to the proof.

"I should very much like to know what you

mean by *tempérament*," said Dora. "No one has been able to explain it to me, and even the dictionary has not helped me much."

The young girl's words were followed by one of those terrible silences which awkward and injudicious remarks usually cause.

"*Tempérament* is a defect, according to some people, and a quality according to others; it is a very dangerous thing, anyhow," answered the Viscount de Nozay, as seriously as he could speak, "and it is impossible to explain it to young girls."

"That's a pity, for it must be interesting," remarked Miss Carroll carelessly; and then, suddenly aware of what she had said, she coloured slightly, and asked some question on another subject altogether, by way of changing the topic of conversation.

Just before they were leaving, the Count de Limeray approached Dora.

"Mademoiselle," he said, fixing on her his sad eyes, "since I have had the pleasure of knowing Madame de Kéradiou and Madame d'Anguilhon, I have learnt that the truth never offends an American; and so I am going to take the liberty of telling you that your criticism of the French aristocracy yesterday evening was both severe and unjust. It is true that my generation, rightly or wrongly, has held itself aloof, but our children are gradually entering again into the struggle, and, believe me, they have more than

the moustache of former times,—they have also the daring and the heroism which give to it the peculiar bold expression which you have noticed. My eldest son went out to Africa and sacrificed his life for the sake of an idea, that of helping France and getting ahead of England in certain matters. I do not doubt that others will follow his example.”

Dora was overwhelmed with confusion, and felt strangely small by the side of this old nobleman, with his dignified bearing.

“I often speak without thinking,” she said, overcoming her embarrassment quickly, “but I am always sorry when I have talked nonsense and hurt any one’s feelings, as I did yesterday.”

“I quite believe you, and, for my part, I am glad to have had an opportunity of modifying your opinions. You are not angry with me?”

“On the contrary!”

The Count held out his hand, and Miss Carroll put hers into it with a spontaneousness full of apology and contrition.

No sooner were they in the carriage and on the way to the Hôtel Continental, than Mrs. Ronald asked Dora what the “Prince” had said to her.

The young girl repeated word for word their conversation.

“Wasn’t I unlucky!” she added, laughing. “Monsieur de Limeray is perhaps the only Frenchman of that age in the Faubourg who

understands English, and he must just be our neighbour at table."

"What a delightful evening!" said Charley Beauchamp. "It is strange; but I had, in that society and in that old house, just the same feeling of restfulness that I always experience at the Louvre. I notice, too, in the eyes of these men belonging to the aristocracy that same light which one sees in the eyes of the old portraits. Oh, no; they are not meant for the costume of our times, and still less for modern life. I am not surprised that Annie fell in love with Monsieur d'Anguillon, for he has perfectly fascinated me."

"Yes, he is very curious—very interesting," remarked Miss Carroll, as though she were speaking of some trinket or rare piece of furniture. "I should never feel at ease with him, though. He would do for a Sunday husband, but for every day I prefer Jack; and if I were his wife, I should want to know of whom he was thinking whenever he was absent-minded, as he was to-night."

CHAPTER V

THE PARIS OF THE FOREIGNER

“**L**OISET'S, Rue Royale!”

This order, given to the coachman by Mr. Beauchamp on leaving the Renaissance Theatre, represented another of Eve's victories over Adam.

Charley had, not without protesting strongly, taken his sister and Miss Carroll to the Moulin-Rouge, the Olympia, and to all the noted café-concerts. The idea that they did not understand, any more than he did, all the vulgarities which were uttered at these extremely up-to-date resorts set his conscience at rest. He was frankly astonished that they should care to hear things in Paris to which they would never have listened in New York. Several times they had begged him to take them to the noted restaurant in the Rue Royale, which is open all night, but he had always found some pretext for refusing.

At Helen's suggestion, he had, on the evening in question, taken a box at the Renaissance Theatre, and had invited the Marquis and Marquise Verga, and Willie Grey. Just before the last act, the three ladies had declared that they

wanted to go to Loiset's for supper. It was simply a plot organised among themselves, and there was nothing left but to yield to their whim, as they were most persistent. As the carriages drew up in front of the restaurant, two gentlemen, who had been strolling up and down, stopped for a minute to exchange a few last words, and Helen, on stepping on to the footpath, found herself, to her great consternation, face to face with the "Prince."

The latter, on recognising Mme. d'Anguilhon's friends, took leave of his companion at once and approached them.

"You are not going to Loiset's?" he said anxiously.

"Yes, we are," answered the Marquise.

"But it's a place where ladies do not go."

"French ladies—perhaps not," said Mrs. Ronald, "but we Americans are very healthy-minded. We can safely see and hear everything. There is nothing to fear."

"Well, but, Helen, if it is impossible for you to go to this restaurant—" began Mr. Beauchamp.

"Impossible! Why, all our friends have been here to supper! It is as well known in New York as the Eiffel Tower."

"Well, anyhow, I have never been inside, and it is only a stone's throw from my club."

"Then come with us now and have some Welsh rarebit. You know it is just toasted cheese and

bread, a regular midnight dish, but it is quite a specialty here."

"Agreed! Let us go and try the Welsh rare-bit," said the Count. "It is rather amusing for me, an old Parisian, to be taken for the first time to Loiset's by American ladies."

One of the waiters advanced to meet them, and, on seeing that they were foreigners, took them right through to the other end of the restaurant to a sort of platform two steps higher than the rest of the room, and with a railing in front. Below this platform to the right was the Tzigane band.

"You will see everything here," said the waiter, graciously pointing to one of the tables.

These words struck M. de Limeray as significant, and he wondered what they might mean.

Mr. Beauchamp ordered the supper, and the three ladies at once looked round curiously. They all had the same feeling of disappointment on seeing the smallness of the room and the ordinary-looking decoration of the celebrated restaurant.

"Not up to much,—Loiset's," remarked the Marquis Verga.

The *habitués* began to arrive. Fast-looking men, old and young, accompanied by *demi-mondaines*—more or less pretty and more or less elegant. Presently the scene began to get animated. There were peals of laughter, sparkling eyes, and bursts of forced gaiety. The

atmosphere reeked with a mixed odour of wine, various dishes, and strong perfumes, and began to get heavy and vitiated. It seemed to M. de Limeray as though an ever-mounting tide of human scum were advancing towards him, and all, looked at from the standpoint of his sixty years of life, appeared to him hideous and loathsome. He glanced at his companions. Charley Beauchamp and Willie Grey were entertained with the sight before them, and did not seem to be troubled by it in the least. As for the ladies, they were examining the toilettes of the *demi-mondaines*, exchanging remarks in a low voice, chattering gaily, and evidently delighted to see so many shocking things. In the midst of these surroundings, the air laden, as it were, with sensuality, they remained absolutely unaffected by it all, their eyes limpid and their expression serene. The Marquis Verga, noticing M. de Limeray's astonished look, leaned over towards him, and said in a low voice:

"You see them—not a vestige of *tempérament*."

"So much the better for them."

"And for their husbands, too."

Dora's attention had been drawn to an old woman, dressed in black, with a fichu of Spanish lace over her greyish hair, who was sleeping peacefully in a corner of the room with some baskets of flowers near her. She continued sleeping a few minutes longer, until the voices

became louder and louder, and then the music struck up. She at once began to sort her flowers in a slow, weary way, and to arrange them in bunches.

"Look what a charming face that poor woman has," said Miss Carroll. "I am sure she has a history."

The "Prince" turned round.

"Why, it is Isabelle!" he exclaimed, "an old friend of mine."

The flower-seller, on hearing her name pronounced, raised her blue eyes, which still had a certain charm and beauty. She looked at the Count an instant, and then her whole face lighted up with recognition, and in obedience to a sign from him she came up on to the platform.

"How's this that I find you here?" said M. de Limeray. "I thought you were living on your means in some village near Paris!"

"My means! Wherever should I get them from? I have nothing but what I earn, and I am working now to bring up a niece, who is studying at the Conservatoire, and to pay the twenty per cent. I promised to my creditors."

"Where do you live?"

"At Sannois."

"And you pass your nights in this awful place?"

"Yes, until the first morning train, which takes me back home."

"It's a hard life."

"I'd rather have this than be bedridden. I must live in Paris, even in this way, and I must have my flowers. I could not exist without them both."

"Do you make plenty of money?"

"No. In the old days when young men had been lucky either in their love affairs or at the gaming-table, they'd give me a twenty-franc piece for a flower. In these times they are stingy, even when they are in luck. Oh, they are mean! mean!" said Isabelle, with an expression of intense contempt.

The Count could not help smiling.

"Ah, well, go and fetch us all some flowers now," he said, "and we won't be mean. You guessed rightly, Mademoiselle," he said, turning to Dora, "that good woman has a history. Under the Empire she was the flower-girl specially favoured by the Jockey Club, and all the year round she wore the colours of the horse that had won the *Grand Prix*. She was pretty and a good girl, and earned any amount of money. This made her family jealous, and her mother, at the instigation of a relative, I believe, accused her daughter of allowing her to be in want, and brought an action against her which made a great deal of stir. The Jockey Club gave her up, and entirely withdrew its favours. She then opened a flower shop, but failed; and since then I had lost sight of her."

Isabelle now came back, bringing some sprays

of roses artistically arranged, which she presented to the three American ladies; and then, approaching M. de Limeray, she put a superb white carnation in his buttonhole.

"In memory of the old days," she said quietly.

The Count slipped a fifty-franc note into her hand.

"I will come in now and then, and see how you are getting on," he added kindly.

"It is just on purpose," said the Marquise Verga, looking round the room, "there is nothing extraordinary going on to-day. The other evening, it appears, a Russian princess danced on the tables."

"A Russian princess!" repeated the Count de Limeray. "You astonish me!"

"What a fine thing education is!" said Dora, with the most comical expression. "You are thinking, I am sure, that only an American princess would be capable of going in for such exploits as those. But out of politeness, you do not say so."

"Well, you are mistaken, Mademoiselle; my education is not merely a superficial one. And when in the society of American ladies, such a thought as that would not occur to me."

"There I am again! It seems that I am fated to be always in the wrong about you," owned the young girl gaily.

Just at this moment four couples entered noisily and took their seats at a long table oppo-

site the platform to which the foreigners had been conducted. An enormous lobster was brought to them, and their glasses were filled with champagne. Presently they began to raise their voices and to exchange vulgar remarks. The music of the Tziganes was getting wilder and wilder, as though it were intended to act on the nerves and serve as an accompaniment to the revelry. One of the women held her glass up to the lips of her neighbour, and obliged him to swallow the contents. Another one put her arm round the neck of the individual to her left and rubbed her cheek against his. The three American women were inwardly rejoicing that the scene was getting livelier. Mrs. Ronald put on a pretty air of severity, and with an instinctive gesture of dignity drew herself up, as though to rise above such coarseness and vulgarity. At the first glance, M. de Limeray had guessed to what category those elegantly dressed men belonged, with their gardenias in their buttonholes, and those faded women, adorned with sham jewellery. After a few minutes' observation he began to laugh.

"Ah, what a good joke, what a good joke!" he exclaimed. "These people are acting a comedy. They have been paid to behave abominably and to make a sensation. Your Russian princess was paid, Madame Verga. I understand now what the waiter meant with his 'You will see everything.'"

"Upon my word, I believe you are right," said Willie Grey, in amazement.

"And all these people," continued the Count, looking all round the platform, "English, Americans, Dutch, Norwegians,—there are even Norwegians,—will go away from here convinced that they have witnessed a scene of Parisian life—of true Parisian life. They will declare that ours is the most immoral city in the world, that there are restaurants where people kiss each other in public; and this little comedy is enacted for their special benefit, to satisfy the taste for which we give them credit. Just look! the Parisians who are here do not trouble themselves about that table: they probably know the trick. I am very glad that I came, and that I have been able to enlighten you, at any rate!"

"You really think," said Helen, with a discomfited look, "that these gentlemen——"

"These gentlemen," interrupted the Count, "are individuals who get their living in a way which cannot be spoken of, even. Look what is going on now!"

One of the women had evidently fixed her choice on a young Englishman, with a clean-shaven face and serene expression, who was smoking his cigar and drinking beer at a neighbouring table. She was throwing flowers at him, one after the other, from a basket in front of her.

"If her companion were paying for this supper," said M. de Limeray to Charley Beauchamp,

"he would not put up with this provocation."

"Certainly not! You are quite right about it, we have been taken in; and now that there is no doubt about it, the best thing we can do is to go."

"Oh, let us wait and see how this ends with the Englishman!" begged the Marquise Verga.

The flowers continued to be showered on the young foreigner; some of them hit him on his head and others right in the face, but he remained perfectly unconcerned.

He picked up, one after another, a rose, a pink, or a geranium, and after inhaling their perfume crushed them between his fingers; his eyes had a dreamy, far-away look in them, and a smile played over his lips—a smile in which there was a defiant expression. It was as though he had laid a wager with himself and were intent on winning it. The woman who had challenged him, exasperated at his indifference, rose abruptly, went and took a seat by him, and with her elbow on the table began to talk to him. The champagne had given a flush to her face, and she was pretty enough to be quite bewitching.

The young man listened for without moving a muscle, and then, after glancing at her for an instant with eyes as cold as steel, he got up from the table.

"I do not understand your language," he said very calmly; and then, leaving her there in the lurch, he moved towards the door.

Furious with anger, and thoroughly humiliated, the girl watched him with a fearful expression in her eyes. She looked just ready to spring upon him.

"*Mufle!*" she cried at last, at the top of her voice.

She was somewhat relieved by this invective and, endeavouring to hide under a wild burst of laughter the anger caused by her defeat, she went back to her place.

"This time we have had our money's worth," said Willie Grey, laughing. "We can go now, I should think."

"Have you been sufficiently edified, Ladies?" asked the Marquis Verga.

"Yes, yes!" answered the American women.

"That's right!"

On leaving the restaurant, they all drew a long breath.

"What a good thing pure air is!" remarked Helen.

"And pure life, too," added Charley Beauchamp, in a tone which indicated his regret at having yielded to his sister's whim.

The Marquis and Marquise Verga, who lived in the Champs Élysées, hailed a cab.

"Let us walk back," proposed Helen, "and as slowly as possible, it is such a divine night!"

"And what a contrast to all we have just left!" said the Count de Limeray, stopping in the middle of the Rue Royale.

The blue vault above looked infinitely pure and lofty. The sky was perfectly clear and cloudless, and under the soft light of the moon the Place de la Concorde looked strange, weird, and immense. At this hour of the night it was no longer a Parisian thoroughfare. With its obelisk of hieratic lines, the white road over the bridge leading to a palace of Grecian architecture, the wide avenue of the Champs Élysées disappearing mysteriously under the verdure, and the lonely terraces and silent gardens of the Tuileries, it resembled the agora of some dream-city over which sleep hovered, and which gave a delicious sensation of peace, immobility, and rest.

"Yes, indeed, what a contrast!" said Helen. "Do you know, that what we call evil and ugliness are merely the shadows which are necessary for bringing out in relief all that is good and beautiful? Without those shadows we should not see this, perhaps."

M. de Limeray looked with surprise at this pretty woman, uttering tranquilly a philosophic thought of such weight.

"This theory of yours is rather bold."

"Yes, shocking even; but this idea has often crossed my mind. To-night it comes back to me forcibly. I had to go into that horrible restaurant in order to feel the beauty of this spring night. I have a husband who is both a savant and a philosopher. He likes to discuss

things with me, and although I do not always listen very attentively, many of his words fix themselves in my brain, I do not know how. This gives me thoughts and ideas which come and go sometimes in the midst of my pleasures, and even when I am occupied about dress. It appears, after all, that I am not as frivolous as I look."

"Then you do not regret having gone to Loiset's?" asked the "Prince," who, like all Frenchmen of a certain culture, delighted in exploring the feminine mind.

"On the contrary!"

"And all your compatriots are curious to see such places?"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Ronald honestly. "The majority of American women would not set their foot in a night restaurant. Society women of my generation, though, are all curious about such things. It is amusing to glance, now and then, down a precipice, when one is sure of one's self."

"You like danger?"

"I adore it!"

"You have often braved it?"

"Yes, often," answered Helen, smiling. "Flirting has some good in it; you see, it renders us fireproof in the end, and as in America we all practise it from our infancy we are just about incombustible. As for me, I have taken a salamander for my emblem. I have had it painted

on the panels of my dressing-room, and engraved on my seal. Look at it," she added, pointing to a little salamander of diamonds, with emerald eyes, which was fastened on her bodice, and which glittered with a cold and cruel light.

"Never tell that to a young European; you would be offering him a terrible temptation. You make me regret that I am not thirty years younger."

"Oh, I do not fear anything or any one," answered Mrs. Ronald, with a pretty, defiant laugh.

"Oh, well, I cannot help it, but I do not believe in your insensibility."

"Why?"

"I could not explain why—it is just an impression I have; and, taking the liberty of an old friend, I would say: Beware! One should not tempt Providence, and still less man; the time may come when he will have his day with you."

Mrs. Ronald did not answer. These words gave her a vague feeling of uneasiness, and she changed the subject abruptly. Dora was walking just in front, chattering gaily to Charley Beauchamp and Willie Grey.

"Well, have you enjoyed yourself this evening at Loiset's?" asked the latter.

"Immensely! Then I have these lovely roses," pointing to the bouquet which Isabelle had made, "and this pretty fan, which is quite a master-

piece. I have seen the ex-flower-girl of the Jockey Club under the Empire, and heard her history, which interested me very much. Lastly, I have witnessed the victory of Britannic virtue over Parisian wickedness, and I have learned that they have the laugh on us at Loiset's. I have not wasted my evening, and my letters tomorrow will be so interesting that all my friends' mouths will water."

Willie Grey could not help smiling.

"Give me an American girl for getting the most out of every one and everything."

"*Mufle!*"

"Is that for my benefit?" asked the young artist, amazed.

"No, no!" answered Miss Carroll, laughing heartily. "I am only practising the word so that I shall not forget it. It means *muff*, I suppose; but it is much more expressive and much funnier, anyhow."

As the young girl finished speaking, they had all arrived at the door of the Hôtel Continental. Every one shook hands and took leave of one another. When in the lift, to the utter amazement of the boy, Dora moved a step forward, and, pursing up her lips and jerking her head in a comical way, suddenly exclaimed:

"*Mufle! mufle!* Oh, no," she added, "my evening certainly has not been wasted!"

CHAPTER VI

THE CROSSING OF TWO LIVES

"WHAT is the programme for this afternoon?" asked Charley Beauchamp, at luncheon, about a fortnight later.

"Well," answered Helen, "we must call on Annie, as she is leaving Paris the day after tomorrow. You must come, too. I have ordered the carriage for half-past four. You are free until then."

"All right!"

"I am sure that Madame d'Anguilhon would have invited us to Blonay if she were well," said Dora.

"Probably."

"It would have been more fun than our journey to Holland. I would give anything to see one of our countrywomen acting hostess in her château."

"Annie must be charming in that rôle, because she is so simple and natural," answered Aunt Sophie. "I think, too, that she is much nicer now than when she was a girl."

"That is my impression, also," said Mr. Beauchamp. "She has acquired a certain finish in

these French surroundings; and in spite of that, she is still very American, which proves that we have a strong individuality."

"Oh, the surroundings have nothing to do with the change for the better in Annie! It is time which has done it. She belonged to a class whose moral standard and education are quite as high as that into which she has entered," remarked Miss Beauchamp, with asperity.

"Agreed, my dear Aunt; but Europe, with its different customs, conjugal submission, and the dependence which it imposes on women, acts visibly upon our compatriots, and gives them a gentler and more sympathetic look. What mistaken ideas we have about the society of the Old World! We come and visit the museums and public buildings of a country, but we neither study the mind nor the character of its inhabitants. How stupid it is!"

"Yes, but civilised people do not live in tents, and we cannot interview them as though they were Red Indians," said Miss Carroll. "If we had no friends who had married into the Faubourg St. Germain, we should only have seen the outside of the d'Anguillhons' home, and should never have known how the owners of it lived, or even how they dined."

"Besides, the French, who appear to be so easy to know, are very exclusive," added Helen. "They do not open their doors to people of another country."

"They make a mistake, for they improve on acquaintance," said Charley.

"It would improve them to make the acquaintance of foreigners, anyhow," declared Aunt Sophie peremptorily.

She was one of those Americans who honestly believe that all morality and enlightenment come from their country.

"Certainly," answered Mr. Beauchamp, with a sly wink. "I do not doubt, for instance, but that my example and my way of looking at things will have a salutary influence on Messrs. de Kéradiou, d'Anguilhon, and de Limeray. For my part, after what I have seen and heard, I am not sure that the Anglo-Saxon race will ever rule the world. It is a race which is destined to do the rough work of civilisation, but as to the rest,—the crowning work,—the Latin race was meant to do that."

"It is evident that Willie Grey has converted you," said Dora.

"You will give me credit for being able to form my own opinions, I hope? I have never, for instance, understood so thoroughly the difference between the Latin temperament and the Saxon temperament as the other evening at the Odéon on hearing *l'Arlésienne*. I saw men there moved to tears; and not only did the piece fail to affect me, but it seemed to me false, extravagant, absurd."

"I think Frenchmen are decidedly amusing,"

said Miss Carroll. "They are so inquisitive, and they are famous women-interviewers. They want to know what you think, what you feel, and a hundred things about which an American would never trouble. They literally take us to pieces just to see how that little thing is made which we have on our left side. That abominable Viscount de Nozay, for instance, turned me inside out like a glove."

"Well, then, Jack can be easy in his mind, for if he knows you inside out he will never want to marry you," remarked Mr. Beauchamp, with a smile which mitigated his teasing.

Dora threw her serviette at 's head.

"It's very bad of you, Char y, to say that, for I am really better inside than outside."

"Are you going out at once?" Mrs. Carroll asked her daughter.

"No; I am expecting one of the girls from Virot's with some hats."

"More hats!"

"Yes, I saw such pretty ones this morning that I could not resist. It quite disgusts me to have so many things, yet I go on buying all the time. In Europe it is want that causes suicide; with us, it will soon be satiety that will cause it."

"Don't say such silly things," observed Miss Beauchamp, looking annoyed.

Helen rose from the table and went to the glass. She was wearing a walking costume, and had kept her hat on for luncheon. She dis-

covered that it was one of the days when she looked her best, and she smiled to her reflection in the glass by way of congratulation.

"An idea has just come to me," she said, taking one of her little side-combs and running it through her beautiful glossy hair, which was turned up from the back of her neck. "I will go and see Mrs. Kevins. She is never there after three o'clock, and she promised me some addresses of hotels in Holland."

"Ask her to give you all the information she can while she is about it," advised Mr. Beauchamp. "That will make the journey easier. I will come down and see you into a carriage."

"There's no need; I will walk. It is not too hot, and I need a little exercise." At the very moment when Mrs. Ronald was inspired to pay this visit, a young Roman, Count Sant' Anna, who had just been lunching with a friend at Voisin's, remembered an appointment he had made the day before.

"*Per Bacco!*" he exclaimed, looking at his watch, "half-past one already! I shall have to leave you," he added to his friend, "for I have an appointment in the Avenue d'Antin with Binder. He is to show me a new style of phaeton."

Helen was only a few yards from the Hôtel Continental when the Italian started out of the restaurant, smoking his cigar, and both of them, without being aware of it, were obeying the

Supreme Will which had fixed their meeting for that day and for that hour. Count Sant' Anna went down the Rue Cambon and turned the corner of the Rue de Rivoli. The fine weather tempted him, too, to walk. Suddenly he caught sight of Mrs. Ronald, and could not take his eyes off her again. Her costume was of light beige cloth, the jacket quite short, and the skirt, which fitted closely at the top, outlining her graceful figure. Her round hat, turned up at the back with pale pink roses, showed her fair, wavy hair, the colour of which was so wonderful that it looked artificial.

"A *demi-mondaine*, undoubtedly," thought the Italian; and, quite deceived by the general appearance of Mrs. Ronald, he walked a little faster, overtook her, and then, turning round, stared at her unceremoniously.

"No, a foreigner," he said to himself, "but deucedly pretty!"

Whereupon he at once slowed up in order to follow her.

The American woman is more feminine in Europe than she is at home. It may be that the atmosphere and surroundings develop her femininity, or perhaps it is that she is more venturesome. However that may be, in Paris she likes to attract attention and admiration in the street. It is a pleasure which she does not get in her own country and which she values all the more accordingly. Whenever a French-

woman is followed persistently it always troubles her; she is annoyed about it, and reproaches herself as though she were to blame. An American woman is not disturbed by such trifles. It often happens that some idler, attracted by her beauty or deceived by her coquettish manner, mistakes her for a foreigner on the lookout for adventures, and follows her for the fun of the thing. Far from being alarmed at this impertinence, she is flattered by it, and most imprudently slackens her pace and stops to look at the shop windows. When the "follower," imagining that he is being encouraged, speaks to her, she gives him a withering look, and repulses him with an expression of such freezing propriety that he retires more or less abashed. She returns home delighted at having humiliated an individual of the stronger sex, and conscious of no other feeling than that of satisfied self-respect.

Mrs. Ronald often had little adventures of this kind when out walking. They always gave her pleasure, although she complained, with pretended indignation, like all her countrywomen, that it was impossible to go out-doors without being followed in this *wicked* Paris, as it is generally called in England and America. It would have been very difficult to persuade Helen that the fault was her own and that of her dresses, which were too elegant for the street. As a matter of fact, the French are more re-

spectful than any other men towards women whom they judge to be *comme il faut*.

This afternoon, Mrs. Ronald was quickly aware that she had made a conquest. The stranger who had turned round and looked at her so boldly was following her. She soon saw that, and it both amused her and flattered her vanity, for she had time to observe that he was handsome and distinguished-looking. Under the magnetic influence of the admiration and the desire she had excited, she felt glad to be alive and to be beautiful; her step was more elastic, and she herself more animated. After crossing the Place de la Concorde, she took the Avenue Gabriel, and both of them, guided by the Invisible, continued their way for some minutes almost alone in the shady avenue, the atmosphere laden with the scent from the flowers and trees.

The Italian felt an increasing pleasure in following this pretty woman. He began to notice her more closely, like a true connoisseur. He then walked faster, until Helen, perceiving that he was gaining on her, became frightened, and, turning abruptly to the left, entered the less shady avenue of the Champs Élysées. The young man understood at once that the fair unknown was not merely taking a walk, but that she was either going to call on some one or she was on her way home. He wanted to accompany her to the end of her journey and, hypnotised by the

brightness of her hair and the pretty outline of her figure, he passed by the Avenue d'Antin, forgetting both carriage-builder and phaeton.

Mrs. Kevins lived quite near the Arc de Triomphe. On arriving at the last house but one in the Champs Élysées, the entrance to which is in the Rue de Tilsitt, Helen passed through the carriage gateway. Sant' Anna stood still a moment on the footpath, wondering whether she lived there. At last, yielding to an irresistible curiosity, he entered, in his turn, and asked the concierge whether the lady who had just gone up-stairs lived there. The good woman looked at him somewhat distrustfully at first, then, seeing he was unmistakably a gentleman, she replied that the lady was only a visitor.

The suite of rooms occupied by Mrs. Kevins was on the first floor, and the drawing-room had two corner windows, so that Helen was able to see her admirer acting as sentinel. This did not fail to make her somewhat nervous and absent-minded, so that she did not hear half the particulars which her friend gave her concerning Belgium and Holland. When her visit was over, Mrs. Ronald felt a certain amount of excitement as she descended the stairs. In order to avoid the troublesome young man, she asked the concierge to call a cab for her, and remained herself out of sight in the doorway. When the cab drew up, she stepped in quickly, telling the man to drive to the Avenue Friedland. The young man,

who was strolling up and down, caught sight of the cab as it was hurrying away in that direction. He guessed that it was bearing away his fair unknown, and that he had been duped. He lifted his arm with a gesture of vexation, and gave that inimitable jerk of the head and shrug of the shoulders with which the Italian accepts his defeats and expresses his helplessness.

"I shall meet her again," he said; "a pretty woman never disappears."

According to his wishes, he met Helen face to face two days later in the Rue de la Paix. She seemed to him more charming still, and her wonderful *blondur* had the same effect on his brain as a sunstroke. He gazed at her with eyes full of admiration, but she appeared not to have seen him. When he had gone a few yards in the opposite direction, he turned round and began to follow her again. She felt this in a magnetic way, and was flattered at this fresh proof of his admiration. Without hurrying, she continued her walk, took the Boulevard des Capucines, and turned down the Rue Royale. She had intended going straight back to her hotel, but, seeing that the stranger kept up with her, she hailed a cab and told the driver to take her to the Louvre shops. When once there, she knew that, by one door or another, she could manage to elude the young man. Sant' Anna, who also knew the treachery of those countless doors, did not give her this satisfaction. He

made up his mind now to meet her again, and the next two days he strolled up and down the Rue de Castiglione and the Rue de la Paix, but without any result. He had guessed that she was an American, and that she was probably staying at one of the hotels in that neighbourhood.

Like most of his countrymen, Sant' Anna was a great woman-hunter, and delighted in love adventures. This kind of sport provided him with the sort of excitement in which he revelled. He put all his energy into it, all the artifice and puerile superstitions natural to his race.

He never reckoned the cost when once his interest had been roused by a pretty face or a graceful figure, but whenever it happened, as, indeed, was rarely the case, that his advances were repulsed, he accepted the failure philosophically. Whether it be that with the Italian there is less combativeness, or that his extremely refined nature makes him realise more the inevitable in life, he gives in without resistance, with as much resignation as the Oriental, but with more intelligence.

"È la fatalità! È il destino!" ("It is fatality! It is destiny!") These words, which come instinctively to his lips, console him easily and take away all remorse and all regret. Very superstitious, the young man said to himself that the American woman had made too deep an impression on him for her not to be destined to play a part in his life. He little guessed what

part she was to play! He therefore set himself to look out for her everywhere, and on the morning of the fourth day he suddenly saw her in front of him, crossing the Place Vendôme. He felt his head swim round and his heart begin to beat faster. His first idea was to hurry on, but, determined to find out where she lived, he decided to follow her at some distance, and was rewarded by seeing her enter the Hôtel Continental. That was quite enough, and he continued his way, thoroughly satisfied at having attained his end.

That very evening, as Mrs. Ronald and her brother were taking coffee in the hall of the Hôtel Continental, she saw her admirer arrive. This unexpected apparition caused her some uneasiness. She did not doubt for an instant that he had come on her account. He had unearthed her, then! It was very clever of him, and her vanity exulted and made her suddenly joyful and gay. Her eyes shone more brightly than ever, and she began to talk fast and volubly. The Count had taken a seat at the next table to hers, and although several times she felt the attraction of his persistent gaze, she braved it with the most perfect expression of indifference. While talking, she said to herself that he was certainly either an Italian or a Spaniard. At the first glance, she had observed his pale complexion and his regular features; on looking again, she noticed his well-built figure, and all

the outward signs which reveal a gentleman. Decidedly this conquest did her honour. The idea struck her that he would be sure to take Charley for her husband; and immediately, with the instinctive and petty cruelty of a woman, she wanted to tantalise him, and so began talking to her brother in an affectionate way. She allowed him to admire her for another quarter of an hour or so, laughing to herself at the thought that she was leaving Paris the following day, and picturing to herself his discomposure when he heard of her departure. After imagining this cheerful scene, she rose and walked back along the hall to take the lift. Just as she was passing the stranger in a proud, dignified way, M. de Limeray's words came back, strangely enough, to her mind, and her lips took a pretty curve of defiance and disdain.

"It will not be this time," she said to herself, "that man will have his day with me."

CHAPTER VII

FEMININE DIPLOMACY

THE following day, Helen, with her brother and aunt, and Dora, with her mother, left Paris.

The journey to Belgium and Holland fascinated Mr. Beauchamp beyond everything. His friend, Willie Grey, joined him at Brussels, and accompanied him from one museum to another. These treasures of Europe, treasures which have required such long years of patient effort and research to collect, impressed him, as they do many of his countrymen, with that sense of restfulness and idealism which alone can soothe the fevered brain of men accustomed to the rush of business life.

Helen and Dora had never been to Belgium and the Netherlands. It was a new page of the Old World, which they read with great curiosity, and which charmed them with its strangeness. The little towns fading away in silence and prayer, the antiquity of which is so poetic, plunged them into a sort of awe. The sight of all the heavy-looking, quaint costumes, the placid faces, and the slow, solemn mode of life amused

and interested them all the time. In spite of this, Mrs. Ronald was anxious to start for Switzerland, in order to join the Marquis Verga and his wife. Considering her exclusive character, she had made friends very quickly with this compatriot whom she had met at the Marquise d'Anguillon's.

Madame Verga belonged to a very good family of Washington. As a girl she had been much in the cosmopolitan set, and it was in this way that she had met her husband, a military attaché to the Italian Embassy.

She had a pretty, doll-like face, which was lighted up with blue eyes sparkling with merriment and good nature. She was more brilliant than intelligent, and was childishly proud of being a Marquise and of her position in the best society of Rome. Her good-natured disposition and straightforwardness had won for her a large number of friends, so that her salon was one of the most frequented, which fact gave her much gratification. Her easy-going, honest nature prevented her seeing half the intrigues which went on under her very eyes. She liked the Italians, she always said, because they are naturally silent, and that gave her the opportunity of talking as much as she wished. The Marquis had the reputation of being one of the least faithful of husbands. Some people believed that his wife was ignorant of this, and others, that she merely shut her eyes to the fact. However

that might be, she always declared herself to be the happiest of women.

Madame Verga had often talked to Mrs. Ronald and Dora of the society in which she moved. She had advised them to spend the winter in Rome, promising to see that they had a good time, tempting them with all the pleasures imaginable, and offering to introduce them to various aristocratic families.

Influenced by this repeated suggestion, Helen had begun to wonder whether she could not persuade her husband to come to Europe and spend a few months there. An idea well worthy of Eve the First came to her mind. Mr. Ronald, whose favourite study was toxicology, had often expressed his regret at not having discovered the secret of the Borgia poison. She would endeavour to rouse his curiosity again on the subject, and would give him to understand that through the Marquis Verga and his friends he would be enabled to search the most secret archives of the Vatican, and surely, she thought, he would never be able to resist that!

Miss Carroll's imagination, too, had been fired by the perspective of a season in Rome, and the famous fox-hunts which Madame Verga had described to her. Then, too, the thought of going to Court and meeting those princes and dukes, whose grand, historic names had always had a sort of fascination for her,—all this was very tempting, and all the more so as she had an

excellent pretext also for prolonging her stay in Europe. Her mother's health was far from satisfactory, and the doctor strongly advised her to try a mild climate and to take things quietly. In the minds of both women the words of the Marquise were doing their work silently and surely.

From Amsterdam, Helen wrote her husband one of her charming letters, always full of clever and original remarks about everything and everybody. She sprinkled it over, as usual, with a few words of love and affection, and then finished up by expressing a wish to spend the winter in Italy. She assured Mr. Ronald that he really needed a holiday, and that he could not have a more agreeable one than in Rome; and she did not fail to hold out to him the temptation of the researches on the subject of the famous Borgia poison. This epistle was a veritable masterpiece of feminine diplomacy. Just as she was slipping it into the envelope, Dora arrived with a packet of letters in her hand.

"Have you anything for the post?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Ronald, giving her the letter she had just written.

"I'll wager that I can guess what you have been saying to Henry!"

Helen could not help colouring.

"Well, what have I been saying?"

"Merely that you want to spend the winter

in Italy!" answered Miss Carroll. "I have told Jack the same thing."

"Oh, Dody, that is too bad of you! I am married, and there is nothing to prevent Henry's coming to join me here, while you——"

"I am postponing Jack's misery for him, that is all! Joking apart, though, the two gentlemen will not be very well pleased—more's the pity; but it will help to improve their character. I know we are at liberty to do as we like, but they may spoil our fun with their worrying and their tiresome reproaches. We shall have to stand up for each other. Henry will be hard to manage, as you promised to go back for October, and if you disappoint him he will be furious. He cannot bear any one to fail in keeping a promise. The Ronalds are so terribly straightforward."

"All right," said Helen, "we will see!" and her nostrils dilated slightly, in a rebellious way.

The anatomist who studies the human body is always struck with surprise and admiration when he examines the minutiae of the details which compose it, and the way in which Nature turns to account the most tenuous fibre and the smallest molecule. In the destiny of individuals, Fate goes to work in the same prodigiously careful way. It brings from afar, from distant lands sometimes, the agents necessary for its purpose, and then from a word, a look, or a gesture, it allows the most poignant drama or divine joy to ensue; and these produce in their turn a whole

chain of sentiments, which have incalculable consequences.

The coming to Paris of Mrs. Ronald and Miss Carroll, their introduction to Madame Verga, the meeting of Helen and Count Sant' Anna, represented the result of the machinations of Providence—an alarming series of circumstances, a co-operation of beings, things, and fluids such as would bewilder a simple novelist, but about which the philosopher and the psychologist would be in their element and would learn much, and perhaps even obtain some light.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LOST PURSUER REAPPEARS

THE first week in August, Miss Carroll and her mother started for Carlsbad, while Helen, Aunt Sophie, Charley Beauchamp, and Willie Grey went to join the Vergas at the Hôtel National of Lucerne.

The little Swiss town seemed rather dull at first to Mrs. Ronald, but before long she had begun to enjoy the Alpine excursions, the long drives, and the boating or walking expeditions which the Marquis organised so well. After a few days the Marquise Verga and she had become the centre of a little coterie which excited the envy of every one by its gaiety and liveliness. After dinner, for which they dressed exquisitely, the two American ladies took their seats in the hall of the hotel, which was the general rendezvous, and there, surrounded by their friends and admirers, they rocked themselves gracefully in their chairs while listening to the Neapolitan and other songs. The Italian musicians, who go every summer to Lucerne, lend a charm to the place which all the jodlers of the Tyrol would fail to give it. After a day spent on the

grey-looking lake, on the green or snowy mountains, among the cold scenery of the Alps, it is the most exquisite pleasure to have this sudden sensation of sunshine, of warmth, and of love which one gets from the music and songs of Italy. Helen felt this more than any of the other women present. She did not understand the sense of the words, but they had a singular charm for her ears. It seemed to her that they expressed feelings which she had never experienced; there was a something passionate, luminous, and fugitive about them. She was fascinated by the mimicry of the Neapolitan singers, by their black eyes, which flashed alternately with love or anger, or which were suddenly dimmed with sadness, and with the excessive mobility of these Latin faces, so different from the cold, impassive faces of her compatriots. She had been to Rome, Naples, and Florence several times, and the musical sound, so full of colour, as it were, of the Italian language was not new to her, but it had never before impressed her so strongly. Perhaps it was that her mind had been purposely sensitised, or that she had some vague presentiment.

One evening, Helen and the Marquise Verga were in their usual places in the hall, and were talking gaily with some of their acquaintances. The Marquis had gone to the Schweizerhof Hotel to see whether a friend, whom he had been expecting for the last week, and who had been

kept at Aix-les-Bains by the gaming-table, had arrived.

Mrs. Ronald, looking very pretty in a dress of *écru batiste*, trimmed with pale-green ribbon, was rocking herself gently to and fro, when suddenly astonishment caused her face and her chair to become rigid. The Marquis Verga was coming in with the young man who had followed her about so doggedly in Paris, and whom she thought she had escaped for ever. This, then, was the Count Sant' Anna of whom she had heard so much. She was literally breathless with surprise, and was slightly embarrassed and alarmed. The Italian did not see her at first when his friend took him up to introduce him. He started when he recognised her, and with a flash of triumph in his eyes, and a mocking smile playing under his moustache, he bowed low.

Madame Verga monopolised the newcomer for a few moments, besieging him with questions about all the people they knew who were at Aix-les-Bains. As soon as he was free, he advanced towards Helen, and the Marquis rose and gave him the arm-chair in which he had been seated.

"I do not often have such good luck as this," he said, fixing his magnificent dark eyes on Helen. "Dame Fortune owed me this recompense, for she has treated me pretty badly at baccarat," he added, with a boldness that was very near akin to impertinence. "If I had only

guessed that you were the friend of whom Verga told me in his letters, I should have been here a long time ago."

"I do not see why," said Mrs. Ronald coldly.

"Because I had the pleasure of meeting you several times in Paris, and I would have gone to the end of the world to see you again."

It would have been impossible for Helen to resist this challenge to a flirtation.

"As far as that!" she said, in a mocking tone.

"As far as that," repeated the young man gravely. "We Italians are apt to experience sudden antipathies or sympathies. When a woman rouses in us an instinctive liking for her, she obliges us to follow her; it is a sort of homage that she compels us to render to her beauty, and at which she cannot take offence."

Mrs. Ronald was so thoroughly stupefied by the subtlety of the explanation that she could not find a word to say in reply.

"And that is just what happened to me with regard to you. It seemed to me that until I met you I had never before seen a blond woman."

"I did not know that there was anything extraordinary about me——"

"Eve's *blondeur* must have been the same."

"You really think so? But that is not at all reassuring for me."

"And still less for other people," answered the Italian, with his shrewd smile. "I guessed that you were American."

"How?"

"By your elegance, in the first place, and then by your quick, decided walk. I know it well, for we have many of your countrywomen in Rome. In the morning, when they go out, they literally light up the Corso."

"I am delighted to hear that."

"You did not come here direct on leaving Paris?"

"No; I went to Belgium and Holland."

"Do you like Lucerne?"

"Very much."

"Do you intend staying until the end of the season?"

"As long as I enjoy myself here."

At this moment Miss Beauchamp, who had been reading her *New York Herald* in the drawing-room, came up to her niece.

"Are you coming up-stairs?" she asked.

"Yes, Aunt; I was waiting for you," answered Helen, getting up with an alacrity which was just a manœuvre of her instinctive coquetry.

"We have been for a long excursion to-day," she said, by way of excusing herself to Count Sant' Anna, "and to-morrow we are going to the Rigi for luncheon, so if I am to be in good form, I shall have to retire early."

After wishing the others "Good-night," Helen went across to speak to her brother, who was talking to Willie Grey in a corner of the hall.

The Italian watched her as she moved away.

"*Cristi!* what a pretty woman!" he said to the Marquis. "Is that the husband?" he asked, indicating Mr. Beauchamp, who was accompanying his sister and aunt to the lift.

"No; the brother."

"She is a widow?"

"A widow by favour or permission—a grass-widow, as they say so comically in English. Mr. Ronald has stayed behind in America."

"Deucedly imprudent of him."

"Oh, he does not risk anything! His wife is very *comme il faut*—belongs to one of the best families in New York—all the moral securities possible, and the safest one of all, that of a virtuous temperament."

"Yes, yes; heard that before. Let a good temptation come in her way, though, and all is up with the fine principles—the ice melts."

"You don't know American women well yet. They are all brain. I believe that if Providence is really busy just now creating a third sex, as the feminist movement would make us suppose, the United States will supply us with the first specimens: priestesses—doctresses."

"Oh, horror! Anyhow," added the Count, "if, with hair like hers, her exquisite complexion, and a grass-widow for several months, Mrs. Ronald were to prove invincible, it would be superhuman—inhuman even. I am very much tempted to put her to the proof."

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"I would bet you twenty pounds that you would have your trouble for nothing."

"I'll take the bet."

At this moment Madame Verga came up to the two men to wish them "Good-night."

"What are you plotting there?" she asked.

"The perdition of a woman," replied Sant' Anna.

"I might have guessed that," observed the Marquise, with a pretty laugh.

CHAPTER IX

COUNT SANT' ANNA

ALTHOUGH neither a prince nor a duke, Emmanuel Sant' Anna belonged to the most aristocratic Italian society. His family had come from Spain in the thirteenth century, and had taken an important part in the political affairs of Rome, being closely connected with the Papacy. Donna Teresa, his mother, was a Princess Salvoni, the sister of a cardinal eligible for the Popedom, and a great authority in the Holy College. His father had been one of those handsome Roman nobles whose life was spent between the Piazza del Gesù and the Piazza del Popolo, and who were always to be seen at the fashionable hour at the Corso or the Pincio, with their canes held up to their lips, watching the beautiful women, and exchanging salutations and mysterious signs with them.

After 1870, the childish idea of remaking, with Italians alone, the Rome of olden times, made up as it had been of twenty different nations, was held out as a temptation to such men as these, who were totally ignorant of business. Count Sant' Anna was one of the first to be

ensnared by it. He bought land, launched out into wild speculations, ruined himself, and died of grief. A year later, Donna Teresa, his wife, inherited her father's fortune. When she had married her daughter, and given her a dowry, she was left with an estate in Umbria, a villa in Frascati, and a palace in Rome. She lived most economically, so that her son might have plenty of money at his disposal. She loved him with that excessive maternal affection which is made up of all that is good and bad in the human heart. To her, Lelo (an abbreviation of Emmanuel) was all and everything in the world. When, out in her modest brougham drawn by one horse, she happened to catch sight of him at the Villa Borghesi, or at the Pincio, driving in style a pair of thoroughbreds, she was perfectly happy, and for the rest of the time she saw nothing but his square shoulders and erect bearing. His good looks were her pride and joy. He had one of those Italian faces with clear-cut features of classic regularity, lighted up by luminous eyes, with a tender, melancholy expression in them, which could be savagely hard or most womanly gentle—one of those faces without any great intellectual power or any indication of idealism, but with a particular charm due to extreme sensitiveness. Like all his contemporaries, Sant' Anna was a Roman of the transition, an ultra-refined being, living an aimless life, ignorant, with no convictions, who

neither dared abjure the past nor accept the new ideal.

For the young men of the French aristocracy, the evolution is infinitely less difficult and less painful. They have a religion and a *patrie*, and nothing prevents them from adhering to the one and serving the other. The religion of the Roman nobles was the Popedom; their *patrie* was the Eternal City; and both of these have been mutilated and transformed. They had been accustomed to consider Italy as the enemy, and they have been compelled to enrol themselves under her flag. They ought to forget everything, and to be born again, as it were. Their faculties, which have been blunted by long idleness, do not serve them well now; and so, conscious of their inferiority, they stand aside, and one cannot blame them for it.

Lelo had been brought up in a Jesuit college. He had not been taught there the true history of Italy, that which tells of her bitter struggles, of her long efforts for unity—efforts which have always been baffled by treason, but which could not fail to lead up to the fateful event of 1870; he had been taught, together with all his comrades, a distorted history, built up on that ingenious fable of the patrimony of St. Peter, and in which the glorious rôle belongs to the Popedom. He was lured on by the hope that the Pope, with one or other of the great Powers, would, before long, reconquer his temporal

sovereignty, and that the Italians would be obliged to seek another capital.

And yet Rome was no longer a closed city, where no philosophical idea, no scientific discovery, and no news even, could penetrate without being verified and examined by an absolute theocracy. Newspapers of all kinds were cried in the streets; books and reviews were admitted without any difficulty; modern life had opened out in the boldest way under the very windows of the old palaces, round the basilicas, the churches, and the forums. Through the breach in the Porta Pia, the nineteenth century had burst in, and had projected its light into the darkest corners of the Trastevere. The very atmosphere of the Eternal City had changed. It had lost for ever its sanctuary beauty, and had entered upon the thankless and painful stage of transition.

In spite of all precautions, the new atmosphere, laden with ideas of liberty and patriotism, had acted on Count Sant' Anna. He had been drawn irresistibly into the new current by all these things. He had begun to frequent the cosmopolitan set, and had even ventured to enter some of the salons of the Whites, or Royalists. He had met there Princess Marina, one of the sirens of the Court party. She was Italian, slender and elegant, with the beautiful oval face of the Latin type, heavy black hair, and very dark-blue magnetic eyes. She had married a

man who was a bigot and who was both brutal and tyrannical, and she had left his roof, taking with her all the honours of the separation; or, in other words, keeping her title and having a sufficient income allowed her. On account of her hatred of the Prince, who belonged to the Blacks, or Clericals, she had joined the Whites, and had become one of the most devoted friends of the Quirinal.

Lelo fell in love with Donna Vittoria with all the ardour of his inexperienced youth. He was twenty-two, and she was thirty-four. This love affair completed his emancipation. He allowed himself to be presented to the King and Queen of Italy, but he appeared at Court only at rare intervals. This act of political fealty seems Platonic enough; but, taking into consideration his education and the attachment of all his people to the Vatican, it must certainly have cost him a great moral effort, of which he would not have been capable without the influence and suggestion of Donna Vittoria. His defection brought about terrible family quarrels, and caused him to be disinherited by a stubborn uncle.

After all this, Sant' Anna considered that he had earned the right to remain tranquil, and so went on living from day to day with that philosophical indifference which distinguishes most of his compatriots.

In order to understand the character of a peo-

ple, one must know its language and its history. No nation has paid so dearly for its unity as Italy. For centuries she has been experimented on, torn to pieces, and deceived by various political parties. She has not perished in the struggle simply because she bears a charmed life, thanks to her beauty, her art, and her poetry; while in every one of her sons one sees, in a greater or less degree, the lassitude which follows a long crisis, the scepticism born of repeated treasons, the prudence, ruse, and subtlety which tyranny develops.

All this was to be found in the young Roman. The hard work of the Anglo-Saxon, the activity of the American, and the creative fever of the Frenchman made him shrug his shoulders and say, with haughty contempt: "*À che serve!*" ("What's the good of it all!"). The excitement of love and of the gaming-table, and his passion for horses and hunting, were enough to fill his life. He was a gambler, but only by fits and starts; he would be months without touching a card, and then quite suddenly the taste for them would come back to him. These gambling fits had already cost his mother considerable sums of money, but he had always regretted his folly so sincerely that she had never had the courage to reproach him for it.

Count Sant' Anna, like the majority of the Italian aristocracy, loved Paris, if not France. He had friends and relatives there, and every

year spent part of the season in the gay French capital. Before returning home he usually stopped at Aix-les-Bains, where baccarat impoverished more often than enriched him, so that he was obliged to go to the country to economise. Hunting then helped him to wait patiently until he could return to Rome, where, in November, he took up once more the round of his society life.

Workers despise men of this category, but they are wrong; for although such an existence may appear aimless and wanting in relief, it is far from being useless.

Lelo occupied the place which had been assigned to him in this world. He always treated his inferiors with that familiar and yet dignified kindness which never humiliates them. His servants and tenants adored him, and had an almost feudal respect for him; while he, on his side, looked upon them as belonging to his family. When he happened to meet with an intelligent lad among his dependents, he would help him to make a position for himself. Nothing gave him so much pleasure as to see one of his servants—a mere kitchen-drudge, perhaps, or a groom—getting on in life, and he never lost sight of him. He was, in fact, a true *grand seigneur*, and a true *grand seigneur* understands the meaning of fraternity better than a *bourgeois* or a Socialist.

Amongst the men of high society in Rome, Sant' Anna was one of those who had the most

prestige. He was so handsome that he had won the admiration of all the women in the cosmopolitan set. He had been faithless to the Princess Marina times without number, but she closed her eyes heroically in order to avoid scenes which would have driven him away for ever; and as it was, he always came back to her again. The Frenchman is, perhaps, of all men, the one who puts the most idealism, intelligence, and elevated sentiment into his love affairs. To the Italian, and particularly the Italian aristocrat, love is but an adventure, which, nevertheless, rouses within him the most ardent jealousy and almost Oriental feelings. In his youth he is less faithful than the Frenchman, and in his maturity more so, and this is not due to any virtue on his part, but rather to native indolence.

When Lelo was brought so unexpectedly into the presence of Mrs. Ronald, he experienced that strange inward tumult which a sensitive person often feels on meeting with some one who is destined to affect his or her after-life. Superstitious as he was, he looked upon this meeting as an encouraging fatality, and, with his frivolous conception of love and of woman, he imagined that this American woman, so far away from her husband, and evidently a coquette, would be delighted to have a little diversion, and he thanked his good star for having sent him such a delicious adventure to put an end to his gambling fit.

CHAPTER X

IMPERVIOUS TO DANGER

RELIGION has a considerable influence on the formation of a woman's character. Catholicism acts on the soul and imagination, and Protestantism on the intellect. Femininity is Catholic, and feminism is Protestant.

The American woman prides herself on her coldness of temperament, and the French-woman on her susceptibility. When the latter is in love, her one ambition and delight is to give happiness, while the American woman expects to be made happy herself. This opposite way of looking at things makes them as different from each other as two creatures of the same species could possibly be.

Mrs. Ronald was a proof of this. The fortnight which followed the introduction of Count Sant' Anna was like some beautiful dream to her. There were delightful walks through woods and across mountains, with blue lakes below, lovely halting-places, gay chats, and innocent *tête-à-têtes* with a handsome, high-born man, whose voice was low and mellow. This idyll was lived in the intoxicating atmosphere created

by admiration and sympathetic feeling, those fluids which envelop a woman with warmth and light, making the very air she breathes light and pleasant to her.

And yet, in spite of everything, Helen remained untroubled. Lelo was not long in recognising the truth of what Marquis Verga had said to him, but he was not discouraged. In love affairs, the Italian delights in resistance. The frank coquetry of the young American woman slightly disconcerted him. She seemed honestly glad that he should like her, and even exerted herself to that end; but all that she wanted was admiration, and plenty of it. The Count was quite aware of this. Any love speeches that he ventured on in the course of their conversation were taken as a joke, and merely as a joke. For the first time he found himself in the presence of an absolutely good woman, who was quite love-proof. As a matter of fact, this pleasant friendship had not caused Mrs. Ronald a single thought which could have troubled her conscience. The young Roman interested her as an exotic, because he was different from all other men she had known. His changeable humour, his excessive sensitiveness, his fits of melancholy and indolence, both astonished and amused her. Then, too, the title of Count sounded agreeable to the ear, and gave him a certain prestige. She came very near thinking of him as a superior being. In all her letters to Dora she spoke of

him, and, strangely enough, this name of Sant' Anna captivated the fancy of the young girl. She began to look eagerly forward to making the acquaintance of this friend of the Vergas, and finally, without any scruples about the matter, she began to hurry her mother through with her treatment, so that they might leave Carlsbad as quickly as possible.

As Miss Carroll had foreseen, Mr. Ronald was very much hurt and annoyed to find that his wife did not intend to keep her word. The perspective of discovering the Borgia poison did not tempt him in the least. He replied to Helen's letter, saying that he should not be able in any case to spend the winter in Rome. He hoped that she would not let herself be persuaded by the Vergas, and he counted on her returning home in October as she had promised. Without being aware of it himself, he wrote in a severe tone, somewhat authoritatively. Helen was not at all accustomed to this; it was the first time that her husband had refused her anything. Under the impulse of her anger, or of some feeling for which she could not account, she wrote one of those fiery letters which seem to be dictated by an evil spirit—a letter such as one always regrets and is tempted to disown, and which bears unforeseen consequences. The substance of it was that she informed her husband she was tempted to take advantage of the opportunity offered her for spending an agreeable sea-

son in Rome; that if he loved her more than he did his laboratory he would come to her; and that if he did not, she should not scruple to stay a few months longer in Europe.

When Mrs. Ronald announced her decision to her aunt and brother, they were loud in their protestations, and blamed her severely. Mr. Beauchamp, who was kindness itself, had from the first moment taken a strong dislike to Count Sant' Anna. He was not long in perceiving that the young man was paying court to his sister. He had always seen her surrounded by admirers, but for some reason or another the attentions of the young Roman displeased him, and he felt himself personally aggrieved.

"Take care!" he said one day to Helen. "This young Count does not inspire me with confidence. Foreigners fancy that anything is allowed with a coquettish woman—and *that* you are with a vengeance."

"You need not alarm yourself; no one will ever be disrespectful to me," answered Mr. Ronald, with her usual assurance.

"I hope not, but it would be wiser not to lay yourself open to anything of the kind. You have no idea how different Italian men are from Americans. I should never have thought it myself if I had not known the Vergas so intimately. Beware, I say!"

A few days later Charley received a cablegram, calling him back to New York im-

mediately. It was not the first time that he had had his holidays cut short in this way, but he had never before felt so vexed about it.

"I am sorry to have to leave you," he said to his sister, "and if only my own interests were at stake, I would not go. Promise me you will come home in October, so that I may feel easy in my mind."

"I do not promise anything," answered Mrs. Ronald drily.

"It would be cruel to disappoint Henry: Then, too, you surely would not give Dora such a bad example? If you go to Rome, she will want to go with you. Jack will be annoyed, and it might lead to the breaking off of the engagement."

"Dody is old enough to know what she ought to do. I do not consider myself responsible for her."

Mr. Beauchamp would not argue the subject. He knew that it was dangerous to make Helen express her will about anything, as after that she would never yield. Before leaving, he asked his aunt to do all in her power to persuade his sister to give up her project. He was even tempted to put her on her guard with reference to the Count, but his brotherly loyalty prevented him from doing so. At the station, when he was bidding his sister farewell, he felt a pang of uneasiness.

"Good-bye—and in six weeks!" he called out from the train.

Helen turned her head away without answering.

CHAPTER XI

THE UNTASTED FRUIT

MRS. RONALD had owed to M. de Limeray that she loved danger; and certainly for the last three weeks she had been playing like a child with all the passions and vanity of a man, without suspecting the danger to which she was exposing herself. The moral and physical education of the American is different from that of the European, and this particular education is a greater protection for woman than either her principles or her integrity. Helen had always tantalised and tyrannised over her admirers with impunity, but not one of them had ever gone further than she had wished. Count Sant' Anna was of another temperament altogether; and the Platonic flirtation which was imposed upon him seemed to him an insult to his manhood, and at times exasperated him until he was furiously angry. The departure of Mr. Beauchamp delighted him, for he had guessed the latter's hostile feeling, and imagined that it might thwart his plans. He felt, now, that Helen was more in his power.

The first week in September, the little Italo-

American coterie left Lucerne for Ouchy, and settled at the Hôtel Beau-Rivage.

The Marquis Verga, although a Roman, had a certain amount of physical activity. His duties compelled him to accompany the Queen of Italy during her sojourn in the Alps. He had in this way acquired a taste for mountaineering, and he now chose Switzerland as his practising ground. Lelo, who was not a lover of nature, and who detested excursions, was delighted to be spared the Rigi and the Pilatus, and to have nothing more in perspective than the beautiful easy walks round Lake Lemman. The Hôtel Beau-Rivage was infinitely more private than the Hôtel National. It had beautiful grounds, with lovely nooks where one could be apart from the others, and where tender speeches must take more effect; the scenery was charming, and there were a hundred things calculated to aid and abet the Count in his suit. He was more and more in love each day. Helen's brilliant beauty, her hair, which looked as though it had been dipped in a bath of gold, her dazzling complexion, and her magnificent moral and physical healthiness tempted him beyond his strength. It seemed to him that this woman belonged to him naturally, she was so fair and beautiful, and he so dark. And yet he felt that she had remained proof against the fascination he had been trying to exercise over her. Neither his words, his mute admiration, nor his tender

glances had disturbed her serenity, and every evening, when she gave him her hand, it was always as fresh and cool as a child's. One afternoon, when by a rare chance he found himself alone with her in the salon, he ventured to speak to her of affection and love and guided her skillfully along to the flowery edge of the precipice. She listened to all the pretty things he said, allowing herself to be led on without any resistance, and then, suddenly, she asked quite coolly:

"Do you believe that love is a fluid, like warmth and like electricity?"

Sant' Anna started, so surprised was he at the strange question.

"Love a fluid!" he repeated, bewildered and almost speechless.

"Yes; men of science say that they will even be able to analyse it, to register it with the galvanometer, and even to photograph it."

On hearing such an enormity, which to his ignorance worthy of the Middle Ages, and to his youth, sounded like blasphemy, he rose, took his hat, and went away without a word, leaving Mrs. Ronald stupefied with amazement. A few hours later, she tried to explain to him that she had not been making fun of him.

"Hush, hush!" he answered; "I do not want to know the secrets of the gods. For my part, as Carmen says:

“L'amour est enfant de Bohème,
Il n'a jamais connu de loi;
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime;
Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!”

A Frenchwoman, pure-minded as Mrs. Ronald was, would not have allowed a man to make love to her in this way. It would not have been enough for her that she was not sinning herself; she would have had scruples about leading a man on and making him unhappy. The American woman never refuses herself the luxury of *an admirer*. It was as such that Helen considered the Count Sant' Anna, but he, unfortunately, had none of the Platonism which distinguishes this essentially transatlantic species of lover. The climax of her imprudence was, that she was very amiable to Willie Grey, who, at the request of her brother, had accompanied her and Miss Beauchamp to Ouchy. Every morning she went out cycling with M. Verga and the young artist. Lelo, who had a horror of this kind of locomotion, always stayed at home. When he saw Mrs. Ronald, with her sailor hat, her short jacket, and close-fitting skirt, spring lightly on to her machine, her figure erect, and then dart off at full speed, his love was increased by the wild jealousy he felt.

The Marquis Verga was highly amused at the little comedy which was being played under his eyes, and it was certainly more through mas-

culine rivalry than from a love of virtue that he enjoyed his friend's failure.

"Was n't I right?" he asked one evening, when Lelo, after accompanying Helen to the lift, came back to his seat, and began to twist his moustache furiously. "What do you think now about American virtue?"

"That it very much resembles perversity. It is not self-respect, but rather the satisfaction of annoying a man, and not allowing him to triumph."

"That is just it."

"Well, I believe that every woman has, some time in her life, whether she yields to it or not, a weak moment. Mrs. Ronald has not had hers yet, and that is what makes her so audacious; but, *per Bacco!* I will find a way to bring it about, and to take advantage of it. She has decided to come to Rome this winter."

"Yes, I put the idea into her head, but certainly did not intend to pave the way for you! All the same, I fancy you are wasting your time."

"Possibly; but Mrs. Ronald shall not cause me to be ridiculous in my own eyes. If I cannot make her respect man, I'll make her fear him, as true as my name is Sant' Anna," said the Italian, with a savage expression in his eyes.

With all her daring, Helen did not risk dangerous *tête-à-têtes*. She allowed the flirtation to continue, but within sight, if not within ear-shot, of every one. In spite of his Italian clever-

ness, Lelo had not managed to isolate her from the others. He had laid many traps, but as she was a thoroughly right-minded woman, she had seen them. It is very rarely that a woman is taken unawares, although she always pretends to be. The young man was convinced that if he could only speak to her a few minutes quite alone, he should be able to make an impression on her, and he was continually looking out for the opportunity.

One morning, in crossing the landing at the hotel, he saw that the salon and bedroom which separated Mrs. Ronald from her aunt were empty, and he was at once inspired with a diabolical idea. He went in, inspected the two rooms, and then, hurrying down-stairs to the office, he announced the arrival of his brother-in-law and sister, and engaged the vacant apartments for them. He spoke to the Vergas and to Helen of the visitors he expected, and gave orders, while they were present, for flowers to be put in these rooms. He had discovered a most unique position, and it was now a question of taking advantage of it. The following evening, after dinner, every one went out into the garden. It was a beautiful, mild, moonlight night, and Sant' Anna took Helen to the edge of the lake. She had thrown a Breton cloak over her thin dress and, in contrast with the dark wraps, her bare head, in the silvery light of the moon, seemed to be of a marvellous

blondeur. She was doing all the conversation, while her companion walked along at her side looking down on the ground, evidently absorbed in thought.

"What's the matter with you this evening?" she asked. "Are you cross?"

"Not at all! I am trying to find the solution of a problem."

"In mathematics?"

"No; in psychology."

"Ah, that interests me! May I know what it is?"

"Certainly; and you will be able to help me with it better than any one, as you are the problem yourself."

"I?"

"Yes; I am wondering how it is possible for you at your age, and with your beauty and intelligence, to live without love."

"Without love! But I love my husband, and could never love any one else. He is a splendid man, and I have never yet met any one to compare with him, and probably I never shall."

"And yet you are here, so far away from him, and by your own free will! I begin to think that you American women have a special kind of sentiment for your husbands, a sentiment which allows you to travel, to enjoy yourselves, and be quite happy without them. When one is really in love, it is heartrending to be separated."

Mrs. Ronald laughed.

"Thank heaven! we do not experience anything so inconvenient. In Europe, love appears to be the principal thing in life. With us it is a secondary affair, and we women do not live solely for man."

"No! And for whom do you live?"

"For our family, for society, for our friends. Then, too, we have to cultivate our minds, to progress, and to work for the improvement of our fellow-creatures."

At the statement of this modern programme, Lelo stopped short and gazed at Helen in amazement.

"You are joking!" he said at last.

"Not at all."

"And that is enough for you?"

"Quite."

"You do not need anything else—you yourself?"

"I need a true, faithful love, and that is just what I have," answered Mrs. Ronald, with dignity.

Sant' Anna walked on again.

"I guessed rightly," he said. "There is in you a certain purity, which I felt and which charmed and surprised me. You do not yet know what there is divine in life. You will know some day, and," he added in a low, broken voice, "I would give ten years of my existence to be the one who will teach you this."

For the first time Helen appeared moved, but she was soon herself again.

"Don't talk nonsense!" she said, in a dry tone. "Let us go back now."

Lelo bit his lips.

"As you like," he answered coldly.

Mrs. Ronald spent the rest of the evening on the veranda with the Vergas, Willie Grey, and a few other acquaintances. She was absent-minded and silent, which was most unusual with her. Sant' Anna was seated in a shady corner some little distance from her and, whenever she met his eyes, her rocking-chair moved more quickly, thus betraying the state of her nerves.

About ten o'clock she went up-stairs to her own rooms, and, anxious to be alone, she very soon dismissed her maid. She felt joyful and exultant, and as she moved about in the room all flooded with light, she hummed an Italian song of which she was particularly fond. After undressing, she put on a peignoir of white surah silk trimmed with handsome lace, and, turning down the electric light, sat down for a few minutes before one of the open windows revelling in the scenery to which the full moon lent an ideal beauty. While her gaze was wandering aimlessly over the luminous lake, and the mountains so divinely outlined, the words she had heard came back to her brain. Ever since the days of Eden, the means of seduction and the causes of woman's weakness have never

changed, which fact proves that ruse and curiosity are among the immutable factors of the human soul. Man still succeeds with woman by persuading her that the tree of life has fruits which she has not tasted, the flavour of which is quite unknown to her. The temptation was working in the mind of Mrs. Ronald, the ultra-modern American woman, just as it did, according to the inspired poet, with Eve.

Sant' Anna had affirmed that there was something divine in life which she had never experienced. She began to recall the days of her engagement, her early married life. Yes, she had been happy, with a sort of joyous, deep happiness, but in a very human way, and without any intoxicating bliss. This certainly aroused within her the desire to know—the regret she had felt sometimes when reading books which described this passionate love. She remembered conversations she had had with her girl-friends at the Convent of the Assumption. All of them had ideals and wonderful dreams, and all of them appeared to be living in expectation of some great mystery. With their child-like souls, they had had presentiments of certain things of which Helen was still ignorant. It was really too bad!

Just as she was saying this to herself she heard something being moved, and then footsteps in the room next hers, which she knew was not occupied. She listened a moment, and

then, by some magnetic intuition, she was sure that Count Sant' Anna was there. The veins in her throat beat violently and she was terrified. She said to herself that the door was bolted, and she had nothing to fear, but beads of cold perspiration started out on her forehead. She held her breath in order to hear better. Suddenly a hand seized the knob of the door, turned it boldly, and Lelo, looking very handsome, his eyes aflame with passion and daring, appeared in her room.

Helen rose to her feet in her fright.

"How dare you!" she exclaimed, her voice choked and instinctively lowered, lest the neighbours on the right should hear. "Go away this instant!"

Instead of obeying, the Count advanced towards Helen, and, bending his knee on the chair which she was using as a barrier, said in a low voice:

"You must listen to me. Come into the salon. It was for you that I put flowers there."

"It is infamous of you—perfectly infamous!" repeated Helen, clenching more tightly still the back of the chair which separated her from the Italian.

"I ask you for an audience just as I would a queen. You have nothing to fear, on my honour!"

"Your honour! A precious guarantee! You are no gentleman!"

"If I were no gentleman," answered Lelo, lowering his voice still more, "I should have come a couple of hours later, and should have found you then quite defenceless."

The blood rushed to Mrs. Ronald's face.

"Like the brigands of your country!" she said, with stinging disdain.

Sant' Anna turned pale with anger.

"And what has driven me to this bold deed, if not your coquetry?" he asked, with concentrated violence. "From the first moment I let you see the admiration with which you inspired me. You accepted my homage; you have tempted me beyond my strength, and—I love you!"

Helen put her hands to her ears. The young man drew them away, and held them by force.

"I love you!" he repeated.

The warm light from the Italian's eyes seemed to have touched Helen's forehead; her eyelids drooped, and a sort of intoxication took possession of her brain, but her well-trained will came to her rescue, enabling her to master herself at once.

"But I do not love you!" she said, drawing away her hands quickly. "It was wrong of me to act as I have done; I acknowledge that. You have given me a lesson which will serve for the future. Now go!"

"For ever, then?"

"I hope so."

This answer, which was so unfeminine, brought the Count suddenly to his senses, and, as though by miracle, his ardour cooled down at once.

"I was mistaken in you," he said, drawing himself up proudly. "Farewell!" and then without turning round again, he left the room in a deliberate way.

Helen waited a few seconds, and then, hurrying across to the door, she pushed the bolt across, which had been perfidiously drawn back.

"What an adventure!" she murmured, still trembling all over with the shock. Count Sant' Anna in her room at half-past eleven at night! Fancy daring such a thing! And he had taken those rooms next hers, hoping to entice her there!

Mrs. Ronald blushed as she remembered that she had been tempted to follow him into that salon all filled with flowers. Yes, she had been tempted—but she had resisted. At that thought her vanity was exultant, and she gave a low laugh of satisfaction. Ah, it was not so easy to get the better of an American woman! A Frenchwoman in her place would have been irrevocably lost. What a horrible fascination! She could see the young man now as he had looked, his knee bent before her, and his face transfigured with passion.

Mr. Ronald's words came back to her memory. "Science is right," she said to herself;

"love is a fluid, a kind of magnetism, a force which attracts human beings to each other." Just for a moment she had felt it; the atmosphere of the room had seemed quite different, and she had had just a second of exquisite joy, such as she had never experienced—the sensation of something extraordinarily radiant. Ah! she had understood what Sant' Anna had called *the divine*; it was love brought to its highest degree of intensity for a brief moment. At that degree it does not last; it could not last with our imperfect faculties.

She saw this with all the lucidity of her clear intellect, and her lip took a disdainful curve. Thank heaven! she had a force within her which was stronger than the temptation to forbidden and fleeting happiness! She had received a lesson; but she had also given one!

With this consoling thought Mrs. Ronald got up, and in a slow, absent-minded way finished undressing. A vague uneasiness kept her wide awake, and she lay listening for a long while until, at last, feeling quite reassured, she fell asleep with an agreeable sensation of triumph and of unscathed honour.

The following morning Helen went down-stairs about ten o'clock, and installed herself in a corner of the garden to read her *New York Herald*. It was impossible, though, to fix her attention on politics or on society news. She was expecting to see the Count appear every

minute. What attitude would he take? Would he look vexed or ashamed? As for herself, she would be very dignified and very cold. At the end of an hour, instead of the young Roman, she saw the Vergas coming, and the Marquis had an open letter in his hand.

"Mrs. Ronald," he said, with a sly smile, "you have lost your admirer. Sant' Anna had a telegram at midnight saying that his sister is not coming here, and that his mother is dangerously ill. He started this morning by the first train, and he asks me to give you his kind regards, and to tell you how sorry he is to leave."

"Ah!" said Helen, in the most indifferent tone she could assume.

The Marquis did not add that enclosed in his friend's letter was a cheque for twenty pounds—the gallant avowal of his defeat.

"Well, for my part, I do not believe in his mother's illness," declared the Marquise Verga. "It is simply Donna Vittoria who has called him back."

"Who is Donna Vittoria?"

"A friend of Lelo's—his first love, a woman twelve or fifteen years older than he is, and who has great influence over him; a woman, too, who knows how to hold on—*una strega*, as the gentlemen would say. Italians are not faithful, but they are very constant."

"*Brava, Lili!*" exclaimed the Marquis, laughing. "Your definition is absolutely right, and

does us great honour. Constancy is a virtue, whilst fidelity is merely the absence of all fancy and imagination."

"Do you hear that, Helen?" said the Marquise. "Is n't it comforting?"

Helen smiled in a vague sort of way, for she had not heard.

He had gone! Sant' Anna had gone! She could not believe it, and fancied it must be a feigned departure. In spite of herself, she kept expecting to see him for the next few days. She tried to persuade herself that she was glad to be rid of him, but Ouchy seemed much less pleasant now. Why had he spoilt the last days of a season which had been perfect, and which would have been such a pleasant memory for them both? She was annoyed with him in a childish way for having deprived her of his admiration and his homage, and of having put an end, in so brutal a way, to the flirtation which had amused her. Two days later, Mrs. and Miss Carroll arrived from Carlsbad.

"I shall at last make the acquaintance of this famous Count Sant' Anna," said Dora, on entering her bedroom.

Helen gave a nervous laugh.

"Count Sant' Anna!" she said. "Why, he left here the day before yesterday!"

"Oh, that's too bad!" exclaimed the young girl, her face clouding over. "Left here! Oh, how disappointing!"

CHAPTER XII

THE UNANSWERED LETTER

IN October the little coterie was obliged to break up, and every one separated, promising to meet again in Rome at the beginning of January. The Vergas returned to Italy, and the four Americans to Paris, where they took up their abode at the Hôtel Castiglione, which had been recommended to them by the Marquise d'Anguillon.

Mrs. Ronald's letter to her husband, the letter which was destined to separate them for the time being, was calculated to wound him to the quick. Without being aware of it, Helen had written in such a way that every word would irritate him, make him obstinate, and bring on one of those sulky fits which are often singularly persistent when indulged in by good-natured men. He did not answer his wife's letter, and this silence astonished Helen at first, and then caused her a mingled feeling of grief and anger. She fancied that her husband was acting under the influence of his mother and sister, and this conviction made her unjust and absolutely unreasonable. It was all in vain that Miss Beau-

champ represented to her that it was too much to want a man like Mr. Ronald to leave his work in order to come and live among worldly men and women, with whom he had nothing in common, and who would bore him to death. Helen declared that her husband ought to make this sacrifice for her sake. Then, too, he needed rest and a change, and she would not allow him to be so absorbed in science, as she had married a man, and not chemistry. When, in support of her own will or desire, a woman can manage to bring forward a semblance of logic, there is no way of dissuading her, and Mrs. Ronald succeeded not only in persuading herself, but in convincing her aunt, who, nevertheless, had plenty of common sense, that she was in the right. In spite of herself, every Monday and Thursday she anxiously awaited the letters, and when, after glancing through her voluminous correspondence, she found there was nothing from her husband, she could not help feeling a pang of grief, which at the same time increased her anger. Charley Beauchamp blamed her unreservedly, and in all his letters tried to persuade her to return, until, on seeing that nothing he could say had any effect, he remained silent on the subject.

On announcing to Jack Ascott that her mother would not be able to spend the winter in America, and that they would not return to New York until the end of the season, Miss Carroll had

invited him to join them at Rome, and in such terms that the poor fellow was once more disarmed. Dora was, in fact, beginning to wish for the presence of her long-suffering *fiancé*, and from time to time she would say, "I do miss Jack!" All this did not prevent the two American women from enjoying themselves, and Willie Grey did his best to replace Charley Beauchamp. He took them to the theatre and escorted them on their cycling expeditions, and they were very glad to have him. Like most of their countrywomen, they were always ready to proclaim their independence as regards man, but at the same time they did not care to be without a cavalier.

The scene which had taken place at Ouchy was not one which a woman could easily forget, even though she might be an American and a woman of intellect. Mrs. Ronald thought of her adventure with all the more pleasure from the fact that hers had been the *beau rôle*! She wanted to see the young Roman again, so that she might triumph a second time. Would he bear her any ill-will? In any case, he would certainly never begin making love to her again; she could be quite easy on that score. In spite of herself, and without being aware of it, thought stamped again on her brain the words he had spoken, and the impressions she had received. She wondered whether the Count Sant' Anna had really been in love with her, or whether it had merely been a violent fancy. His face, instead

of fading from her memory, was more and more present with her, and the sound of his musical voice seemed to get more distinct. She would often give herself up to the remembrance of that exquisite temptation, which she thought was without danger now, and which always gave her a thrill of retrospective fear. And all this hidden working of her mind had produced on her face a slight change, almost imperceptible, and which only an interested observer could have remarked.

Although Helen had not confided in her, Miss Carroll had guessed instinctively that she had had a slight flirtation with the Italian. She was always questioning Helen about him, and rejoicing openly at the idea that she, in her turn, would be able to make his acquaintance.

"Fortunately, Jack will be there to look after you," said Mrs. Ronald one day.

"If Jack is disagreeable, I shall send him to Jericho," answered the young girl briskly.

"Anyhow, I would advise you not to flirt with the Count Sant' Anna."

"Why not?"

"Because foreigners are rather dangerous at that game."

"Ah! You have tried the experiment, then?" asked Dora, looking straight at Helen; and then, on seeing the telltale colour coming into her face, she added: "Ah, I know now! I fancy

you have given this fine Count a lesson. If he should deserve one from me, too, he shall have it, so that he will not fail to have a good opinion of American women."

CHAPTER XIII

CHRISTMAS AT THE CHÂTEAU

IN the early part of December, the Marquise d'Anguillon, with her mother, Mrs. Villars, came to Paris to buy the hundreds of articles necessary for the gigantic Christmas Tree to which she invited the children of Blonay every year.

She stayed at the Hôtel Castiglione, as she frequently did, instead of opening her Paris house. She liked going back to the rooms in which she had lived when a girl, and from which she had been married. The American woman, although not sentimental, is devoted to her souvenirs. Annie was delighted to see her friends again, and she invited them to spend the Christmas week at Blonay, to the great joy of Miss Carroll.

"And to think that we should have missed that if we had gone back to America!" she said. "How lucky we are!"

On the 20th of December, Helen and Dora, with Miss Beauchamp and Mrs. Carroll, set out for the Bourbonnais. At the sight of the château of Blonay, which is one of the finest castles in

France, they were enthusiastic in their admiration, and were amazed and stupefied to see how perfectly at home Annie was in this stately abode. The Marquise d'Anguilhon had presented her husband with a second son, and her sweet face beamed with happiness and content. She showed her friends, with great pride, the improvements she had introduced around her home, the red-brick cottages surrounded with shrubs that would flower in the spring, and the assembly-room, with its library and billiard-table, where the workmen and peasants could meet in the evenings and on holidays. Instead of joining in the praises of Helen and Dora, Aunt Sophie drew in her lips and remained silent; but as she always had great difficulty in keeping her thoughts to herself, she could not resist saying to Annie:

"It is very fine, all this, but you know I am patriotic before all things, and I cannot help regretting that your energy and benevolence"—(she had the tact not to add "your money")—"should be lost to your own country."

The young hostess smiled.

"Oh, well," she said, "if you are such a patriot, you ought to be delighted about my marriage with Monsieur d'Anguilhon."

"Why?"

"Because my husband's great-great-uncle died for the independence of America. He was the intimate friend of Lafayette, and he sailed out

with him and took part in the siege of Yorktown. It was at his command that the French grenadiers and cavalry made the attack, and he was one of the first to be killed."

"Ah, that is curious!" said Miss Beauchamp, slightly embarrassed.

"I discovered all this in the family archives, for Jacques did not know about it. It seemed to me then as though I had been sent by Providence to pay this debt for my country."

"And you don't seem vexed to do it, either," said Dora, smiling.

"On the contrary, I am very happy," answered Annie, with an accent which came straight from her heart.

Amongst the d'Anguilhons' guests were the Viscount de Nozay and M. de Lineray. The "Prince" was particularly delighted to meet once more, and as a guest in the same house, the American woman whose beauty alone was a pleasure to him, and who interested him in her quality of a feminine novelty. She was the first specimen of the Intellectual Woman he had come across. Like Sant' Anna, he was surprised at the insignificant part love and sentiment played in Mrs. Ronald's life. Although it did not actually concern him, he felt that it was a sort of insult to his sex. She was absolutely sincere, too. In spite of her exquisite colouring and her brilliant complexion, her face was cold and even hard. It wanted the soft, warm, living

light which is undefinable, and which comes from the soul. The Count regretted this as an artist and as a man. When he looked at this woman, he would often say, as of some unfinished masterpiece: "What a pity! what a pity!" He was not long in discovering that she had some trouble or anxiety, for she was absent-minded sometimes. Her gaiety did not seem as spontaneous, nor her mind as free, as when he had first met her. One day, when she was talking to M. de Limeray of the pleasure she was expecting from her stay in Rome, she went so far as to tell him of the grievance she had against her husband. The Count gazed at her in astonishment.

"And in all good faith, do you really think that Mr. Ronald is in the wrong?" he asked.

"In the best faith in the world."

"Well, excuse my frankness, but it seems to me that you are quite in the wrong, and that you are not fulfilling your duty."

"Why? If my husband were ill or needed me, I would start back this very night, and if there were any serious reason to prevent his leaving America I would go to him; but there is nothing, and so I consider myself perfectly free to stay a few months longer in Europe."

"And what about conjugal obedience?"

Mrs. Ronald broke into a merry peal of laughter.

"Conjugal obedience! That's all very well

for the harem, and for tent people. We are the equals of our husbands. We can buy, sell, and dispose of our fortune without their consent."

"Then, when you marry, you do not promise obedience as well as love and fidelity?"

"Oh, the old vow still exists in our Marriage Service, because it is that of the Church of England, but many clergymen leave it out, as they know we would not keep it. Some girls take the precaution to stipulate that it shall be omitted. It nearly caused the engagement of one of my friends to be broken off, but her lover gave in at the last—like all our men."

"What a good tale!" said M. de Limeray, laughing.

"A tale! It is pure and simple truth."

"You are not joking?"

"Not at all."

"Well, then, with you, women have abolished the vow of obedience?"

"Absolutely! Between equals there can be no question of submission."

"Quite true! quite true!" said M. de Limeray, in a mocking tone. "I was not aware that you had made such progress. I am not surprised, now, that we see so many American women alone in Europe! I fancy, though, that Madame Verga was wrong in putting it into your head to spend the winter in Rome."

"Oh, Mr. Ronald will come to me in the end! He adores me."

"I can quite understand that," said the "Prince" gallantly, looking at Helen admiringly.

The Marquise d'Anguillon was delighted at being able to give her friends this opportunity of seeing a Christmas in the Old World; as in the provinces, and especially in the country, the old traditions are kept up with all their poetry and religion. Mrs. Ronald and Miss Carroll helped her to prepare the Christmas Tree, to unpack the boxes which had arrived from Paris, and to decorate the château with holly and mistletoe. They worked with the most contagious liveliness, and Dora, giddy with nonsense, tried the trumpets and drums, played with the dolls, pulled the strings and wires of all the toys, exclaiming every minute, "Oh, what fun!" so that on seeing her no one would have imagined that she was one of the society girls of New York. The American woman has this good quality—she is never *blasée*; and, what is better, she never pretends to be.

On Christmas Eve, the host and hostess of the château, with their guests, escorted by the footmen with torches, descended the hill to the village church. There was no moon, but it was a glorious starlight night. Dark figures could be seen moving along all the paths in the valley. A procession of human beings, actuated by the same invisible force which guided the Magi, was being led to the same adoration.

The old Roman church of Blonay was particularly beautiful that evening. The nave was dark, but the chancel, all lighted up, seemed to form a brilliant background to the manger, where a beautiful Christ-child stretched out his arms to the humble crowd of believers. The priest, inspired by the solemnity, celebrated the mass with pathetic fervour. In his beautiful, deep voice, which seemed to have been specially given him for the liturgy, he intoned the *Gloria* and the *Credo*. The pupils of the nuns sang the old hymns with their quaint words, and an amateur sang, at the close, Adam's triumphant Christmas Hymn. This ceremony, touching in its simplicity, affected Mrs. Ronald as nothing had ever done, and made her think of the Convent of the Assumption. It seemed to her all at once as though since leaving there she had travelled a long way, and was now quite different. As to Dora, Miss Beauchamp, and Mrs. Carroll, this midnight mass astonished them by its strangeness; they watched everything, and would willingly have taken the voyage across the Atlantic for the sake of being present, but they were not otherwise impressed by it. All the younger members of the party preferred walking back to the château, and they arrived there with an excellent appetite for the Christmas Eve supper. The dining-room was decorated with holly and mistletoe, and the sombre green leaves harmonised well with the old oak.

The Christmas log was burning in the immense fireplace, sending its bright light into the different corners, and mingling its warm flame with the glitter of the silver and glass. The meal was most gay, and there was an expression of peaceful joy on all faces. The American women, Annie's mother included, were quite astonished at finding themselves amongst these foreign and aristocratic surroundings, and still more astonished at feeling so perfectly at ease. The Marquis d'Anguillon looked round several times, and then said:

"After all, there is nothing so good as the *réveillon*, preceded by the midnight mass, at home among one's own people. The *réveillons* at a restaurant are stupid, and make you feel sad."

"It has taken you all this time to find that out?" said the Count de Froissy to his nephew.

"No, but I never felt it so thoroughly as to-night," answered Jacques, with a fond look at his mother and wife.

"And what do you think of our old-fashioned customs, Mrs. Ronald?" asked M. de Limeray.

"I think there is a great charm about them. I quite see that there are elements in European life which do not exist with us, and that is just what attracts and fascinates us. All my other Christmases have left me no souvenir, but I am sure that I shall never forget this one," said Helen gently.

The following afternoon, Annie and her mother-in-law entertained the Blonay children. There was a ball for their parents and for the servants of the château, which was opened by Jacques and his wife. Dora was in a perfect state of delight. She felt as though she were living in a book.

"How interesting it all is!" she said to Mrs. Ronald; and then, lowering her voice: "It was lucky for Jack that I did not come to Blonay earlier."

The four American women took away with them the most agreeable impression of their visit. They were scarcely in the train when Helen exclaimed:

"Dody, you deserve a good mark! You have behaved perfectly. I should never have believed you capable of conducting yourself so properly."

"Thank you!"

"I believe it was the Dowager Marchioness who impressed you."

"That's true! I would not for anything in the world have shocked that *grande dame*, who is so simple and so kind. Besides, I felt at once that among these people it was necessary to put a damper on our modernity, so that we should not be out of harmony with our surroundings. And, by the bye, I was very proud of Annie. Upon my word, I believe that an American woman, well born and well brought up, can rise to the height of any situation. If they want

a queen in any part of Europe, they have only to come to us for one."

"Well, you are not modest by any means!" said Mrs. Ronald, smiling.

CHAPTER XIV

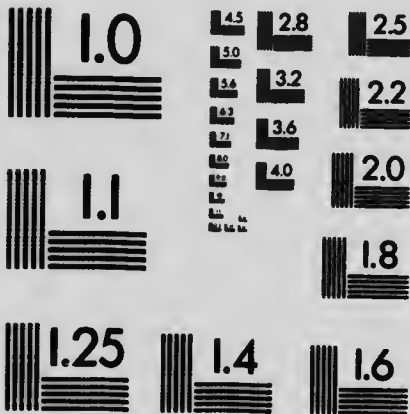
A DIFFERENT LELO

ON the 2d of January, Mrs. Ronald and her companions started for Rome. They had engaged one of those Italian couriers who are the providence of American women travelling alone, and who fulfil their duties with all the ease and tact of their race, and often with a sort of chivalrous devotion. Thanks to Giovanni, they reached the end of their journey in royal comfort, and found, all ready prepared for them at the Hôtel du Quirinal, a handsome suite of rooms with a southern exposure, facing the garden, and consisting of four bedrooms, a dining-room, and salon. As they were to arrive by the first train in the morning, they had not written to the Vergas; but between three and four o'clock that same day Helen and Dora, impatient to see them again, drove to their house. For the sake of economy, they had let their palace and taken a villa in the neighbourhood of the Macao, and were now getting settled in their new quarters. The Vergas were by no means ceremonious, so that the footman introduced the visitors at once into the large draw-



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ing-room, where his master and mistress were to be found. They stopped a second in the doorway, somewhat taken aback. Furniture and ornaments were scattered about pell-mell. Monsieur Verga and two distinguished-looking men were climbing up ladders and holding pictures against the walls, all hung with brocaded silk; while the Marquise, with her hat on, was standing in the middle of the room, judging the effect. On hearing her countrywomen announced, she uttered an exclamation of delight; the three men sprang lightly to the ground, and the Marquis stepped forward to welcome the Americans, and then introduced his friends:

“Prince Viviani—Duke Marsano.”

At the sound of these titles, Mrs. Ronald and Miss Carroll were amazed; and as soon as they were alone with the Marquise, Dora asked at once if it had been a live prince and a live duke she had just seen.

“Why, certainly, and with genealogies a mile long, but that does not prevent them from being very simple and natural. It amuses them to help us in getting our house straight. Italians have no false pride, as you will see.”

After telling each other all the Parisian and American news, Marquise Verga insisted on taking her friends out for a drive. The weather was so mild that they were able to go in an open carriage, and they drove slowly across the Corso.

"Dear old Rome!" said Helen, looking round her with a softened expression. "One is always glad to see it again. I came here with Henry soon after we were married, and I have always remembered everything about it. I believe I should know all the old streets again, and all the palaces."

"Oh, well, I have not been here for eight years," said Dora, "but my legs still remember the endless galleries of the Vatican, through which I was dragged. I often cried, on getting back to the hotel, with nervousness and fatigue. I simply hated all the statues, except the Apollo of Belvedere, that beautiful winged figure——"

"Winged—Apollo! Oh, Dody, what mythology!" exclaimed Mrs. Ronald. "You are mixing him with Mercury."

"Not at all! I know, of course, that he has no wings on his heels, but he gave me the impression of a being who could walk on air or on water, a true god-man. I have never forgotten him. *À propos*, Madame Verga," added the young girl, "if you see Count Sant' Anna, tell me which he is."

The Marquise laughed.

"Ah! Count Sant' Anna *à propos* of the Apollo! He would feel highly flattered if he heard that."

Miss Carroll coloured up, and then said hastily:

"He would be wrong, then, for with me ideas

come one after the other, without any connection; and as I do not know him, I could not make any comparison."

"That is true. Besides, he is very handsome, is he not, Helen?"

"Very handsome," answered Helen, in an indifferent tone.

"You will see him soon; he is sure to be at the Pincio."

These words caused Mrs. Ronald a sudden agitation. She realised all at once how embarrassing the souvenir of the scene at Ouchy would be, and she was conscious at the same time that she ought not to have come to Rome so soon. It had rained the night before, and Madame Verga, fearing that the Villa Borghese would be too damp, told the coachman to drive to the Pincio. The carriage went slowly up the sunny slope which leads to the terrace, where the society people assemble to exchange greetings and commonplace conversation, and where artists go to get impregnated with the divine melancholy of the sunset of Rome. The three American women had been there but a few minutes, when the Marquise exclaimed:

"Ah, there is Sant' Anna!"

Dora had just enough self-control not to look round. Lelo, on recognising Madame Verga, left the friends with whom he was talking and advanced towards the carriage. At the sight of Helen he gave a slight start of surprise, and

then, without any embarrassment or hesitation, he held out his hand to her.

"*Benvenuta!*" he said in Italian, in the most natural tone. "I am delighted to see you again!"

The Marquise introduced him to Dora, and he bowed low, and then returned to Mrs. Ronald.

"You have been so long in coming," he said, "we feared you had changed your plans."

"We wanted to wait until your bad season was over."

"You were very wise," answered Sant' Anna. "We can now give you as much sun as you want," and, putting his hand in a familiar way on the carriage, he asked Mrs. Ronald after her aunt and brother, and even her husband.

He then talked of Paris, and of what was going on at the theatres, glancing now and then curiously at Miss Carroll, as though she interested him. He went on chatting gaily for a few minutes. There was no light now in his eyes, though, no quivering of the lips, and his voice was perfectly calm. There was not a sign of the passion which had made his face so expressive and so eloquent. Stupefied with astonishment, Helen could scarcely answer his questions. Was this the man who had made her such fervent declarations, and who had come into her room at eleven o'clock at night? When had she been dreaming—then or now? As she looked at him and listened to his words, she

felt a strange sensation of an inward chill. It seemed to her that everything around her had turned grey and sad-looking. Influenced by these extraordinary impressions, the expression of her face changed slightly and she shivered. The Marquise noticed this.

"The sun is setting," she said; "this is the dangerous time for newcomers."

Sant' Anna asked Mrs. Ronald's permission to call upon her, and offered his services with all the courtesy of a man of the world; and then, after taking leave of the other ladies, he stepped back and bowed again.

"He is simply superb!" declared Miss Carroll, as soon as the horse had turned.

"Well, he is eligible," said Madame Verga, smiling, "and I fancy he would willingly marry an American——"

"For heaven's sake, don't put that into her head!" interrupted Helen anxiously. "She would be capable of giving Jack up."

"Thank you," said the young girl drily.

As we have seen, Lelo had left Mrs. Ronald's room on the eventful night completely cured. The Italian, who is a veritable pagan in his conception of love, has an instinctive repugnance for a cold-natured woman. At Ouchy, in that room all flooded with light, alone with a man who was desperately in love with her, Mrs. Ronald had remained mistress of herself. This had seemed perfectly monstrous to Sant' Anna, and

his passion had melted away on the spot. He had left her without any regret even, but with the impression, as new to him as it was disagreeable, of having met with a check. We affect a contempt for wounded vanity, but we are wrong, for such wounds are the most painful of all, and take the longest time to heal. By way of diversion, Lelo had stopped on his way at Aix-les-Bains, had gambled desperately, and lost a large sum of money. He had considered Helen responsible for his bad luck, and had called her "*una jettatrice*." The Princess Marina, whom he had seen next, had made up to him for his fiasco; but he had not forgotten it, and resentment was still smouldering in his soul.

The news of the approaching arrival of Mrs. Ronald had not moved him in the least. He knew that at bottom she had been more flattered than offended by his audacity. As he wished to keep up an appearance of friendship on account of the Vergas, and also, perhaps, because Helen was a pretty woman, he decided to appear very repentant, thoroughly convinced of the purity of American women, and to put their relations with each other on a friendly footing.

On finding himself unexpectedly in Helen's presence, he had felt no emotion whatever. Her beauty left him quite calm, and while talking to her, he had examined her curiously with his mind perfectly lucid. She was so cold—and with that

hair of tawny gold, that brilliant complexion, and those full lips! "What a living deception!" he said to himself. "What a snare and delusion!" Suddenly he had noticed the effect which his indifferent attitude had produced on her; he saw her face cloud over with disappointment, and his heart beat more quickly, while a gleam came into his eyes. As the carriage drove along, he watched it for some time.

"Well, well!" he said aloud, and a cruel smile played over his handsome Roman mouth, as he hummed the words of the celebrated song:

Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!

As he walked down from the Pincio, in the exultation of his vanity and wicked delight he twirled his stick round and round several times, and this gesture, by no means elegant, of masculine triumph betokened once more a woman's probable defeat.

CHAPTER XV

A CHANGE OF TACTICS

THE very next day Count Sant' Anna went to the Hôtel du Quirinal. He found Helen alone, and she received him with a pretty air of dignity.

"I was in a hurry to come and pay my respects, and to ask you to forgive me," said Lelo, after they had shaken hands cordially, but in a matter-of-fact way. "I had a fit of madness, which caused me much suffering, and which I regret because it offended you. We Italians are somewhat hard of belief as regards feminine integrity; but when we do meet with a really good woman, we bow low before her, as I do now." Only a disinterested person would have caught the veiled irony in the young man's tone. "I was afraid that you would still bear me a grudge," he added.

"I had not the right," confessed Mrs. Ronald, with the rectitude which characterised her, "since my behaviour had caused you to judge me wrongly. I have flirted all my life, but I had never before had occasion to repent it."

"You have flirted with men of flesh and blood?"

"Rather!" answered Helen, laughing.

"One of these days I shall have to ask American men to tell me the secret of their stoicism," said Lelo, with mock seriousness. "This time your coquetry found me quite defenceless. That is the only excuse I have to offer, but as I know that you are very just, I hope you will accept it and forgive me."

"Yes, yes—agreed, I forgive you!" said Mrs. Ronald, with a nervous little laugh.

At this moment Dora entered the room with her hat on, and looking very elegant in her afternoon dress. On seeing Sant' Anna, her face lighted up with pleasure.

"I often heard about you during the summer, Mademoiselle," said the Count, after exchanging a few commonplace remarks, "and I very much wanted to make your acquaintance."

"Did they tell you such very bad things about me, then?" asked Dora, with her disconcerting irony.

"Bad things!" repeated Lelo, somewhat taken aback by this attack. "Have you so poor an opinion of the Italians?" he added, laughing.

"Of the Italians in particular, no, but of Europeans in general."

"Ah, you know a great many Europeans?"

"No," answered Miss Carroll frankly; "and, to tell the truth, those I met in Paris at Madame

d'Anguillon's seemed to me charming, but in America they are not considered models of perfection."

"Well, you will see that we are not as bad as our reputation; and when you have lived some time amongst us you will render us justice."

"In the meantime, I am astonished at Rome and delighted with it. The impression it had left with me was that of a church city, in which one scarcely dared to speak above a whisper. This morning I have been going about, and it seems to me lively, and quite modernised."

"Yes, they have made it younger, as it were, but not artistically enough, and the effect is rather painful. As for me, when I go through the new parts, I have an indescribable sensation of something wrong, and I go along blinking as though the light were too strong. I have an injured, offended sort of feeling. It is most strange."

"No," said Helen; "as our race is continued in us individually, it is our ancestors who suffer in this modern Rome thrown open to the world."

A slight flush came into the young man's face. He looked at the American man with surprise, mingled with admiration.

"That is possible," he said. "It is an explanation which I should never have found myself. If the Sant' Annas of former days, as well

as those of to-day, are protesting against the present state of things, it is no wonder that I am nervous."

"You belong to the Whites?" asked Miss Carroll.

"Yes, my best friends are among that party, and my sympathy is more with them; but I have not completely broken away from the Blacks, the party to which my family belongs. That will enable me to get anything for you from the Vatican."

"Take care," said Mrs. Ronald, "we shall ask the most extraordinary things."

"Ask them—I am entirely at your service," answered the young man, getting up.

The two ladies thanked him, and he took his leave.

Madame Verga was always delighted to have some interesting compatriot to introduce, as it gave her a certain importance. The young men were more assiduous at her receptions, and this was always a great pleasure and triumph for her. Mrs. Ronald was a very pretty woman, and eminently decorative; Dora was a wealthy heiress, original and attractive, so that, with the two, her season could not fail to be agreeable. She exhibited them in her carriage and at the opera, introduced them to her intimate friends, and in the salons of the Whites. They were received wherever they went with that simple kindness and that gracious courtesy which characterise

the Italian aristocracy. They very soon felt quite at their ease in this Roman society, where every one speaks English and French with equal facility, and which is becoming more and more cosmopolitan, whose doors the American woman has forced open, and which she is perhaps destined to regenerate.

Helen and Miss Carroll soon had more invitations than they could accept. They went everywhere, escorted in the most correct way by Miss Beauchamp and the Vergas. Scarcely a day passed by without meeting Count Sant' Anna. Carrying out the mild vengeance he had planned, his attitude towards Mrs. Ronald was that of respectful friendship, while for Dora he had all the attentions of an admirer. From the first moment these two had felt a sort of sympathy for each other, and he had had no difficulty in making their friendship seem like a flirtation. He never lost an occasion of being with the two American ladies, and had asked to be allowed to accompany them on their sight-seeing expeditions, which were nothing less than artistic and historical pilgrimages.

"Not as your cicerone," he added, with fine candour, "for I do not know Rome; I have always been waiting until I could find a pretty woman who would show it to me. Since Providence has sent me two, I must take advantage of a graciousness which may never be repeated."

This petition, so drolly expressed, was granted,

and Lelo was constantly to be seen roaming through the picture galleries of the Vatican, visiting the basilicas, the forum, and the palace of the Cæsars. Mrs. Ronald and Dora soon discovered his real ignorance—his incapacity to translate a Latin inscription. They teased him unmercifully, but he did not take offence, as the Italian is never ashamed of not knowing things; he would be more ashamed of not feeling them. He has the gift of intuition, which serves him constantly and which suffices, making him despise acquired science. In her usual free-and-easy way, Dora handed over the Baedeker to Sant' Anna, and made him read it to her. He did this, at first considering it a great bore; but soon the concise information made him want to know still more about certain subjects. He even plunged into Suetonius, and a member of the Hunting Club reading Suetonius was indeed a phenomenon! By some mystery of atavism, Lelo entered into everything connected with the things and people of Rome more quickly and more thoroughly than his companions could. Often, when looking at some relic of the Middle Ages, his face would cloud over with emotion, his eyes would take a still more melancholy expression, and he would bend his head slightly as though for a few seconds the past had claimed him. In all these expeditions he kept more with Dora, who amused him with her outspokenness and her

original ideas. By a tacit understanding they both fell behind always, looking at some statue or picture. This little manœuvre caused Helen to feel a sort of exasperation, and she would hurry on as though to get away from something which pained her. Aunt Sophie, who always made one of the party, could scarcely keep up with her; and when the young people joined her again, there was a nervous expression on her face which made the Roman's eyes sparkle with mischief and satisfaction.

One afternoon Madame Verga had invited Dora and her mother to accompany her, and Miss Beauchamp and Mrs. Ronald drove out together. The latter told the coachman to take them out by the Porta San Sebastiano. The idea had suddenly come to her, like some inspiration, to go on to the Appian Way. It happened to be one of the great days for the Campagna, one of those days of mourning, when, either through the effect of the light or for some unknown cause, it looks infinitely sad, almost supernaturally so, in fact. Helen was deeply impressed as by something uncanny.

"It looks like part of a dead planet," she said, her eyes wandering over the dreary Campagna.

"Not quite," answered Miss Beauchamp; "for just over yonder is the Vergas' carriage, and, if I am not mistaken, there are Count Sant' Anna and Dora on in front, walking."

Mrs. Ronald looked in her turn, and, on distinguishing amongst the tombs which skirt the old Roman Way the forms of the two young people, she felt a sudden pang at her heart. She saw Miss Carroll stoop down to read an inscription, and then afterwards, with her head turned towards her companion, walk slowly on again with him in a way which showed they were having a familiar chat.

"Yes, you are right, they are studying archæology," she said, in a sarcastic tone.

"Where did they find the Count?" asked Miss Beauchamp.

"At the Corso, probably; these Romans are always in the street."

"It is no wonder that every one is saying Dora is going to marry him."

"Ah! is every one saying that?"

"Yes; several people have spoken of it to Mary, and she seems to be more flattered than displeased at the idea. I really believe that she would not be vexed to see her daughter a countess."

"A countess—she—Dody! with her free-and-easy ways and manner! A pretty countess, certainly! I hope she will be sensible enough not to hamper herself with a title, and honourable enough not to break off her engagement. Jack, who knows her, ought not to let her be alone here with all these foreign men; he is stupid."

"But, my dear, you forget that his partner is in San Francisco, and that he is not free. She wanted him to go into business, and he is in business."

"Well, I shall write to him this very day. He particularly commended Dora to me, so that I shall be rid of my responsibility then."

"You are quite right."

"Let us go back—it is so gloomy," said Helen, shivering, and without waiting for Miss Beauchamp's assent she told the coachman to turn round. All the rest of the way she was silent, and on arriving at the hotel, without even taking off her hat, she sat down and wrote to Mr. Ascott. She could not have waited a minute, possessed as she was by that fever which at certain moments would make us start a locomotive or inflate a balloon,—anything and everything for our words to arrive more quickly,—words which afterwards we would give our life not to have written. Without mentioning any names, she told Jack that some one was making love to Dora, that her fortune was a temptation, and she warned him that his happiness was at stake. She knew that on receiving that letter, Jack would send for his partner and start for Europe.

"That's done," she said to Miss Beauchamp, after writing the address quickly; and then, while drying the wet ink with the blotting-paper,

she added, in a sort of temper: "Our American men are much too stupid. If we were not precious good creatures the very worst things might happen!"

CHAPTER XVI

THREE PEOPLE IN LOVE

IN transferring his attentions and his admiration to Miss Carroll, Count Sant' Anna had had no other object than to annoy Mrs. Ronald and to wound her vanity. Gradually, however, a certain sentimental fervour had come into his words, and, without being aware of it, he had adopted the tone and manner of a lover. He had been fascinated by the dark complexion and light eyes of Dora, and by her resemblance, in certain points, to the Princess Marina. Both of them were slender and graceful; Donna Vittoria had all the grace and suppleness of a feline creature, and the American girl the strong pliancy of well-tempered steel.

A man is not often faithful to one woman, but he is nearly always faithful to one type of woman. Miss Carroll was the type which Lelo admired, and, besides this, she had the gift of amusing and interesting him. It seemed to him that until he met her he had never seen a creature absolutely free. Her independence of thought amazed him, and she seemed to walk through life unfettered in every way. With her

strong will and the wealth at her disposal, she impressed him with the idea that she was all-powerful. Then, too, like him, she was passionately fond of horses. Both of them would have stopped in the middle of a love duet to watch a fine animal pass, and to discuss his coat or his step. The first time that Lelo saw Miss Carroll out fox-hunting he had a sort of lover's thrill, and, fascinated by her faultless horsemanship, he never left her for a moment, and complimented her in terms which gave her the most delicious sensation of pleasure and triumph she had ever experienced.

The Marquise Verga, whose secret wish was to see the American element increase in Rome, and who did not know Mr. Ascott, had no scruple whatever in working against him. She kept repeating to the Count that Miss Carroll, an only daughter, with a dowry of five millions, was the wife that he needed. The suggestion, repeated over and over again, had done its work, and he was now beginning to wonder how his mother and sister would look upon his marriage with a foreigner and a Protestant. They would probably consider it as the complement of what they called his apostasy. He was obliged to own to himself that this ultra-modern American girl would be a somewhat violent contrast to his own people; but, as he said to himself, money smooths over all difficulties.

Lelo knew that Dora was engaged. At the

beginning of their acquaintance she had often spoken to him of Jack Ascott and of her approaching marriage. She never talked of all this now, and he wondered whether he would be able to persuade her to break off her engagement, and whether she would love him enough to brave the scandal which this would cause. Under her frivolity he felt that there was a strength of character which might prove a serious obstacle. He noticed, however, with keen satisfaction, that she seemed to be more and more affected by his presence. When he arrived, her long eyelashes would droop, the corners of her thin lips would contract, and for the first few minutes she would talk volubly in a tremulous, nervous way. When with him she was infinitely more gentle, and as she walked along at his side there was in her whole attitude a sort of unconscious submission. This was all the more marked, because her strong individuality generally made her brusque and hard. The change in the young girl was still greater than Lelo had dared to think.

The first time that she had read the name of Sant' Anna in one of Helen's letters, she had been fascinated, as it were, by it; she imagined that the man who bore it must be tall and dark, with regular features. She had not been disappointed; and, what was still more, the first time that her own bright eyes, with their bold, mocking expression, had met the luminous gaze of

the Italian fixed on her, she had felt a sort of shock and a certain emotion which, although slight, went to prove that it had been a case of love at first sight. If, at that moment, impossible though the supposition may be, he had proposed to her, she would have accepted him. She would never have owned to this, but it was in this way that she had been conquered. The attentions of the Count, handsome Roman patrician as he was, flattered her extremely. She began to compare him with Jack, and the comparison was not to the advantage of the latter. His presence caused her a joy which she had never yet felt; his words and looks made a deep impression on her. Things which belonged to him, no matter how commonplace they might be, seemed different to her; and when she touched them, it was as though there were something magnetic about them. Dora, who had never really loved before, was surprised at these phenomena, and looked upon the man who caused them as a superior being. And during their long walks and conversations the divine fluid was doing its work, as Henry Ronald had explained, "touching an inactive cell here, an unsuspected fibre there, or a mute chord," in order to produce the great miracle of love.

Miss Carroll had always had a secret weakness for titles, and since she had been in Rome she liked them more than ever; she even said to herself that with her wealth she might have

married into the aristocracy. She began to feel something very near akin to regret about her engagement to Jack Ascott, and this increased as she became more intimate with Sant' Anna. She fought against it energetically at first; and then gradually it gained ground, until at last faithlessness worked itself into her heart, as it has done into hundreds of feminine hearts, in all the various ways due to different characters and temperaments.

Dora could see very well that in Roman society her marriage with the Count Sant' Anna had been arranged. Whenever he approached her, people watched them and whispered together. While she was in her box at the opera, all the glasses were turned on them in the most persistent way, and she could scarcely hide the joy which this caused her.

Helen had not failed to tell her what she knew about Lelo's relations with Donna Vittoria.

"Mind you do not make this beautiful princess jealous with your flirtation," she said to her one day jokingly. "She might make you pay dearly for it—stab you, perhaps."

The young girl blushed and shrugged her shoulders.

"I am not afraid of anything but vitriol," she answered gaily, "and that is too plebeian a weapon for a *grande dame*."

Mrs. Ronald watched with increasing anguish this romance which was being lived under her

eyes. She tried to be indifferent to it, but that was impossible, for it found a deep and direct echo within her, and she felt herself hopelessly involved in it. Her soul, hitherto so serene and so joyous, was now disturbed by the most extraordinary feelings. The sight of the intimacy between Dora and Sant' Anna irritated her, but this she attributed to her friendship for Jack. The idea that Miss Carroll might marry the Count was so painful to her that she would not allow herself to continue thinking about it. She would have given anything to hasten the arrival of Mr. Ascott. It seemed to her that his presence would relieve her of this weight which had fallen on her heart, and which, she fancied, was that of her responsibility.

Lelo was counting on the Carnival for advancing matters for him. Now that the Church no longer countenances this outburst of folly, which is necessary, probably, like all other things, the Carnival at Rome has lost its superb mediæval character and its originality, but it still favours lovers in a most marvellous way. Masks, disguises, *confetti*, *moccoletti*, play their part in the weaving of delightful romances, in bringing about tragic or comic effects and unforeseen encounters, and, in short, in changing human destinies.

The masked ball, or *veglione*, in Italy is quite an acknowledged society institution. There is nothing disorderly or unseemly about it. Great

ladies and women of the middle class all go to it, and endeavour to puzzle their friends and acquaintances by whispering to them all kinds of perfidious and embarrassing remarks, while others simply go for the pleasure of being able to walk arm-in-arm with a lover. The Roman women begin to think about the *veglione* months beforehand, and always hope to have some amusing adventures.

Madame Verga was very enthusiastic. In order to have more liberty, she generally went with some of her compatriots, and enjoyed herself in the most innocent manner. She was always well posted and cleverly disguised. Her friends never failed to recognise her in the end; but in order not to spoil her fun, they did not let her see that they knew her. This year, on account of the illness of one of her children, she could not take part in the first *veglione*, but as she was free for the last one she engaged a box at the Constanzi Theatre, and invited two American men, Helen, and Dora. She ordered three black dominoes, all alike, not too ugly, but made to conceal the figure entirely. She then initiated her friends into the spirit of the masked ball, as it is in Rome, made them practise a falsetto voice, and told them various little secrets about certain young men who were well known in society. When the great day arrived, the Marquise took her friends to the Constanzi Theatre. The three ladies wore on the left shoulder a

spray of the same kind of orchid. On entering the box, Mrs. Ronald and Miss Carroll gazed with some alarm on the strange, masked crowd, moving like a buzzing swarm below them. The Marquise at once began trying to recognise people, and, impatient to be quite free, she dismissed the two American men who had accompanied her, and took her two friends down into the theatre. When once there she gave them a few more hints, such as not to allow themselves to be taken into one of the boxes, and to get away as quickly as possible from any one who seemed inclined to carry joking too far, and then she herself glided into the crowd and disappeared.

For the last week, Helen and Dora had thought of nothing but the *veglione*. It was quite a new kind of entertainment for them, and had excited their imagination as nothing else had ever done. They had made up their minds to be daring and witty enough for ten people, but now, on finding themselves alone in the middle of the theatre, they were quite taken aback. They saw some young men pass, whom they had intended to mystify, but they had not the courage to utter a word. It is not as easy as one would think for a well-brought-up woman to leave the beaten path. A man, even, when he feels an unknown hand placed on his arm, cannot always master a certain emotion which often makes him dumb, or else causes him to talk nonsense. Their masks, which the two American

women had imagined would give them assurance, seemed to paralyse them, and the falsetto voice, which they fancied they had practised to perfection, refused to serve them. Their first ventures were awkward enough, but when once they had fairly started, they got back their courage, and before long caused plenty of bewilderment and curiosity, thoroughly enjoying themselves the fun of it all. Although they did not own it even to themselves, the great attraction of this ball for both of them was Count Sant' Anna. It was he, above all, whom they wanted to mystify and bewilder, and they had looked round for him the very first moment. He was there; standing up, with the light full on him, his back against the door-post of one of the boxes to the right of the entrance, some white carnations in his buttonhole. He appeared to be having more success than any other man present, and was surrounded with dominoes with whom he was exchanging lively remarks. Thus besieged, it was impossible to accost him during the first part of the evening. Later on he entered the crowd, and, examining closely all the masks, seemed to be trying to find some one. Several women endeavoured to take possession of him, but he got rid of them quickly. Helen, who had never lost sight of him, approached, and began following him about, her heart beating fast, and she herself almost dizzy with emotion. A little group having stopped him on his

way, he was suddenly side by side with her. It was now or never if she meant to accost him. She seized his arm brusquely, and Lelo looked at her curiously, his face lighting up.

"Is it true that you are going to be married?" asked Mrs. Ronald in French, in a voice which was admirably disguised.

"Again! Oh, but this is a bet! It's the twentieth time, at least, that I have been asked this question."

"And what have you answered?"

"That I am quite willing, if only I am accepted."

Deeply moved by these words, Helen instinctively tried to take her hand away, but the Count held it firmly, clasping it tightly in his own, and Helen experienced once more the same feeling of strange happiness which she had had at Ouchy.

"Why do you want to leave me so soon?" asked Sant' Anna gently. "Does my marriage trouble you?"

"Trouble me? Oh, if you only knew how perfectly indifferent I am to you and all that concerns you!"

These words proved to Lelo that he was not mistaken in thinking it was Mrs. Ronald with whom he had to do, and a truly diabolical idea came to his mind.

"Indifferent!" he repeated. "I do not believe that, for my love has always won love in return."

"Not always."

"Always—sooner or later. I have resolved to win you, and to make you forget Jack Ascott."

Helen gave a forced laugh.

"Ah, you take me for your American! Well, for a lover, I must say you have not much perspicacity."

Sant' Anna, pretending to be surprised and embarrassed, stopped short.

"Who are you, then?"

"Find out!" And with these words, Helen escaped, and turning her back on him was soon lost in the crowd.

A mocking smile lighted up the Count's eyes.

"She knows now," he said to himself, "and she is furious into the bargain!"

Dora, who from some distance had seen the domino she knew abandon Lelo, left the unfortunate young man she was herself tormenting, and came hovering around Sant' Anna. Twice she passed him quite closely, not daring to speak a word, suddenly seized with an invincible timidity. He examined her from head to foot.

"Another spray of orchid," he said to himself. "It is certainly Miss Carroll."

"Will you take my arm?" he said. "You look charming."

The young girl put her trembling hand on the arm which was held out to her.

"Let us get out of this furnace. We can go into the passages; it will be better there." And

then, seeing that his companion did not utter a word, he added: "You are not dumb, I hope?"

Dora had by this time recovered her assurance.

"Oh, no, thank heaven!" she replied quickly, in a voice which could not be recognised; "and I am very well posted up about you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; you are as fickle and inconstant as Don Juan, incapable of true affection; and at the same time you have the art of persuading women that you are in love with them."

"Your information is false—absolutely false! I can prove it to you. Let us go into this box."

Miss Carroll, remembering Madame Verga's advice, tried to escape; but Lelo put his hand quickly on hers.

"I do not let you go until you have heard me. An accused man has the right to defend himself." And with a certain authority, which acted like a spell on the American girl, he took her into a box which belonged to him, gave her a chair, and placed himself opposite her, with his back turned to the rest of the theatre.

"You have been told that I am incapable of true affection?" he asked.

Dora nodded.

"Well, then, you have been told wrong, for I am sincerely in love with a girl now."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"It is the simple truth."

"And she is fair?"

"No; she is dark."

"Pretty?"

"I think so—yes."

"That means that other people think her ugly?"

"Not at all! She has the most beautiful eyes in the world, and she is intelligent, original, delicious. I love her as I have never loved before. It is so true that for the first time in my life I am thinking about marrying. Shall I tell you her name?" asked Lelo, lowering his voice.

"No, no; I am not inquisitive."

"Because you know it; because you know that her name is—yours."

Miss Carroll rose, and her emotion was visible in spite of her mask and domino.

"What folly!" she said brusquely.

Lelo rose in his turn, and taking the young girl's two hands he held them firmly between his.

"Folly—why? I ought not to have said this to you in such a place, but your words drove me to it. Tell me that you believe in my love?"

"What is the good? I am not free; you know that well."

"Yes; and the sight of that ring you wear is odious to me. I shall not be happy until you have returned it to the person who gave it you."

"What! Break off my engagement? Oh, that is impossible—quite impossible! Mr. Ascott

does not deserve such an insult, and it would spoil his life. He loves me devotedly."

"But you do not love him," said the Count boldly. "And if you dared to search your own heart, unless I am greatly mistaken you would feel that you could not marry Mr. Ascott now."

Dora drew her hands violently away from Sant' Anna's. At this moment a friend of his, thinking the box was empty, rushed in with two dominoes. There was an upsetting of chairs, and before the intruders could get away Miss Carroll had escaped.

When she returned to the hotel, towards three o'clock in the morning, Giovanni, the courier, handed her a telegram which had arrived in the evening. She guessed instantly from whom it was, and turned slightly pale.

"Jack arrives on Thursday," she said, after reading it.

"It isn't any too early," remarked Mrs. Ronald drily.

"No. It is too late, in fact!" answered Dora, tearing up the telegram in a quick, hard way, which showed that her mind was made up on some subject.

CHAPTER XVII

AN ENGAGEMENT BROKEN

SANT' ANNA'S words had at first alarmed and disturbed Miss Carroll; but when she was alone she felt, as she recalled them, such joy as she had never yet known, added to a certain pride and the most delicious emotion. He loved her, and he had told her so with his lips and with his eyes. The words had been written on every line of his expressive face, and it was for her now to decide whether she would be his wife—she, Dora, the wife of this Roman patrician! The prospect dazzled her to such a degree that she dared not immediately look it full in the face.

Marriage, which she had hitherto been pleased to consider as a sort of noose, seemed to her now like something quite awe-inspiring.

The Count had gone so far as to tell her that she could not marry Jack now! He must think, then, that she loved him, and at this idea a deep blush covered the young girl's face. She began to protest to herself, to get indignant, and to make fun of it all, but her revolt finished piti-

fully in a little tremulous laugh. No, she could not deny it. His presence caused her the most extraordinary joy, and when with him she lost all notion of time and all memory of the past. Love alone could produce such phenomena. How was it that Jack had not been able to rouse this feeling in her? It was all his own fault, after all. His fault!—She had at last found a grievance against the poor fellow. He was good, and true, and devoted; but he was just like all other young men. His eyes had never had that flame in them which stirs the depths of a woman's soul. She knew him too well, and whenever he left her she always used to feel a sort of relief. With Count Sant' Anna, life would seem to her too short and, with Jack, too long. No, she would never be able to make him happy; she understood that now.

It was her duty, then, to break off her engagement—yes, it was certainly her duty. She dwelt on this idea in order to blind herself to the odious cruelty of the deed she was about to commit. And every one would blame her; no one would appreciate the loyalty which dictated her conduct. How should she set about getting herself released from her promise? As she asked herself this question, she turned her engagement ring round with a reflex movement on her finger. Suddenly her eyes fell on the magnificent ruby, which was a rare and precious gem. The sight of it awoke within her a whole

crowd of memories, and a sudden feeling of remorse took possession of her.

"Poor Jack!" she said aloud; and then, her eyes misty with tears, she added: "I wish I were dead!"

There was not the faintest shadow of sincerity in this wish; but it is a way in which the American woman is accustomed to ease her conscience.

The moral combat which was waged in Miss Carroll's soul during part of the night and the whole of the following day revealed a depth of thought and feeling which no one would have suspected. If she had been the frivolous, selfish girl she always tried to appear, she would quickly have disposed of her *fiancé*, but she was in reality much better than she herself imagined. Just at first she had only felt the joy of being loved by Lelo, and satisfaction at the thought of becoming a countess; at present, though, she was regretting the pain that she would cause. The idea of breaking her word was unendurable to her, and made her feel thoroughly ashamed. She hated herself, called herself all kinds of names, and was much more severe about the matter than any one else would have dared to be. She would have given a great deal to break off her engagement by letter; but this was quite impossible. She was doomed to face Jack's grief, to endure his reproaches. If only he would get into a temper—give her cause to blame him! A good

quarrel was the only thing which would facilitate the inevitable rupture.

As the time drew nearer and nearer for Miss Carroll's interview with her *fiancé*, she kept repeating, with more and more sincerity: "I wish I were dead! oh, I do wish I were dead!" But there was no sign of a premature end for the poor girl; and Mr. Ascott was coming as fast as the express could bring him.

As Mrs. Ronald had supposed, he had, on the receipt of her letter, at once sent for his partner and started, himself, by the first steamer which had set sail. During the whole time of his voyage he had had alternate fits of trust and doubt, and these different waves of feeling had produced a sort of moral seasickness, which was more intolerable than definite pain.

The agitation which precedes all decisive events in life nearly always ceases when one begins to act. A sort of unconsciousness then comes over us; we do not utter a word of what we wanted to say, we do nothing that we intended to do; but, according to our destiny, things take this turn or that, and often the most unexpected turn possible.

When, on Thursday morning, towards half-past eleven, Mr. Ascott's card was brought to Dora, her heart began to beat violently. As she arranged her hair at the glass, and retied the bow at her neck, her fingers trembled visibly, and then, subjugated by the Inevitable, and all

capacity of thought annihilated, she went to the salon.

"Hullo, Jack!" she said, greeting her *fiancé* as though she had seen him the day before, and using the friendly and familiar word which came most naturally to her.

The eyes of the two young people met at the same time as their hands, and all at once they both felt as though they were strangers to each other. There was a moment of embarrassment, a silence that could be felt. Miss Carroll was the first to recover.

"And so this is how you come upon people, without giving them any warning!" she said, trying to joke. "Is your partner back again, then, sooner than you expected?"

"No, I did not wait for him. I left the house and the business in the hands of my head clerk."

"Were you in such a hurry to see me again?" asked Dora, with her incurable coquetry.

"You are surprised at such a thing? Our separation has seemed a light matter to you, no doubt.—No, it is not that, though. I received a letter informing me that a certain Italian count was making love to you, and I was told that the report of your marriage with him was being spread about—I could never have waited for the mail to bring me your denial of this. I have come for it myself."

There was a certain authority which impressed Miss Carroll in the young man's tone,

but she endeavoured to fence with him, after the manner of women.

"And who is the person, pray, who rendered you this kind service?"

"That 's no matter—Dody, for heaven's sake," exclaimed Jack, seizing his *fiancée's* hands, "put an end to the torture I am enduring, for it is intolerable!—Tell me that this flirtation means nothing, and that you are still mine."

Miss Carroll, paralysed with shame and the consciousness of her own unworthiness, remained silent; her lips moved several times, but without uttering a sound.

"I wish I could, Jack!" she said at last, with an accent of real distress. "I wish I could, but—I cannot!"

Mr. Ascott loosed her hands brusquely and stepped back, his face deadly pale and his moustache quivering.

"Then it is true, this marriage, about which people are talking?" he asked, in a hoarse voice.

"No, no; there is no question about marriage!—No one has proposed to me; but—but—I cannot be your wife—now."

"Because you love some one else?"

The young girl blushed violently.

"Because I think that we should make each other unhappy. I like European life, and now that I have tried it, I should never be satisfied with our life at home. A discontented woman is the most uncomfortable creature in existence."

"Ah, I understand! I understand! You have been associating with these European *grandes dames*, and now you want a title. If that is all, I can buy one. For about five hundred dollars the Pope would make me a baron—the first American baron. It would be very ridiculous, but tremendously *chic*. Baroness Ascott! What do you think of it?"

Jack had made an unlucky hit, for this was not quite just, and the injustice of it gave Miss Carroll courage to go straight to the point.

"Well, then, you are mistaken," she said drily; "for if you were a prince even, I would not marry you."

"You have taken a dislike to me personally, then? The result of comparison, no doubt!"

Dora's better feelings were again touched.

"A dislike to you!" she exclaimed. "Oh, don't imagine that, Jack! I like you very much, indeed, and I understand how good you are; and it makes me suffer horribly to be obliged to break my word, and to cause you such sorrow—I wish I were dead!"

The girl's accent of sincerity thawed the anger which had been keeping Mr. Ascott up. His courage failed him, and feeling as though he had lost the use of his limbs, he sank into an arm-chair, pressed his hand to his forehead, and said in a voice of anguish:

"Dody, Dody! is it not all a nightmare—

one of your usual jokes? Are you not going to finish up, as you so often used to, by telling me you are good again?"

Miss Carroll, who was deeply moved, shook her head.

"I wish I could, but it is impossible. Do not try to persuade me. It is better to break it off now than to have a Dakota divorce, and it would come to that. Marriages are foreordained—people are quite right in believing so—and ours probably was not. And, Jack, after all, I am not worth so much regret," added Miss Carroll, with the most extraordinary humility. "There are plenty of girls more beautiful and better than I am. I know twenty, at least, who would be proud to be your wife, and who would be able to make you happy."

"That may be, but as far as I am concerned, they do not exist."

"You will forget; men always forget."

"You think so?"

"Yes; they have a hundred chances of forgetting—a hundred ways."

"That is so! Gambling—drink—suicide."

"Oh, Jack, hush! Promise me that you will never stoop to such horrible, degrading things."

"I promise you nothing," answered Mr. Ascott, clenching more tightly still the arms of his chair. "I do not know of what I am capable now. Perhaps I am better, and perhaps worse, than I fancy. Time will prove. It is my fault;

I was very much to blame. I ought not to have let you come alone to Europe; but I had such confidence in you! I thought you loved me."

"I thought so too, or I should not have accepted you. I know now, though, that the feeling I had, and which I still have for you, is not love."

"You know that?" asked Jack, his face drawn with grief.

Dora nodded.

"Then it really is too late," said Mr. Ascott, getting up.

The young girl followed his example.

"Yes, it is too late. I must give you this back," and, very pale with emotion, she drew off her engagement ring—the ring she had worn for two years—and held it out to Jack.

He took it, and, obeying an irresistible impulse of grief and anger, flung it into the grate, where a huge fire was burning. Miss Carroll uttered a cry, and instinctively seized the tongs in order to pull it out of the flames. Mr. Ascott put his hand firmly on her arm and held her back.

"Leave it alone!" he said; "you have no longer the right to touch it. I wish it to be destroyed." And then, with stinging irony, he added: "That is a woman all over! She rushes to save a trinket from destruction, and she sends a man straight there. God forgive you—I cannot!" And with these words Jack went away without

even looking at her again; while Dora, as though petrified, stood still with the tongs in her hand, gazing into the fierce fire, and feeling as though something of herself were being consumed. She drew herself up at last, her face very pale, and then, letting the fire-irons fall from her hand, and trembling all over with nervous excitement, she sank into an arm-chair, murmuring:

"It is horrible! perfectly horrible!"

The tears streamed from her bright, mocking eyes. She wiped them away furiously; but to her honour let it be said that they continued to flow. A minute later Mrs. Ronald burst into the room.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Jack's card has just been brought to me, and on it he has written: '*I am going back—do not want to see any one!*' Have you been quarrelling?"

"We have done more than that—we have broken off our engagement," answered Miss Carroll, turning her head away.

Helen's face changed as though she had received a blow.

"You have given him up! How infamous!"

This word was enough to put Dora on her mettle, and to rouse into action the fine power of defence and attack which she possessed.

"'Infamous!'" she repeated. "I do not see that. When one is convinced that one does not love a man enough, it is better not to marry him."

"And this conviction has come to you since you knew Monsieur Sant' Anna?"

"Perhaps! By the bye, was it you who wrote to Jack?"

"I did."

"You had no right to interfere in my affairs."

"I beg your pardon; it was my duty to warn Jack, and all my life long I shall regret not having done so in time. I would never have believed, though, that the ambition to become a countess would have driven you to do such a mean thing."

"The ambition to become a countess! Monsieur Sant' Anna does not need a title to get into a woman's good graces. You know that very well, considering that you flirted with him yourself. I'll be bound that if you had been engaged to Henry, instead of being his wife, you would have given him up and acted as I have done," said Miss Carroll, with her unconscious brutality.

Helen turned white.

"You are mad," she said.

"I shall certainly be glad to have a title," continued the young girl, "I do not deny it; but as to marrying any one for the sake of that—never!"

"Then you are reckoning on marrying Monsieur Sant' Anna?"

"If he asks me—yes."

"He will certainly ask for your fortune."

"Well, I will give it to him, then—I will certainly give it to him!" cried Dora, with childish anger.

"You love him, then?"

"I love him—yes, I love him! Oh, certainly I do!" said Miss Carroll, a gentle expression coming suddenly into her face.

"When you have accepted him, I shall leave Rome. I will not witness a marriage which will spoil Jack's whole life." And with these words, uttered in a cold, cutting tone, although her lips were quivering with emotion, Mrs. Ronald left the room.

Dora, who was holding her handkerchief, still wet with tears, by the two corners, twisted it round and round, turned it more quickly still until it was like a string, and then, tying it up furiously in a knot, she flung it into the middle of the room, exclaiming again:

"I wish I were dead! Oh, I do wish I were dead!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CULMINATION OF A ROMANCE

WHEN starting for the *veglione* at the Constanzi Theatre, Sant' Anna little thought that he should be led on to make Miss Carroll a formal declaration. On finding himself in the dim light of a pit box, *tête-à-tête* with the graceful girl in her domino, the souvenir of other adventures, and the fascination of the mask, had given him a sort of intoxicated feeling, and, without intending it, he had pronounced those decisive words. Although Dora had not inspired him with an ardent passion such as he had known, he was very much in love with her, and wished for nothing better than to marry her. The idea of winning from another man a *fiancée* who was probably dear to him did not cause Lelo any very serious remorse. He would have preferred that there had been no Jack in Miss Carroll's life, but this particular one did not trouble him much. From the very first he had soon guessed that Dora's feeling for Mr. Ascott was merely that of sincere friendship. At the age of twenty-three, emancipated as she was, she

knew less about love than an Italian girl of fourteen. And it was he who had been the first to initiate her, to arouse within her her "femininity." This idea flattered and delighted him in the extreme, as a man, and especially an Italian, is more jealous about the first awakening of love than about love itself. Lelo had decided to propose to the young American girl, but the thought of the grief that he would thus cause his mother and the Princess Marina, and still more the dread of the scenes and reproaches in store for him, would have made him postpone taking any official step in the matter, if Fate had not driven him to it. He had always looked upon marriage as a stern necessity, a terrible risk. He had very slight faith in feminine integrity; the majority of girls had hitherto inspired him with an invincible distrust, and now, after a few weeks' acquaintance, he was about to confide the honour of his name and of his house to a foreigner—an American. And here he was, before he had had time to think what he was doing or to discuss the matter, taking upon himself all kinds of responsibilities. He was perfectly amazed when he thought of it. How was he to reconcile his family to this marriage? Miss Carroll's immense fortune might perhaps perform the miracle, but his mother was so sincere in her conservative ideas. The best way was not to trouble about it beforehand, but to trust to the inspiration of the moment. It was

generally in this way that the young man met all difficulties.

For two days after the *veglione*, Lelo was perfectly unapproachable; he was nervous and irritable as only an Italian can be, with a savage irritability which kept all friends or would-be intruders at a safe distance. He was not to be seen anywhere except at his club, and there he stayed for hours, lying back in an easy-chair or full-length on a divan, a cigarette between his lips, a far-away look in his eyes, living again in the past—that past to which he must now say farewell, and which, on that account, had suddenly become very dear to him. In his reverie, women, horses, carriages, triumphs in love affairs, on the hunting field, and at the gaming-table passed before him, one after the other, yielding him again sensations of happiness and of gratified vanity. Gradually a sort of mist fell over these pitiful souvenirs of the worldly man, and Dora's graceful figure, her eyes, with their light pupils and curly lashes, and her piquant face, stood out clearly in his thoughts, and he saw nothing but her—his future! She appeared to him so loyal, so full of life; and then, too, she was so safe, with her activity. Besides this, she loved him. He had a magnetic power over her, the only power he thought necessary with woman; the only power which, according to him, can ensure her submission and fidelity. No, he did not regret his declaration.

And, then, too, five millions for her dowry, and double that in prospect! It would be enough to put his house on the footing of former days, to restore the historic Frascati villa which he loved so dearly, and to enable him to have fine equipages and a first-class stable. It certainly was a grand stroke of luck.

And now, how would Mrs. Ronald receive the news of this marriage? It was all in vain that she endeavoured to be mistress of herself; her expression at times betrayed something more than vexation. At this thought the cruel smile, which was so rare with him, and which did not seem to belong to him at all, played over his lips, and was reflected in his eyes by a hard gleam.

"We shall see," he said, "whether an Intellectual Woman is not a woman all the same."

It was, of course, Dora who had explained to him about this new feminine type, almost unknown in Italy, and to which the American woman boasts that she belongs. In order to make her explanation more clear, she had mentioned Helen as a specimen of the kind; and, remembering the scene at Ouchy, he had taken a sudden dislike, which was very masculine, to the name and the species. The young girl had then owned that she herself was only very moderately intellectual, whereupon he had congratulated her on this with a warmth which was most comical.

From Mrs. Ronald, Sant' Anna's thoughts turned to the Princess Marina. To no man is the souvenir of his first love dearer than to the Italian of every class, and Donna Vittoria had been Lelo's first love. For a few minutes the thought of her in the olden days held him spellbound; the expression of his face softened, his eyes lighted up, he looked quite young again; and then all this faded away, and the present was again victorious. The Count said to himself that he ought, before going any further, to announce his marriage to the Princess. Lately she had questioned him a great deal about Dora, and with the idea of preparing her he had allowed her to guess his intentions. For a long time he had felt for her only a sort of friendship, mingled with love, but she still loved him, and he knew that all this would be a cruel blow to her, and cause her infinite sorrow. He dreaded witnessing her grief, for the sight of a woman's grief affects a man much more than the knowledge of it does.

The following day, before going to see Miss Carroll, he went to Donna Vittoria's. Like all his compatriots, Sant' Anna excelled in scenes where great tact was required, and in this particular instance he was wonderfully skilful and clever. He did not fail to repeat the famous Italian phrase: "*Ci vuol della filosofia*" ("We must be philosophical").

The Princess was not philosophical enough,

evidently, to be able to bear this supreme infidelity, for the tears streamed from her eyes. Lelo then reproached her with making him suffer, and with her lack of generosity; he represented to her that he could not let his name die out, that his position compelled him to marry; and he added that if she loved him she ought to encourage him in this, and not make his duty so painful to him. He posed as a victim to circumstances, and the high-born lady fell into the trap just like the simplest of women. She believed that her friend needed sympathy and consolation, and so she stilled her own sorrow in order to comfort him, and he left her with his mind easy, and a delicious sensation of having reconquered his independence.

The following day Miss Carroll and the Count Sant' Anna, both of them free, and moved by the supreme will incarnate in their hearts, went to meet each other.

It was Friday, the day when Roman society has its rendezvous in the beautiful gardens of the Villa Panfili. Dora went there, accompanied by Madame Verga. The weather was mild, quite springlike. On the hills, which one mounts instinctively in order to get more light, and to escape from the oppressive feeling of the past, one enjoys two exquisite things—the light and the air of Rome; that clear, opalised light so merciful to the grand ruins, and that air, so strangely silent, impregnated with a singular

morbidness which makes one feel a sort of voluptuous fatigue. For the first time Miss Carroll was affected by this particular atmosphere. As she walked along on the daisy-covered grass, edged with flowers of bright colours, a quiet sadness took possession of her which seemed to silence her very soul. This state of mind was so new to her, and was so extraordinary, that she looked round naïvely to see what was causing it.

Suddenly her heart began to beat violently; Sant' Anna, accompanied by his friend, the Duc de Rossano, was coming in her direction. When she held out her hand to him and their eyes met, she blushed in the most foolish way, and, to use her own words, was quite ridiculous.

"I have not seen any one since Tuesday," said Lelo, addressing the Marquise, so that the young girl could recover herself. "It is very odd, but after the last *veglione* all the ladies disappear, and seem to avoid us. It is as though their consciences are not very clear with regard to us."

"It is rather that they are tired of hearing so much nonsense and such untruths."

"Untruths! But the mask often provokes declarations which are very sincere," said the Count, looking at Miss Carroll.

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it; and I have very good reasons too."

Nothing ever escaped Madame Verga, and she noticed Dora's embarrassed look.

"And so," she said, smiling, "you made a declaration which was quite sincere at the *reglione*. So much the better for the person to whom you made it"; and with these words the Marquise moved on again.

The Duc de Rossano, who was admirably well up in his rôle of confidant, immediately monopolised her by asking how she had enjoyed herself at the Constanzi.

Lelo walked on with the young girl, leading the way towards the avenue of evergreen trees which have heard so many lovers' conversations in their time. There was one of those silences between them which one would like to prolong eternally, during which invisible fluids are at work, creating happiness and sensations that are almost divine. Miss Carroll had nothing of her usual assurance, and was not walking with her nose in the air. Her head was lowered, and her eyes were fixed on the ground.

"Do you not know that I was quite sincere the other evening?" said Lelo suddenly, with a tremor in his voice. "I am sorry that such words as I said to you should have been mixed up with Carnival talk, but they were none the less true—I love you with all my heart!"

Dora managed to get the better of her emotion.

"To how many women have you said the same thing?" she asked, in a mocking way.

"To plenty, as you can imagine," answered the Count, not in the least disconcerted; "but I have never offered my name to any one of them, and I now offer it to you, because you have inspired me with true love, and with absolute confidence, and also—because I know that you love me."

Miss Carroll, amazed at such boldness, turned brusquely towards the young man, words of denial on her lips; but on meeting the luminous gaze of those Latin eyes, the power of which she had not hitherto realised, she blushed, and could only stammer out:

"Well, I never——"

"You never heard such an audacious assertion, I hope?" interrupted Lelo, smiling. "Why should you be ashamed of this feeling which has grown up in your heart in spite of yourself—oh, quite in spite of yourself!" These words were uttered in the most indulgent, bantering tone. "Am I unworthy of it, then?" he added, suddenly becoming serious.

"No, no!" protested Dora, touched by this mock humility.

"You ran away the other evening when I asked you to look into your own heart. Promise me that you will do this."

"I have," answered Miss Carroll, pulling her veil in a nervous way.

Lelo, struck by this answer, stopped short. The two young people gazed at each other for a

few seconds, whilst a great wave of emotion passed from one to the other. Sant' Anna then walked on again.

"And in your soul and conscience, do you think that you can still marry Mr. Ascott?"

"No! And I have broken off my engagement."

"Truly?" exclaimed the Count, his eyes flashing with joy. "You are free?"

"I am free," said Miss Carroll, not without a disagreeable sensation of shame.

"You have written to Mr. Ascott?"

"That was not necessary. He arrived here on Thursday morning, and started back the same evening."

"Have you returned him his ring?"

The young girl drew her glove off slowly and showed him her hand.

"Look!" she said, with a nervous little laugh.

"Oh, Dora, you overwhelm me with joy! And now will you not consent to be my wife?"

"You are not afraid, then, to marry a girl very much up-to-date, very American, with a very independent character, and with any amount of faults?"

"No, I am not afraid. I love you just as you are. You have all the qualities I am short of, and we shall be perfectly well suited."

"Then——"

"Then, you consent?"

Miss Carroll turned towards the Count, and

on meeting the searching look in his eyes she blushed deeply, and shrugged her shoulders.

"How can I refuse you and—myself?" she said, with a tremulous smile.

Lelo could not in public kiss the hand which had just been accorded to him.

"Thank you, Dora," he said, baring his head and speaking in a serious voice. "You shall never regret having listened to your heart."

"I am sure of that."

At this moment Madame Verga, who had finished telling all the adventures of the *veglione* night, discovered that the shade of the ever-green oaks was gloomy, likewise the ground, all stippled, as it were, with sunshine.

"Let us get out of this avenue," she called out to the young people; "it is all very well for lovers!"

"And who says we are not lovers?" answered Sant' Anna, turning round.

"Yes, indeed, why should you not be? Stranger things have happened."

They all four came out into the light, and the Duc de Rossano glanced at Miss Carroll. On seeing the heightened colour of her cheeks and lips, the misty brightness of her eyes, and, above all, her charming look of embarrassment, he had no doubt about Lelo's success.

When once she was back at the hotel, Dora shut herself up in her room. For the last two days Helen had been most cold with her, and

her mother and Miss Beauchamp had reproached her severely about her conduct to Jack, so that she was not on good terms with any one. Mrs. Carroll, one of those delightful, elderly American women, with silky grey hair and a serene expression, was weakness personified. Her daughter knew that her displeasure would not last long, and that at bottom she would not object at all to her marriage with a count. She was, nevertheless, somewhat startled herself at the thought that she was engaged again, and she wondered how to set about announcing a piece of news which no one would expect to hear so soon. In the first place, she dressed very prettily for dinner, and on taking her place at table, she ordered champagne. The American woman looks upon champagne as consecrated wine, and it is with that she always prefers baptising her triumphs.

Mrs. Ronald and her aunt had been spending the day at Albano with some compatriots. During dinner they told what they had seen and done. Dora only heard a word here and there, and, unlike herself, she was very quiet. Helen glanced at her several times with an anxious expression in her eyes. After putting the dessert on the table, the waiters left the room as usual. Miss Carroll took some strawberries and played with them, rolling them about for a long time in the powdered sugar before putting them into her mouth. Suddenly she lifted her head, half closed

her eyes, and then opening them, looked at each of her companions and raised the champagne glass.

"To Dody's happiness!" she said, her face radiant with joy.

Miss Beauchamp and Mrs. Carroll raised their glasses, and Helen imitated them mechanically.

"Is it your birthday?" asked Aunt Sophie.

"No—my engagement day."

It was as though these words had struck Mrs. Ronald's brain, for her fingers relaxed their hold, and the glass slipped from them and broke into fragments. Her face was very pale as she looked at the pieces of glass and the spilt wine.

"However did it happen?" she exclaimed, stupefied.

Dora laughed.

"Oh, well, I never thought it would give you such a shock," she said; and somewhat anxiously she added: "I hope it won't bring me bad luck."

"But what an idea, too, to make a joke of that kind," said Mrs. Carroll.

"A joke! But, I assure you, never was anything more serious! This afternoon, at the Villa Panfilì, Monsieur Sant' Anna repeated to me the declaration he made the other evening at the *veglione*, and then simply proposed to me, and I just as simply accepted him," added Dora, trying to keep up her bantering tone, although her voice faltered. "So much the worse for

every one who is not satisfied! For my own part, I am very happy."

"And that poor Jack!" said Mrs. Carroll.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Mamma, don't remind me of the only thing that spoils my happiness. As I cannot help the sorrow I have caused, do let me forget it."

"I knew perfectly well how this flirtation would end," put in Miss Beauchamp drily.

"Really? You knew more about it than I did, then, for I little thought that such a marriage as this was being reserved for me."

"Ah, you think you are greatly honoured, no doubt, in being married to a count. I never imagined you were such a *parvenue*."

The colour came into Dora's face. She was not as well-born as Mrs. Ronald and her aunt, and did not care to be reminded of the fact. She soon got the better of her anger, though.

"Yes, I shall be very proud to be Monsieur Sant' Anna's wife," she answered, with her usual calmness, "and I know plenty of girls, among those whom you consider as belonging to the best families, who will envy me."

"Oh, Dora, do not let yourself be carried away by vanity!" said Mrs. Carroll.

"There is no fear, Mamma; it's my heart that's affected. I am not as vain as I seem."

"With a character like yours, I wonder how you will put up with all the exactions of a European husband!" said Miss Beauchamp.

Dora put her elbows on the table, and with her chin resting on her hands, looked straight at the old maid with her piercing gaze.

"Have you ever been in love?" she asked, very seriously.

Aunt Sophie turned crimson, and bewildered by the boldness of such a question, merely drew her lips tightly together without deigning to answer.

"If you have been in love," continued Miss Carroll, "you must know that love makes all things easy and all things possible; and if you do not know that, why, take my word for it, as I have just learnt it myself, and I was not aware of it at all a little time ago."

"Then you really love Monsieur Sant' Anna?" asked Mrs. Carroll.

"I adore him!" and the young girl threw her arms round her mother's neck and laid her cheek against hers. "Don't you worry yourself, Mamma," she continued. "Italian men make very good husbands; you ask Madame Verga. Then, too, American women are quite at home here in Rome. They have built palaces here, and married their children into the families of princes, and they hold the first places at Court. I shall be surrounded with my compatriots. Then, too, it is my destiny, it appears. Just think! I was brought to Europe, taken to the Marquise d'Anguillon's, where I must needs meet the Vergas, and get drawn here through

them! Oh, yes, we are led in all these things! It is no use attempting to resist. For my part, I do not complain; and I am very grateful to Providence for the fate reserved for me."

"Well, Helen, what do you say to all this?" asked Miss Beauchamp, in an ironical tone.

Mrs. Ronald started slightly.

"I? Oh, nothing! I am listening and—admiring."

Miss Carroll rose from the table.

"You are quite right," she said tranquilly.

"As for me, I like myself now better than ever."

CHAPTER XIX

A WOMAN'S SELF-POSSESSION

INSTEAD of following Dora into the salon, Helen went back into her own room. On entering, she turned up the electric light, and like a somnambulist who, in his sleep, goes on with his favourite occupation, she seated herself at her dressing-table, drew the comb through her hair over and over again, played with the powder-puff, smelt the lavender salts, polished up her nails, and then, her mechanical activity gradually ceasing, she sat there motionless, the pupils of her eyes dilated and fixed on the mirror, but seeing nothing. Dora and Sant' Anna! These two names, formulating themselves simultaneously and time after time within her mind, caused her great suffering; and this was reflected strangely on her face. Their marriage would take place, then! She had not thought it would; and even now she was trying to believe it impossible.

For the hundredth time she recalled the scene at Ouchy. That marvellous registering instrument which we call Memory rendered to her

Lelo's ardent expression, and all the words he had uttered. Dora little imagined that Sant' Anna had been in love with her, Helen, and that he had entered her room one evening like a thief! If she were to be told that, would she marry him? Perhaps not; but there—who could tell!—for she loved him foolishly! What had Sant' Anna said to her at the Villa Panfili? She could imagine him bending towards the young girl, speaking in his fervent voice, enveloping her with his magnetic gaze. This vision was so painful to Mrs. Ronald that she got up and walked about, in order to dispel it. She looked at herself in the glass over her mantel-shelf, and, suddenly taken with a shivering fit, which she attributed to the cold, she rang for a fire to be made. As soon as it was lighted she held her rosy palms and her feet, in their silk slippers, towards the flame. The heat, penetrating her, gave her a sort of physical comfort, which reacted on her morally. She felt better, and began to breathe more freely. Her thoughts then turned to Jack; and she imagined him seated in the corner of a railway compartment, his hands in his pockets, his hat drawn over his eyes, and his soul wrung with the anguish caused by Dora's fickleness, being borne away from her by the forces of Destiny. Full of compassion for him, she said aloud: "Poor boy! poor boy!"

All this roused in her a strong feeling of

anger with Madame Verga. This marriage was her work. She had inspired Dora with the desire for a title, and had never missed an opportunity of arranging for her to meet Sant' Anna, knowing all the time of the girl's engagement and approaching marriage. It was abominable! "There is no doubt about it," she said to herself, "Europe does demoralise American women!" She only hoped Jack did not believe that she had been an accomplice. She would write to him at once. What would Mr. Ronald say when he heard that his niece had broken off her engagement? He would certainly never forgive her. And yet it was his fault; for if he had come to Rome nothing of this kind would have happened. The idea that her husband persisted in staying in America irritated her again with him. It was seven months now since he had written to her. Five months more and she would have the right to demand a divorce, on the plea of his neglect. This thought, which had sprung from the depths of her soul, brought a deep blush to her face. She—Helen—divorced. That would be odd; and she gave a little nervous laugh at the bare idea of it. And then, as though to escape from herself, she walked up and down the room two or three times, and finally seizing her writing-case and pen, she sat down near the fire, feeling herself in duty bound to write to Jack. By a psychological phenomenon, which was curious enough, the words of sympathy and

consolation that she addressed to the young man did her good, and soothed her as though some one else had said them to her.

The following morning Helen, who hitherto had only known what it was to wake up with a happy feeling, experienced, on opening her eyes, that anguish, caused by hopeless love, which for months and months never left her, and through which her soul was to be developed and transformed.

The thought that the Count Sant' Anna would probably come that very day to make his formal offer nearly drove Helen wild. She did not want to stay at the hotel and be there when he arrived. Dressing herself in haste, she went to call on one of her friends, and proposed an excursion to Frascati, which was at once agreed upon.

Like all American women, Mrs. Ronald believed strongly in will-power; she had the most exaggerated faith in it, and her own had never played her false, although she had often exacted miracles from it, as in the case of the Ouchy episode. On the present occasion she had recourse to it again; and in the evening, on returning to the hotel, she was perfectly mistress of herself. Lelo had called, and she was obliged to hear a detailed account of his visit.

Mrs. Carroll, still under the charm of his delightful manners, was enthusiastic in her praises of him.

The coolness with which Miss Beauchamp and Helen listened to all this did not affect Dora. The joy she felt within herself would have made her indifferent to the disapproval of the whole universe.

Just as Mrs. Ronald was preparing to go to her room, Dora told her that the Count Sant' Anna intended coming to see her about two o'clock the next day.

"Don't be too disagreeable to him," added her niece, "or he might fancy that you are annoyed with him for marrying—men are so presumptuous!"

Helen turned rather pale, and then, opening her eyes wide, she said, with an affectation of astonishment:

"Annoyed with him for marrying!—I—but why?"

"Ah, that's just it! because you flirted with each other. He made love to you—probably while waiting for me," said Miss Carroll in a bantering tone.

"Has the thought of your future grandeur turned your head?"

"Oh, no; it is perfectly right so far——"

"One would scarcely think so," said Helen drily.

Dora had the most extraordinary perspicacity; her wits were as penetrating as the Röntgen rays; and the words which translated her first impressions frequently struck home and hit the

mark exactly. Those of this evening stung Mrs. Ronald to the quick. Good heavens! if the Count were to imagine that she felt any regret. Regret! That was too absurd! Yes, this marriage did annoy and pain her even, but solely because it would spoil Jack's life; and then, too, Miss Carroll's fickleness would cause a scandal which would cast a reflection on the family. She would explain that to M. Sant' Anna; and, unless he were a coxcomb or an idiot, he could not make any mistake about her sentiments.

Helen had such power over herself that the following day, when the Count was announced, she had all her self-possession and dignity at command.

"Allow me to congratulate you!" she said, in a sarcastic tone which could not be mistaken, but at the same time holding out her hand in the most perfectly natural way.

Lelo was for a moment baffled by this reception. Dora had told him that Mrs. Ronald was furious, and he had hoped to exasperate her in such a way as to make her betray herself, in order to enjoy his own vengeance. He was soon himself again, however, and, looking fixedly at Helen, he replied:

"I accept your congratulations with all the more pleasure as I know them to be sincere—coming from you."

Her eyelashes trembled slightly and her nostrils quivered, but she lifted her head proudly.

"I congratulate you sincerely," she said, "because you are marrying an American. It is not, perhaps, very modest of me to say it, but I do think that we are right-minded and intelligent; and, in fact, that we have some good qualities."

"You have many—and the very best ones. For my part, I consider myself very fortunate in winning Miss Carroll's love. Is it true that you do not approve of her choice?"

Mrs. Ronald did not wince at this direct question.

"It is not her choice that I disapprove, believe me; it is the breaking-off of her engagement. In America we consider that almost as bad as a divorce. I have known Mr. Ascott all my life, and I own frankly that I am on his side. He did not deserve the treatment he has had. He is the most loyal-hearted man—one of the best men in the world," added Helen, hoping that these words would be unpleasant to the Count.

"I quite believe that," answered Lelo tranquilly; "but perfect men have not much chance with women. In spite of all his good qualities, Mr. Ascott had evidently not succeeded in awakening Miss Carroll's love. She thought she loved him, but she found out her mistake in time."

"That is possible, but the mistake is none the less regrettable for both of them. My husband will never forgive her."

"Is not Dora Mr. Ronald's niece?"

"His step-niece only."

Sant' Anna laughed merrily.

"But I shall be your nephew, then? No, that is too funny! Life is curious sometimes."

"My nephew!" exclaimed Helen, with the most comic alarm; and then, grasping the strange situation, she turned rather pale.

"It is so; I had never thought of that. I have always looked upon Dora as a younger sister, and she has never called me 'aunt.' Besides, she is only my step-niece."

"Well, then, I shall be your step-nephew—that's very nice, anyhow! Who in the world would have thought of this the day I saw you, for the first time, under the arcades in the Rue de Rivoli! Do you remember?" asked the Count, gazing at Helen with a hypocritical smile. "I fancied that I was just following you of my own free will, and all the time you, like a good fairy, were leading me on to a marriage which I thought was far enough off for me."

"And for which, one might add, you appeared to have very little vocation," answered Helen, who was mistress of herself enough to be able to joke.

"Quite so; but the vocation manifests itself when you meet the woman who is destined for you. Truly, my marriage began like a pretty romance."

"I hope it may continue and finish in the same way. Does your family approve?"

"My family, as a rule, never approves of anything I do," answered Lelo, who was still feeling bitter after a painful scene he had just gone through. "I belong to another epoch."

"You belong to the epoch of American women!" remarked Mrs. Ronald sarcastically.

"Exactly; and I congratulate myself on the fact. I need a wife who will infuse the new spirit into me."

"Oh, Dora will undertake to do that! Even in New York she is considered too modern."

"The atmosphere of Rome will act on her as it does on all your compatriots. The surroundings in which she will find herself will moderate, without spoiling, her liveliness and her gaiety, I hope. I am sure that I shall never feel bored with her."

"There will always be one resource for you—you can talk horses!" said Helen, with a shade of contempt.

"But that is a great deal—to have a taste, or rather a passion, in common. And so, truly, you are not angry with me?" asked Lelo, scrutinising Helen's face in the most merciless way.

"With you? Not at all!" she answered, looking bravely at him. "You would not have made love to Dora if she had not allowed you to. I always try to be just."

"Try to be indulgent, too. Miss Carroll is counting on you to appease her uncle."

"She makes a mistake, then; I shall not do

anything in the matter—out of loyalty to Mr. Ascott. Time will settle everything without my interfering. There is nothing for me to do except to wish you plenty of happiness.”

“And plenty of children!”

Helen blushed up to the roots of her hair.

“Oh, excuse me! I forgot that one does not say such things to Americans!”

“You are right,” she answered coldly.

Just at this moment the courier announced that the carriage was at the door. The Count rose, and Mrs. Ronald followed his example.

“I will not keep you,” she said, “for my afternoon is filled up. Good-bye!”

Sant’ Anna took the hand held out to him and kissed it deliberately. He was amazed that it did not tremble under his lips.

“She is furious, I am sure,” he said to himself, as he descended the hotel staircase; “but I’ll be hanged if one would think so.” And then, in comic vexation, he added: “She’s devilishly clever—the Intellectual Woman!”

CHAPTER XX

UNDER SCRUTINY

ROMAN society did not accept the Count Sant' Anna's marriage with Miss Carroll without protest. The Blacks were strongly against it, while among the Whites it excited plenty of envy and violent jealousy. On the other hand, the Italo-American clan, with one accord, exulted openly at being able to add another great name to its *livre d'or*. As to the Countess Sant' Anna, the news of her son's engagement to a foreigner and a Protestant caused her a shock which thoroughly upset her morally and physically. As we have already said, she was a Princess Salvoni, and the public voice had designated her brother, the Cardinal, as the probable successor to Leo XIII. Donna Teresa had been very beautiful, and had been accustomed to plenty of homage. Religion and the pride of a stern and haughty race had preserved her from those follies to which the Italian woman yields so easily, but which do not leave their marks on her life.

The Countess Sant' Anna was growing old after the manner of great Roman ladies of

former times. She was considerably behind her epoch. After her daughter's marriage, she had modified her style of living and had taken up her quarters on the second floor of her palace. She no longer went out into society, but society came to her. She received every day after five o'clock, and her salon was never empty. Without appearing to do so, she exercised great influence. As the years glided by, one after another of the crowd of admirers, which had been the triumph of her youth, disappeared; but in spite of her sixty years, she still had around her arm-chair a circle of devoted friends. Among the companions of this last stage of her life's journey was the Marquis Boni, who, like herself, belonged to a former epoch. He had for her one of those Platonic affections which have become psychological curiosities, examples of which one rarely meets with now except in Italy. He had loved her as a child, as a girl, and as a woman, and had spent his life within the magic circle of her beauty, protecting her in an occult way, serving her with indefatigable devotion; at the same time, by his respect, keeping all scandal and calumny away from her. For nearly fifteen years he had dined and played cards with her every evening. On leaving, he always kissed her hand, and she invariably said: "*Buona sera, Marchese; domanialle sette!*" ("Good evening, Marquis; to-morrow at seven!").

This was her usual invitation, and the following day he was there, in irreproachable evening dress; and he will probably be there every day until Death relieves him from his knightly servitude.

Among the Countess Sant' Anna's intimate friends were also Don Salvator, an austere Jesuit, her spiritual director; Monsignor Capella, a worldly little prelate, with a chubby face; Dr. Masso, whose science was limited to the treatment of Roman fever, and who was better up in archæology than in medicine. Lastly, there was the indispensable lawyer or *avvocato*, whom one meets in all the families of the Italian aristocracy, where he is received, if not on an equal footing, at any rate as a confidant and familiar friend. The lawyer devotes himself to this house or that, takes all its business in hand, works for its prosperity, and becomes a valuable help to people who, with their disdainful ignorance about all things connected with modern life, would otherwise find themselves defenceless. He acts in this way frequently less as a business speculation than from an instinctive sympathy for his clients. Italy is perhaps the only country in the world where a business man may be actuated and influenced by this mysterious power. These *fedeloni*, or faithful friends, formed a sort of court for the Countess Sant' Anna. Although they belonged to the clerical party, they kept themselves well informed con-

cerning the Whites, and knew all that was said and done in the opposite camp. They were for Donna Teresa living newspapers, and vied with each other as to who should have the best budget of gossip to bring her each day. They all did their utmost to keep up her hopes and illusions. In spite of accomplished facts, she still believed that, at any moment, the Pope might get back the power in Rome. By what cataclysm this might happen she had no idea, but no miracle would have seemed to her impossible. She was counting, too, above all things, on bringing her son back into what she called the right way by a marriage of her own choice, and she had in her mind a young princess of sixteen years of age who was still at a convent school. At her request, the Cardinal had sounded the family, and had made sure that there would be no obstacle raised on their side. It was just at this time that Miss Carroll had arrived in Rome. Donna Teresa was soon informed of her son's attentions to her; but she was not alarmed, so far was she from realising the possibility of what was to take place later on. She had always felt an instinctive antipathy to American women, and often declared that Lelo would never marry one with her consent. After that, it is easy to imagine her grief and humiliation when the young man informed her that he had proposed to Miss Carroll, and had been accepted. For the first time she rebelled against Providence for

thus allowing her hopes to be so cruelly deceived. She treated her son with a severity to which he was totally unaccustomed, refused for several days to listen to him, hardened herself against him, and overwhelmed him with reproaches. She might, perhaps, in the end have won the day if the young man had not been able to plead his formal engagement. The amount of Dora's wealth did not fail to impress the friends of the Countess, and to mitigate their indignation. Orlandi spoke of the increasing demands of modern life, and of the impossibility of Lelo's being happy without a large fortune. The Marquis Boni ventured to remark that American women had their good qualities, that they were right-minded and made excellent wives. Don Salvator and Monsignor Capella were ready to admit that with Miss Carroll's millions a Sant' Anna could do a great deal of good. Cardinal Salvoni comforted himself with the hope that the young girl would be converted to Catholicism, perhaps; and that, later on, in the zeal of her new faith, she would succeed in bringing her husband back to the Vatican. Donna Teresa was both amazed and scandalised at the ease with which her trusty friends, and even her brother, reconciled themselves to this marriage. It seemed to her that everything was crumbling away around her—principles, convictions, and religion itself; but nothing would have overcome her own resistance if it had not been for the

fear of losing her son. In him all her ambitions were centred. She did not want to give him up entirely to a foreign woman, and it was on this account alone that she yielded and forgave him.

For the last two months an attack of rheumatism had kept her a prisoner. She congratulated herself privately that she could not, therefore, pay Mrs. Carroll the formal visit which etiquette demanded, but she consented to receive her and her daughter, and the day for the interview was fixed.

Filial affection is very strong with Italians. When a man can thoroughly respect his mother, when he knows her to be irreproachable, his love becomes a sort of religion. Lelo was very proud of his mother. He admired her beauty as an old lady, her dignity, her rigid conservatism even. He lived with her, and although he usually dined out and spent his evenings in society, he always found time to go and ask for her blessing. After wishing her good-night, he would bend his head, and she would make the sign of the cross on his forehead and say with all the fervour of a believer: "*Dio ti benedica, figlio mio!*" ("God bless you, my son!") She would then hold her beautiful patrician hand to his lips for him to kiss. It was a mutual exchange of all that was best in their souls, and this maternal blessing fell like refreshing dew on the young man's troubled mind, soothing away all

his nervousness, and putting fresh hopes of happiness into his heart.

Now that Sant' Anna had obtained his mother's consent to his marriage with an American, he was astonished himself that he had had the courage to force her hand as he had done. He was quite aware of the fact that between her and her future daughter-in-law there could be neither sympathy nor understanding. This certainty did not fail to cause him misgivings and somewhat dampen his joy. He had often spoken to his *fiancée* about his people, endeavouring to make her understand their characters and their ideas; but he soon discovered that the sense of certain things completely escaped her. Dora laughed at the idea that she was about to become the niece of a cardinal, perhaps of a pope, even. This seemed to her irresistibly funny. In the presence of this limpid Saxon soul, so active and brilliant, and of such a totally different essence, Lelo, who was, nevertheless, no thinker, suddenly understood the Latin soul. He realised for the first time, as though by revelation, its depth and its subtlety, and was somewhat alarmed to feel that he was so different from the future companion of his life.

Madame Verga had warned Miss Carroll that the Sant' Annas did not like American women, so that she might expect to be received rather coolly. The young girl shrugged her shoulders, the remembrance of her great wealth adding to

her assurance and self-confidence. Incapable of conceiving the hostility created by difference of race and religion, she fancied that the fact of her being a wealthy heiress would be enough to ensure for her a cordial reception, and she little thought what moral force had been used in order to persuade Donna Teresa to accept her.

Her dress for this official visit was the only thing which caused her any anxiety. After numerous consultations with her mirror, she decided on a costume of light grey cloth trimmed with sable, and a toque to match.

When, on the appointed day, Lelo came to call for her, in order to take her to his mother's, he thought she looked very exquisite and very well-dressed, but terribly modern. Mrs. Carroll, in a well-made black gown, was perfectly correct, and could not fail to make a good impression.

The Sant' Anna Palace, which is celebrated for the beauty and purity of its architecture, takes up all one side of one of those small, deserted squares in Rome where one can still feel that one is living in the past. Dora knew it well; she had done her utmost to admire it, but she thought it fearfully sad-looking and appalling.

On crossing the threshold of this habitation of another epoch, the American girl was impressed with a sense of a sudden lack of light and warmth. Shivering slightly, her gay chatter gradually ceased as she mounted the wide staircase, and her heart beat more and more quickly.

Lelo, too, was visibly nervous, for he knew that much would depend on this first interview. He had not wished to disconcert his *fiancée* by all sorts of advice and warning, as he preferred her to appear just as she was. Her naturalness and originality would charm every one, but he feared her irrepressible frankness, and then, too, her repartees, which were always too cutting.

The door was opened by a very correct serving-man, whose functions were those of butler and footman combined. The Count gave the names of Mrs. and Miss Carroll, and the two ladies followed him across a wide hall, with high carved seats, old tapestry panels, and the Sant' Anna armorial bearings under a handsome baldaquin. They then went through three salons, leading out of each other, furnished with sofas, chairs, and arm-chairs, placed against walls which were all covered with brocaded silk and hung with pictures, and gold brackets with handsome mirrors. All these antique things, this house, so rich and yet so bare-looking, so cold and stiff, made Dora feel still more ill at ease. On arriving at the door of a large, green salon furnished in Empire style, she heard her name being announced, and suddenly found herself in the presence of the Countess Sant' Anna, the Duchess Avellina, and Cardinal Salvoni. Between these individuals of such different origin, strangers to each other, whose destinies Fate had chosen to interweave, there was a sort of

emotion, a passage of fluids, a rapid exchange of those first glances which often photograph themselves indelibly on the memory.

The Countess Sant' Anna, who was wearing a long dress of woollen material, and a lace cape thrown over her shoulders, had a proud, noble face, with a profile such as one sees on a Roman medallion, framed in grey hair, which was still plentiful and slightly wavy. The imperious line of her eyebrows accentuated the expression of her piercing black eyes, and her severe mouth lent to her face a kind of rigid look. Hers was a head which sorrow had not bowed, a face which age had not softened, and her whole attitude was hopelessly uncompromising. Her brother, Cardinal Salvoni, had the dignified air of an aristocratic prelate. His forehead indicated power and rare capacity. His eyes were often lowered, and when he looked up they had the most rapid, penetrating gaze. His lips were strong enough to guard all the secrets of the Church, and his square chin impressed one with the idea of ruse and concentrated strength. The Duchess Avellina, Donna Pia, was the beauty of the Black party. She had been compared to all the Madonnas, but although she certainly had their pure, regular features, the resemblance went no further. Her expressive face revealed an innate and finished coquetry, mitigated by a religious temperament.

Dora did not need many glances to discern

the characteristic traits of these three Sant' Annas. She had the strangest sensation of being there under the fire of a whole army of flashing black eyes, and it made her feel decidedly uncomfortable. Donna Teresa invited the two Americans to be seated, and then, turning to Mrs. Carroll, she excused herself in French for not having called upon her.

"I have to thank you, Madame," she said, most ceremoniously, "for accepting my son's proposal for your daughter, and I hope that our children will be happy."

"I hope so, too; they have everything in their favour."

"It must be a great sacrifice for you to have to give your daughter to a foreigner?"

This remark naturally implied that the sacrifice was reciprocal.

"A sacrifice! Oh, do not imagine that, Madame!" put in Miss Carroll, coming eagerly to the help of her mother, who was nervously timid about speaking French. "Mamma was almost as quick as I was to discover Lelo's good qualities, and"—with a mischievous glance at her *fiancé*—"she is sure that he will be a model husband. That is all she asks."

It gave the Countess a sort of shock to hear her son thus called familiarly by his Christian name, and her nostrils quivered with pride and annoyance.

"And what about you, Mademoiselle?" asked

the Duchess Avellina. "Do you think you will get used to our life, and our ways and customs?"

"Oh, perfectly well!—just as the Princess Branca has done, and the Marquise Terrani. I cannot say that I should have done so years ago, for Rome would have frightened me; but at present it is so gay, so animated—quite cosmopolitan."

No word could have been more unfortunate and Lelo, who knew all the grievances that it would revive, looked down on the floor in his embarrassment.

"It is true that it has become cosmopolitan," said Donna Teresa; "so much so that only foreigners feel at home here now. It is getting more and more commonplace."

"Commonplace!" protested Dora. "Oh, it will never be that! Just think, it is not a large city, and yet it appears immense."

A flash of joy lighted up the Cardinal's face, and he looked at the young girl with a kindly expression.

"You are right, Mademoiselle," he said, "and it is St. Peter's, it is the Vatican which makes it immense."

"And the Colosseum, too, and the Palace of the Cæsars," continued Miss Carroll, with her outspokenness, which nothing could restrain. "I discovered the fact only the other day that size does not always mean greatness. On looking at the Temple of Vesta, so perfect in

its proportions and in its lines, our houses of twenty-five storeys seemed to me strangely small."

Donna Pia glanced with surprise at this girl, who had ideas of her own about people and things, and who expressed them so clearly.

"Have you seen all there is to see in Rome?" asked the Cardinal.

"Nearly, and I have taken the opportunity of showing everything to Lelo at the same time, as he did not know Rome at all. I made him read me pages and pages of Baedeker; and when I saw that he did not fight shy, I began to believe in the sincerity of his affection."

"You were not far wrong," remarked the Count, smiling, "for I have never yet done that for any one."

"A Sant' Anna studying Baedeker with an American lady—that is certainly a sign of the times!" said the Duchess Avellina, with a shade of disdain and bitterness in her tone.

"That is true," answered Dora tranquilly. "Everything must certainly be arranged by Providence."

"It is impossible to doubt that," said the Cardinal.

"I used to think so vaguely, but now I am sure of it. Just think! I came to Europe for my own amusement. I met Monsieur Sant' Anna, and now, behold me settled for ever on this side of the ocean. I keep rubbing

my eyes every minute to see if I am not dreaming."

"I am told that America is the paradise of women," said the Duchess Avellina, "and I am surprised that you should all leave it so easily."

"It is in order to try purgatory, no doubt. Then, too, we rather pride ourselves on being citizens of the world. When we have lived in America as girls, and then marry in Europe, it is like being born a second time. I shall have all kinds of new experiences, and learn another language—it will be great fun! I should have been vexed, too, never to have experienced the pleasure and excitement of the delightful fox-hunting in the country here. When out of a hundred and fifty, one comes in second or first—well, that is something—quite a triumph!" said Dora seriously.

A somewhat mocking smile flitted over Donna Pia's lips. The revelation of this new type of girl held the Countess Sant' Anna spellbound with amazement.

"You have some fine Catholic churches in New York," said the Cardinal.

"Yes, St. Patrick's Cathedral and St. Leo's Church. Every one goes to St. Patrick's on Easter Day; the music is superb, and all the great artistes who come to America have sung there."

"Do you like the Catholic rites and ceremonies?"

"I think them very beautiful—full of poetry. The service of the Episcopal Church, to which I belong, is very much like it. We have candles, incense, and rather complicated services. I suppose that, with the exception of the confession, it is the same thing?"

Every word she had just uttered showed the distance which existed in all spiritual matters between her soul and that of her *fiancé's* family. Lelo was conscious of it, and, as though ashamed, kept his eyes fixed on the ground. Donna Teresa's lips took a curve of intense disdain.

"The same thing! The service of the Episcopal Church—oh, no, Mademoiselle! Between Catholicism and other religions there is the gulf which separates truth from error."

"Ah, but then what is error to one is not error to another. I suppose that diversity of religions is necessary, just like the diversity of people and things."

On hearing religious questions disposed of so simply, the Cardinal opened his magnificent black eyes wide in astonishment, and gazed at the young girl as though she had been some prodigy. She appeared so unconscious of the enormous heresy she had just uttered that he understood the uselessness of attempting to prove to her the necessity of one unique faith. Mrs. Carroll, feeling that this first visit had lasted long enough, rose to take leave.

"As soon as I am allowed to go out I shall

have the pleasure of calling on you," said the Countess politely. "One of these days we will have a family dinner, which will enable us to get to know each other better. If the idea of an old woman's society does not alarm you," she added, turning to Dora, "you will find me at home every day after five."

"I hope, *figlia mia*," said the Cardinal, "that God will bless your marriage. I shall pray unceasingly for you," and as though he wished to take possession of the soul of his future niece, the prelate traced the sign of the cross on her forehead.

The Count, breathing freely once more, accompanied the two ladies to their carriage. As soon as they were driving away, and she was alone with her mother, Dora, still under the impression she had received, exclaimed:

"What a lot of black eyes! Lelo says that his sister's are violet. They looked to me like coals, and I wish they were blue, green, or red even—anything so that there should be fewer black eyes in the Sant' Annas' home!" she added, with unconscious irritability.

Mrs. Carroll could not help laughing.

"You don't appear delighted with your new family."

"It seems rather formidable; but I am not marrying the family."

"No, but I fear it will be a serious obstacle to your happiness. Monsieur Sant' Anna's peo-

ple will never understand you--they belong to other times. I have an idea that this marriage is a mistake. Think it over; it is not too late yet."

"Yes, Mamma, it is too late, for I love Lelo," said Dora, her face suddenly taking a softer expression. "I could not be happy again, now, without him. The Countess and Donna Pia detest me, that's quite certain; but I fancy I have made a conquest of the Cardinal. I shall be careful to keep his sympathy, for I like him as a future uncle. He has such a magnificent bearing, and the red cap, which seems like a halo of light round his head, is very effective, and I suppose it is symbolical. His sign of the cross made me feel quite strange, even through my veil. If he becomes Pope I shall turn Catholic."

"Heaven preserve us!" exclaimed Mrs. Carroll. "That would be the last straw!"

After seeing his *fiancée* into the carriage, Lelo went back to his mother to hear her opinion, and so finish at once with disagreeable things.

"Well, and how do you like her, *madre mia?*" he asked, as he entered the salon.

"You call that person a young girl!" said Donna Teresa, in a disdainful tone.

"Well, she is not a widow as far as I know," answered Sant' Anna, laughing in a nervous way.

"She might be—she has assurance enough.

I am wondering what there is in her to have fascinated you. She is ugly!"

"Ugly, with eyes and hair like hers! Oh, that's enough! You are prejudiced."

"Well, I don't dislike her, your American," said the Cardinal. "There is a frankness about her that is rather startling, but which allows you to see all she has in her mind. She is interesting."

"If ever that woman becomes a Catholic!" said the Duchess Avellina.

"It doesn't matter," put in Lelo brusquely. "Dora Carroll has all the qualities necessary for making life pleasant; she is gay and original, and has an excellent character; and then, too, she is absolutely straightforward. I have never found her deviating from the truth, even in little things. Do you know many girls about whom you can say as much?"

"Let us hope for our country's sake that American women are not the only ones who are sincere!" replied Donna Pia drily.

Sant' Anna sat down facing his mother, and took her hand in his.

"Come, *madre mia*," he said, "don't look so heart-broken."

"I had dreamed of something so different for you."

"Yes, I know you had plotted and planned a marriage which was to bring me back, bound hand and foot, to your party. Do not regret

my engagement on that account, as I should never have consented to it. You have the effect on me, all of you, of people who would rather walk with their heads turned round than actually see in front of them. Our eyes are given us, nevertheless, so that we may look ahead."

"And above!" said the Cardinal.

"And above, if you like. You ought to be convinced that the Church has been definitely turned into another way, and that it must go that way now, whether it will or not. When I was a child I witnessed a scene which I have never forgotten. The day when the Italians entered the city I was in the laundry with the servants. They were all huddled in a corner like so many frightened ants, waiting in expectation and terror for what was going to happen next. Mary, my Irish nurse, had a little teapot in her hand, the teapot she had brought from her own country, and which she loved like the apple of her eye. She was standing in the middle of the room, holding forth in her droll Italian, and affirming that the enemies of the Pope would never enter Rome. 'Never! never!' she kept repeating, stretching out her arm with a tragic gesture. 'God will never allow it!'—God did allow it, though, for at that very moment we heard the victorious cannon. The Italians had entered. At the same moment, Mary's precious brown teapot fell out of her hand and broke into pieces on the stone floor, and the poor

woman, heart-broken, sank into a chair, the tears streaming from her eyes. 'O God, is it possible!' she stammered out; 'it is the end of the world, then.' It was only the end of a system, though," added Lelo. "At the time I did not understand much about this scene, for I was only eight years old, but as I grew up the sense and meaning of it came to my mind. Many a time since, on thinking of it, I have associated the fate of the temporal power with that of the little brown teapot, for, like that, it appears to me to be irremediably broken to pieces."

This little story seemed to make an impression on the Cardinal, who, with his Italian mind, was naturally superstitious. His face contracted with pain.

"The Pope and the Church are not any the less great," continued the young man. "It is quite the contrary. Just lately I have often taken walks with Miss Carroll round the Vatican, and in its silence and solitude it has seemed to me more formidable than the Quirinal."

"You honour us too much, my son," said the Cardinal, in a bitter, sarcastic tone.

Under the influence of passionate feeling, the Italian often finds words and ideas which seem to come from a source hitherto unknown to himself. The Count had spoken with conviction and firmness, as he rarely did, but he had not succeeded in influencing his audience. On seeing that his mother's face looked as though it

had been petrified with sorrow, he began to kiss her hands.

"Mother mine," he said, magnetising her with his eyes, beaming as they were with filial affection, "forgive me! Be generous!"

"Instead of being able to rejoice about your marriage, as I had hoped, I must resign myself to it. It is indeed hard!"

"You would never have rejoiced at my marriage," said Lelo, smiling, "you love me too jealously for that. You ought to be glad to see me marry an American. A foreign wife will want less of me than an Italian would have done."

The subtle mind of the young man had discovered the only argument which could console Donna Teresa. The muscles of her face relaxed, her eyes grew misty, and she gazed at her son with infinite tenderness.

"Oh, children! children!" she said gently; "what a torment they are—and what a joy!"

"I suppose I must call on these Americans?" said Donna Pia, in her thin voice.

"Yes, unless you want to quarrel with me," answered Lelo.

"Oh, well—I'll go!"

CHAPTER XXI

A CRISIS FOR MRS. RONALD

"SHE is furious," the Count Sant' Anna had said on leaving Mrs. Ronald. What Helen was experiencing was much more serious and much more painful than wounded vanity. After the departure of her visitor she stood still with her handkerchief in her clenched fingers, trying to get a deep breath in order to relieve her heart of the weight which seemed to be oppressing it, but all in vain. And this interview was only the beginning of that Calvary which so many women before her have had to climb for the sake of love. She had to endure all the congratulations of her friends and acquaintances, and then, too, Dora's confidences. The young girl had such a natural way of forgetting that she had been to blame about anything, and of not noticing the displeasure of other people, that it was difficult to keep her at a distance, and Helen had been obliged to make a sort of peace with her. She was always coming into Helen's room to talk to her about her *fiancé*, her marriage, or her future plans.

Mrs. Ronald would stop her ears in sheer

desperation or endeavour to think of other things. In spite of herself, though, the words fixed themselves on her brain, and when she was alone they came back to her and made her suffer. Instead of Jack Ascott's very modern ring, Miss Carroll now wore the engagement ring of the Sant' Annas, a sardonyx on which was engraved the family crest, with the word "Semper." The sight of this historic ring, which had been worn by a celebrated French beauty whom Louis XIV. had married to an ancestor of Lelo's, made Helen envious, and exercised a sort of fascination over her. She had the strange feeling that it belonged to her, and she wanted to try it on, to have it on her finger, if only for an instant.

Every day the Count lunched or dined at the Hôtel Quirinal. Without desiring to win him back, feminine instinct made Helen dress with special care. His presence even now gave her happiness such as she had never hitherto known, but this happiness was mingled with bitterness, and she endured such pangs of anguish as made these daily repasts so many hours of exquisite suffering. Fearing lest her coldness should be attributed to vexation, she made great efforts to appear pleasant and cheerful; but in spite of this, her manner was not quite natural, nor did she seem altogether at her ease.

Lelo treated her with affectionate familiarity, often addressing her as *annt*, and this title, making her seem older, caused her an irritability

which she had the greatest difficulty to control. Dora amused Sant' Anna, but Helen interested him. Her conversation was more connected, and he liked hearing her talk. When she was silent for a time, he would say, with a smile: "How's this, you are mute to-day?" and these words, simple as they were, gave her the most extraordinary joy. Sometimes her dazzling beauty made the young man gaze at her, but the expression she had once seen in his eyes when he had looked at her was not there now, and, realising this, she would suddenly be hard, cutting, and sarcastic in her remarks. When she gave vent to her feelings in this way he would glance at her with a questioning, surprised look in his eyes, and a smile would hover over his lips under his moustache, and that smile would wound her like an insult, and haunt her for days after. In Helen's predicament, a woman of the Latin race and a Catholic, accustomed to examining her conscience, would soon have known what her sentiments with regard to Sant' Anna meant, and, according to her integrity, would have struggled more or less against her love, not failing to get a certain amount of enjoyment and keen pleasure out of the moral combat.

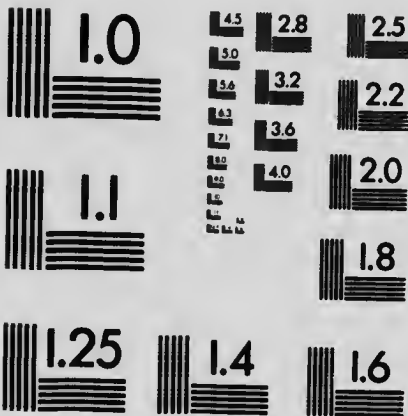
Helen, in spite of her highly developed and cultured intelligence, had but a childish knowledge of the human heart. She believed, and she was constantly saying so, that good principles

and superior education suffice not only to keep a woman safe, but to render her invulnerable. And yet, in spite of these safeguards, love had found its way into her heart with the unerring directness of all the agents of Nature.

It was there, in all its infinite power, there in some unsuspected cell, accomplishing its mysterious work, touching a whole zone of her brain, which had never yet been put into motion, awakening her senses, transforming her character. Society gatherings now made her feel irritable and nervous. She was indifferent to all admiration, and life seemed dull and stupid to her. Actuated by the desire of getting away from Miss Beauchamp and the Vergas, and more particularly from Dora, she went out for long drives here and there, visiting again places which had interested her. It was infinitely pathetic to see this worldly woman, with her brilliant beauty, one of the ornaments of New York society, wandering about alone through the Colosseum and the Circus Maximus, or among the tombs of the Appian Way, trying, like some poor, forsaken creature, to cling to something great. During these solitary expeditions, Helen's worked-up soul suddenly entered into communication with that soul of Rome which it is given to so few to know and feel. The sight of all these broken lines of beauty and harmony, of these human masterpieces so cruelly mutilated, filled her heart with an un-



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selfish sadness which seemed to soothe her own sorrow. The churches specially attracted her. Hitherto she had admired them merely as buildings, but now, without being aware of it, she seemed to be looking for some one within them. She liked their odour even—a sort of odour of the sepulchre, of old age, of burnt-out tapers, and of incense gone cold; an odour which is peculiar to the churches of Rome, and which would distinguish them from all the churches of the world. She drew near to the altars, watched the poor people praying, was amazed at their faith, and instinctively raised her own eyes, so full of anguish, to the radiant Madonnas. St. Peter's impressed her strangely. Neither money nor genius has succeeded in making the great Christian Basilica a place of prayer and devotion. In spite of the majesty of its proportions, the coldness of its marble, the severity of its symbols, it appeals to the sense more than any other Catholic temple.

Towards evening, under the Dome of the Confession, there are mysterious shadows and exquisite lights, an *ensemble* of effects of visible and invisible things which envelops one and exalts one's faith or love. The Pagan soul has taken refuge there, and neither masses, exorcisms, nor Papal benedictions have succeeded in driving it out. It still wanders about behind the white statues, diffusing throughout the sanctuary a sort of penetrating voluptuousness which

no one who has been sensitised by a great sorrow, or by some deep passion, can escape.

Mrs. Ronald felt herself becoming wicked, as she expressed it to herself; and, often seized with unaccountable terror, she would hurry away to seek protection in the daylight outside.

These disconcerting impressions frightened her and made her think that some serious illness was threatening her. For the first time she felt herself alone, quite alone, and the persistent silence of her husband irritated her more and more. She had imagined herself necessary to his happiness, and it humiliated her deeply to see that he could do without her. He should come to her, or she would never go back to New York.

This resolution, which she repeated to herself twenty times a day, was very painful to her. She often thought regretfully of that beautiful home she had made, and which contained a great part of her own self. At times she had a wild desire to see it again, but at such moments she would press her lips together stubbornly, in order to conquer her weakness; and she would make some mad plan, such as to go to India, or to have a divorce, and then settle down in Paris with Miss Beauchamp. She tried to reconcile herself to Dora's marriage, to accustom herself to the thought of it, but this she could not do; it weighed on her like a nightmare, and seemed to stop the free action of her heart. She

attributed this to her friendship for Mr. Ascott. She tried to believe that she was staying on at Rome on account of the misconception that might be put on her sudden departure, but she was in reality kept there by the occult fascination which Sant' Anna's presence exercised over her. Her fine intellectual faculties protected her, without any effort of her will, from the dangers of this fascination. She felt the need more and more as the days went on of escaping from every one and everything; she wanted to go far away, and she tried to find some pretext for leaving Rome without Mrs. and Miss Carroll protesting loudly.

Providence came to her aid in the most unexpected way. One evening, while at dinner, a telegram was brought to her. The idea that it might be from her husband made her fingers tremble slightly.

On reading it, she uttered an exclamation of joy.

"Oh, what a delightful surprise!" she said. "Charley is at Monte Carlo, and he wants Aunt Sophie and me to join him there. It is the very thing I should like most. We will certainly go."

"I'll wager that your brother has brought Henry with him, and is arranging for you to have another honeymoon," said Miss Carroll thoughtlessly.

Helen blushed violently, and her eyelids trembled as she met Lelo's mocking gaze.

"Henry is not in the habit of allowing himself to be brought," she answered, in her driest tone.

"No; but in conjugal quarrels the intervention of a third party is sometimes very useful in the way of helping one to maintain one's self-respect," exclaimed Dora, with that practical common-sense which made it appear as though she had had plenty of experience in life. "However it may be, if my dear uncle should come, reconcile him with me while you are about it. I have written to him twice, and he has not answered my letters. Oh, these perfect men—what a plague they are!"

"You are not going to leave us here alone?" said Mrs. Carroll, with a distressed look.

"You have the Vergas; they will be a hundred times more useful to you than either Aunt Sophie or I should be," answered Helen.

"Yes, but the family——"

"Don't torment yourself, Mammy," interrupted Dora; "we will go and join the family. We have a magnificent plan, have n't we, Lelo?"

The Count nodded; and then, turning to Mrs. Ronald, he said, smiling:

"I am sure you will break the bank at Monte Carlo."

Sant' Anna had spoken without thinking of the proverb which promises good luck at the gaming-table to the unlucky in love affairs; but Helen, remembering it, turned a little paler and drew in her lips.

Lelo caught this fleeting expression, and was more embarrassed than triumphant.

"Why are you so sure that I shall be lucky at Monte Carlo?" asked Helen boldly.

This sort of defiance irritated the Italian, and he smiled in a mocking way.

"Because I believe you are capable of influencing even that confounded roulette," he answered, with hypocritical gallantry. "It is the impression of a confirmed gambler; and if I were with you at Monte Carlo, I should blindly follow your inspiration. I assure you that you are capable of breaking the bank."

"I hope not," remarked Miss Beauchamp drily.

CHAPTER XXII

AN INCIDENT AT MONTE CARLO

CHARLEY BEAUCHAMP had never succeeded in driving from his mind the anxiety he had felt at Ouchy. Although he knew that his sister had a vigilant chaperon in Aunt Sophie, he was not at all easy about her. He considered now that Mr. Ronald was in the wrong, and blamed him for his obstinacy; but, true to the American principle of not interfering in other peoples' affairs, he had not said a single word to persuade him to join his wife. The sad, weary look which he saw written on his brother-in-law's face, and which grew more and more accentuated as the days went on, made him hope that love would before long triumph over pride. In the meantime, the thought of Helen's loneliness made his heart ache for her. She was too young and too beautiful to stay in Europe without a man's protection, and he came to the conclusion that it was his duty to go to her. He therefore began to arrange his business matters with a view to a long absence, and this took him some time. On hearing the news of Dora's engagement to the Count Sant' Anna,

he was secretly delighted, and experienced a sudden feeling of relief, the cause of which he did not attempt to analyse. The announcement of this marriage reminded him of Lucerne, of Helen's flirtation, and brought to his mind a whole crowd of souvenirs, which made him hasten the preparations for his journey. The day before his departure he saw his brother-in-law, and said to him simply:

"I start to-morrow for Europe; have you any messages?"

"None whatever," answered Mr. Ronald, turning his head away to hide his emotion.

Upon this Charley set sail, and as he did not care to go to Rome and meet Sant' Anna again, he decided to stop at Monte Carlo, feeling sure that Helen would be delighted to join him there. Nothing alters a woman's face so quickly as love or maternity, and when Charley saw his sister he was struck with the change in her.

"What's the matter with you?" he exclaimed anxiously. "Have you been ill?"

Mrs. Ronald blushed, without knowing why.

"Ill!" she repeated; "not at all"; and then, with mock alarm, she added: "Do I look older, then—am I ugly?"

"No, but different."

"That proves that you had forgotten me a little, for I am just as I was."

Charley did not insist, but the same feeling of uneasiness took possession of him which had

until lately haunted him in the midst of his business affairs.

The change of surroundings was a great relief to Mrs. Ronald. She was penetrated, as it were, by the dazzling light of Monte Carlo. The music, the flowers, the blue sky around her acted upon her in the most beneficial way, and under the influence of all these beautiful, peaceful things her heart grew gradually lighter, and it seemed to her that she was just waking up from a nightmare. Dora's first letter brought back all her troubles. In this letter, every line of which contained Lelo's name, the young girl announced that her marriage was fixed for the month of June, and was to take place in Paris. At this news, Helen manifested her indignation with Miss Carroll, and her sympathy for Jack Ascott, in such a way as to bring a grave, troubled look into Mr. Beauchamp's eyes. She did not notice this, but the sky, the sea, and the divine scenery before her seemed to change, and to become suddenly dismal and sad-looking, and she at once attributed to the mistral the irritability which grief had aroused within her.

By way of diversion, Mrs. Ronald took to gambling, and was soon fascinated by roulette. In spite of the remonstrances of her aunt and brother, she passed a great part of her time at the Casino. She had some extraordinary runs of luck, and exulted over them, forgetting even, for the time being, Lelo and Dora. She soon

began to be noticed, and was styled "*La belle Americaine.*" People said that she was a millionaire; every one thought she was either a widow or divorced, and nothing short of Mr. Beauchamp's constant presence ensured her liberty, and kept at a respectful distance men who were on the lookout for adventures.

One afternoon Charley had gone to Cannes to see a friend who was ill, and Helen went to the Casino with some acquaintances of hers from Boston. These people lingered at the *trente et quarante* table, and Helen, who liked a more exciting game, soon left them and hurried on to the fascinating roulette. A dark-haired young man, wearing a red necktie with a huge black pearl pin, who for the last week had been pursuing her, followed her now and managed to slip in just behind her. Mrs. Ronald kept putting a little pile of nine louis in the most persistent way on to the nine, as this number had come into her mind on waking that morning. She felt sure that it would prove a lucky number. Four times her expectations had been deceived, and she was watching the croupier in breathless suspense, endeavouring to influence him by the force of her own will, when she suddenly felt two hands grasp her waist under the deep cape she was wearing.

She turned round with flashing eyes, her face pale with anger, and then, just as if in some dream, she saw her husband suddenly appear be-

fore her, and with a formidable blow rid her of her insolent admirer. In the midst of the confusion which followed, she heard distinctly the dialogue between the two men.

"Your card—your card—you must give me satisfaction!" said the one, with a strong foreign accent.

"I am not answerable to you. I saw you insult my wife, and I have punished you in the American way. I was perfectly justified."

Still under the impression of something unreal, of a sort of horror, produced by the multitude of eyes all gazing at her, Helen seized Mr. Ronald's arm, and clinging to him, allowed him to lead her away. Only when she was outside the Casino in the fresh air did she realise that all this had actually happened. Then, withdrawing her hand, she stopped short, looked up at her husband with her eyes full of astonishment, and asked, in a somewhat hoarse voice:

"Henry, where have you come from?"

Mr. Ronald did not answer immediately—he was gazing admiringly at the beautiful face he had not seen for so long.

"I've come from the train, dearest," he answered, with a smile, although his voice trembled with emotion. "I saw Aunt Sophie, and she told me you were at the Casino with the Carringtons. I wanted to surprise you, and I arrived just in time. I did not know what sort of a reception I should get. I have travelled with—"

a hundred-pound weight on my mind, and now an incident fit for a novel has made you take my arm once more. It was wonderful—providential!”

Helen walked on.

“I thought you would never make up your mind to come,” she said, rather coldly.

“And that I should let the whole year go by without giving you any sign that I was alive. Why, you would then have been able to petition for a divorce, on the ground of my desertion!”

Mrs. Ronald could not help blushing, for she, too, had thought of that.

“Did Charley send for you to come?” she asked, trying to conquer her emotion.

“Charley! No, dearest, he does not know I am here. I learnt indirectly that you had left Rome for Monte Carlo. No one sent for me. I came because, without you, life was a burden too heavy to be borne. I have suffered so much, and especially these last two or three months; I would not for anything in the world have to go through all this again. We have both of us been to blame; let us forgive each other.”

The husband and wife had arrived at the Hôtel des Anglais. Mr. Ronald went with Helen to her room, and when once the door was shut he stretched out his arms towards her, and she flung herself upon his breast. As she listened to the passionate beating of his strong, manly heart, the picture of Lelo, a vivid picture, rose up in

her mind, and the consciousness of her love for the Italian came to her like a thunderbolt.

She drew herself gently away from her husband's embrace, and then, gazing at him with a pathetic, sorrowful look in her eyes, like that of an animal at bay, with dry white lips, she stammered out, without knowing what she said:

"Why have you been so long in coming—oh, why have you been so long?"

CHAPTER XXIII

HER FIANCÉ'S PEOPLE

LELO had expressed to Miss Carroll a wish that their marriage should take place as soon as possible, and she, who had been in no hurry to become Jack Ascott's wife, had consented to this joyfully. She had at once written for the necessary papers to be forwarded. Her trousseau had been sent back to Paris from New York, and, laughing as she imagined the surprise it would cause her seamstress, and not without some shame and remorse herself, she had ordered a coronet to be embroidered on her linen. At present the young girl was being carried along by her pride, happiness, and vanity. She had looked through the archives of the Sant' Anna family and seen the jewels with which she would be able to adorn herself, and she had realised the fact that she would be a very great lady indeed, equal to any of the Roman princesses. What retaliation and what triumph for her, Dora, whom many of the society people in New York did not consider aristocratic! With the practical common-sense which characterised her, it occurred to her that, from a worldly point

of view, she was making a very fine marriage, and that her wealth was of very little account compared with what she would gain. To her credit, however, let it be said that these material considerations merely floated through her brain, and it was Lelo himself she loved beyond all else. On seeing her so different from what she had been, it was impossible to doubt this. While love increases the selfishness of a man, it diminishes or destroys it in a woman. Dora feared to displease her *fiancé* in any way; she studied his tastes and subordinated her own will to his. For the first time in her life she was conscious of being dependent on some one else, and this dependence, instead of irritating or humiliating her, made her proud and happy. One thing alone disturbed her peace of mind, and that was the hostility of Lelo's family—a sullen hostility glossed over with perfect politeness, but which she felt distinctly. She had dined several times at the Sant' Anna Palace, and on each occasion she had had the impression that she was not liked, and that everything she said was misconstrued. She, on her side, could not understand these people who were so bound up in the past. They had the same effect on her as so many clocks that had stopped, and one day, in a fit of bad temper, she had declared to Lelo that she would like to send an electric current through their minds in order to refresh them, and rid them of the accumulated pre-

judices with which they were clogged. In the Countess Sant' Anna's circle, Dora had, nevertheless, succeeded in making two friends—Cardinal Salvoni and the lawyer, Orlandi. She had done her utmost to cultivate the sympathy of the prelate, whom she liked more and more. She felt instinctively that he was a force, and she had the greatest respect for all force, just as she had an utter contempt for all weakness. He always started her on the subject of America, and then listened to her with marked interest. Her original outbursts often brought a fleeting smile into his black eyes, and several times she had the triumph of seeing him come over to her side. Lawyer Orlandi was amazed at her practical intelligence, at her mental and physical activity, at the clearness of her ideas, and he was courageous enough to affirm that this American would be just the right wife for Lelo. He took her part always in the cleverest way, and did not fail to show up her good qualities. At her request he had told her the history of the Sant' Annas, and, with the permission of the Countess, had let her know something of how their money matters stood. Miss Carroll, who treated her mother like an elder sister, was very much surprised at the somewhat ceremonious respect which Lelo always showed to the Countess. The first time she had seen him bowing before his mother like a little child, and then kissing her hand, she had remained speech-

less with astonishment, and it had given her a slight pang, for she had realised that her *fiancé* did not belong to exactly the same century that she did.

Dora had at first wished to have her marriage celebrated in Rome, with all the pomp of the Catholic Church, but when she learnt that, as she was a Protestant, the ceremony would have to be a private one, she preferred to be married in Paris. Lelo was inwardly delighted at this, for a wedding at the Nunciature suited him infinitely better. It was an immense relief to him to think that neither his mother nor the Princess Marina would be present at the ceremony.

Lawyer Orlandi had endeavoured in vain to obtain the cancelling of their lease from the tenants who occupied the ground-floor of the Saut' Annas' Palace. When Miss Carroll heard this, she had the greatest difficulty to keep herself from dancing with joy. The prospect of living in a little old-world square, between walls a yard thick, and under the same roof as her mother-in-law, had appalled her. On seeing her *fiancé's* disappointed look, she said to him gaily:

"Don't worry yourself about it. It is always easy to live like a prince in Rome; and then, too, we might build a palace!"

"Build a palace!" exclaimed the Count, "when we already have one which is a marvel of architecture!"

"Yes; but it wants air and light—the right sort of light, too, for killing the microbes and—the prejudices," added the American girl, smiling.

This speech jarred sorely on Lelo's mind, and he winced under it. It was no doubt the soul of his ancestors—of the Sant' Annas of former days—protesting, as Mrs. Ronald had said, against the new spirit of the times, against sacrilegious modernism.

CHAPTER XXIV

LOVE, THE TYRANT

HELEN'S little adventure at the Casino disgusted her with Monte Carlo, and the very next day she wanted to start for Cannes. After staying there a week, she returned to Paris with her husband, her brother, and her aunt, and they all put up at the Hôtel Castiglione.

The consciousness of her love for Sant' Anna had caused Mrs. Ronald a sort of stupor, mingled with self-contempt and deep humiliation. The victory at Ouchy had been merely a defeat, then, after all. M. de Limeray's warning—that prophetic warning at which she had laughed—now came back to her mind. She had tempted man, and he had conquered her in spite of herself. He had won her heart without her being aware of it. She had fallen into the trap laid for her, just like a simple schoolgirl. At this idea her face flushed with vexation. She had fancied herself invulnerable, and had chosen the salamander for her emblem. What a living fraud she was after all and how absurd of her! Furious with the little innocent creature, which

had not communicated to her its fire-proof quality, she flung the seal on which she had had it engraved, together with the diamond and emerald salamander which she had worn with such pride, into her jewel-case.

Helen's moral disturbance did not last long. Her dignity and integrity took up arms against the sentiment which was tormenting her, and which seemed to her like a blot on her honour. She had studied many religious beliefs, and had for some time been greatly interested in the "Christian Scientists"—a branch of which sect is to be found in Paris. She believed with them that through will-power miracles can be wrought, and that the mere thinking of one's malady aggravates it by reprinting it, as it were, in the organism. Resolutely she endeavoured to banish from her mind all thought of her unfortunate love. But in that curious duality of feeling experienced by an individual when the mind is at high pressure, the love went on living within her, producing a variety of sentiments and sensations which at times entirely obtained the mastery over her. She laughed and talked, arranged about her dresses, and generally enjoyed herself; and all the time, through these acts of her outward life, she could hear the rich, mellow voice of the Italian, and see the tender look in his eyes. His flattering words and his declarations of love kept repeating themselves over and over again in her brain. The impres-

sions she had received at Lucerne and at Ouchy—those impressions which seemed to have just glided through her mind—were stored there, and now they kept emerging from it, exercising over her a sort of retrospective fascination. Helen struggled in vain against this occult force, and one day, in the anguish of her powerlessness to escape from it, she exclaimed aloud:

“Oh, this is certainly the effect of that horrible Latin blood I have in my veins!”

She began wandering about in Paris just as she had done in Rome, perfectly alone, going wherever her fancy took her. A strange instinct made her avoid the Avenue Gabriel. The very sight of the shady avenue, along which Sant’ Anna had followed her, was painful now; and as she passed by, she glanced at it in a hurried, frightened way.

In the course of her aimless walks, she often happened to enter some church. The Chapel of the Passionists or that of the Dominicans had an irresistible attraction for her. In the mystical, almost supernatural silence peculiar to Catholic sanctuaries, she felt instantaneous relief. She had always loved religious ceremonies, and she felt them now. The peals of sacred music, and the deep, solemn notes of the liturgy, calmed her suffering now, just as the cradle-songs of her nurse had lulled her childish sorrows. Although she was a Protestant, she knew all about St. Anthony of Padua, whose fame is,

perhaps, as great in America as in France; and in her moral distress she had gone as far as the foolish superstition of promising a large sum of money if only she might obtain oblivion. With that practical sense which never abandoned her, she said to herself that, since her will alone did not suffice to rid her of this unfortunate love which was poisoning her life, she would have to call other forces to her aid. She remembered that one day, at Rome, when some one had pointed out the *Bambino* (which to her was nothing but a frightful old wooden doll), she had seen an aged peasant woman, whose eyes had shone with a strange light, which had transfigured her, making her wrinkles disappear and giving a supernatural beauty to her whole face. It was probably the effect of the woman's faith. And Helen recalled the ceremonies she had witnessed at the Convent of the Assumption, and that touching midnight mass at Blonay. There was surely, then, some mystic force in this old Roman religion! Why should she not have recourse to it? Then, too, in America, Catholicism was being discussed very much at present. It was making its way, and was the subject of strong controversy. She would rather like to understand it thoroughly, if only for the sake of being able to discuss the subject. She thereupon asked Madame de Kéradiou to introduce her to some one with whom she could talk about it; and the latter took her to the Abbé

de Rovel, a cousin of her husband—an unattached officiating priest at St. Clotilde's. She was received by him with paternal kindness, and she began cautiously by telling him that she had not decided to change her religion; that she found the Catholic service fascinating, but feared that, with her modern way of thinking, it might be impossible for her to accept the Church's dogmas.

"One cannot go backwards, you understand," she added, with a serious expression, which was very becoming, on her beautiful face.

"Certainly not," answered the priest, smiling; "but I do not think that Catholicism would impede the progress of your mind; on the contrary. Anyhow, I am quite ready to help you, and to answer all your questions."

It was therefore arranged that Helen should go every day, between two and three o'clock, to discuss religion with M. de Rovel, and very delighted she was at the idea of having found a fresh diversion.

On arriving in Paris, Mrs. Ronald had at once called on the Marquise d'Anguilhon, and in the course of conversation had learnt, to her great relief, that M. de Limeray was still at Pau. She dreaded his penetrating gaze and his shrewd, mocking smile.

At the first Thursday dinner, however, to which she was invited with her people, he was there. It was all in vain that she kept a strict

watch over herself, and endeavoured to appear gay and careless. He was soon struck with the change in her; the upper part of her face seemed to him quite different, her expression was less animated and softer, while every now and then there was a gleam of suffering and anguish in her large brown eyes. At times she avoided his gaze, and then all at once she would brave it with a nervous little burst of laughter.

Altogether, she was like a guilty, shame-faced child, and the old nobleman, who had in his time learnt to understand women, kept saying to himself: "Who is it, I wonder?"

The conversation naturally turned on Miss Carroll's marriage. The Marquise d'Anguilhon, who knew Sant' Anna, declared that he was very fascinating, and just the sort of man to win favour with an American girl. Mr. Ronald was extremely severe in his judgment of his niece; and Helen added that Mr. Ascott would have suited Dora much better, and that she would discover that for herself before very long. In her voice there was a strange note of deep feeling which did not escape M. de Limeray. He questioned her about her niece's marriage, asked her all kinds of details in the most skilful and persistent way, and drew his own conclusions. He then examined Mr. Ronald. The latter was just the type of "superior man" who would be considered ideal by intellectual women. He would never satisfy them, though, as they

would feel instinctively that he did not belong to them, and often that they did not understand him at all, hence their disappointment. The American savant was manly-looking and handsome, with an expression of intellectual power; but his clean-shaven face had that calm serenity about it which is only acquired in the higher realms of thought. His magnificent eyes, of a greenish-blue, with a far-away look in them, were the eyes of a searcher, and had not that magnetic light which is kindled by human passions, while the strong, severe mouth banished all idea of sensuality. It was as though Helen had guessed M. de Limeray's thoughts, for her eyes had a quiet, affectionate expression in them as they rested on her husband, and her words to him were charming. This betrayed her hopelessly, and the Count recalled their conversation on leaving Loiset's. He saw her again as she was that night, so fair and so adorable, walking slowly along at his side, and turning her serene face towards him, beaming as it was with the joy of living. She had proclaimed herself invulnerable, and had stopped a moment to show him her emblem, a little salamander, with emerald eyes, all cold and glittering, as it nestled in the lace of her bodice. He remembered the warning he had given her, and looking at her again, with an inward satisfaction, which was very human and very masculine, he said to himself: "Most certainly, man has had his day."

CHAPTER XXV

THE COMING EVENT

THE engaged couple arrived in Paris the first week in June. Dora's interview with her uncle was somewhat stormy, and for the first time she did not succeed in appeasing or disarming him. He reproached her bitterly with the dishonourable way in which she had treated Jack Ascott, and declared that although he had consented to be present at her wedding, it was solely out of consideration for her mother. Going still further, he added, that when once he had fulfilled this last duty of guardian, he did not wish to have any further intercourse either in a business or friendly way with the Countess Sant' Anna. Upon which Miss Carroll lost her temper, and answered that Lelo was all she needed, and that with him she would be able to do without every one else in the world. These words had influenced Mr. Ronald's reception of his future nephew. It was strictly polite, but frigid in the extreme. The two men examined each other with great curiosity. The Count thought that the American looked like a clergy-

man, and Helen's words came back to his mind: "He is a splendid man." "Yes," was Lelo's inward comment, "but he is made for something else than love. I gave in too quickly," he added, with his unconscious Italian cynicism. Mr. Ronald could not help admiring Sant' Anna. This specimen of an ancient and very fine race could not fail to impress him a little. He, too, summed up his appreciation of the other man: "One of the dangerous idlers," he said to Helen; "one of those men who take without any scruple the wives or *fiancées* of others. A perfect nullity into the bargain; only an empty-headed girl like Dora would prefer him to Jack Ascott!" These words, stinging like so many lashes, though not intended for her, wounded Mrs. Ronald to the quick. An instinctive anger took possession of her, and made her want to strike back.

"That is just like you learned men!" she said disdainfully. "To hear you talk, one would fancy that your deeper knowledge of the mysteries of life would teach you a nobler resignation; but when the least thing goes wrong, you forget your principles and your theories, and are no more philosophical than ordinary mortals. You yourself, for instance, who believe that we are entirely the creatures of God, you are always proclaiming the impossibility of free-will—why do you hold Dora responsible for her marriage? Is it logical?"

Mr. Ronald was taken aback, and looked somewhat disturbed in his mind for a few seconds. As soon as he had recovered his self-possession, he laid his hand affectionately on Helen's shoulder.

"You are right," he said, with that rare and wonderful smile peculiar to men who think deeply. "Bring me back always like this to the truth, when by the force of habit I depart from it. There was to be this infidelity, probably, in Dora's life; and although it may be unjust to reproach her with it, yet one cannot help regretting it, especially when it caused the misery of a good fellow like Jack Ascott."

Helen, appeased by these humble and straightforward words, continued in a gentler tone:

"Really, everything that has happened since we left America goes to prove that we are being led along for purposes that we do not understand. After all, when you come to think of it, if the musicians in an orchestra were all free to execute their individual inspirations, they would produce the most horrible mixture of discordant sounds. As we are here in this world to execute the work of the supreme Master, each one of us must arrive with his part ready written, and then, whether it be beautiful or ugly, gay or sad, we must play it through to the end, otherwise all harmony would be impossible."

"Your comparison is very good," said Mr. Ronald, with an expression of pleasure in his

eyes. "One can imagine the Universe without light, but not without harmony."

"Oh, if only this belief in the Inevitable in life could be definitely fixed in our mind, what rest and what peace it would give us!" said Helen, with her pathetic look.

And during the month which followed—a month which, perhaps, was the most excruciating in her existence—she clung desperately to the idea that she was living out her destiny.

On hearing that Dora's wedding was to take place in Paris, her first impulse had been to escape from there; but, oddly enough, she happened to remember the old saying that in order to get the fire out of a burn, one must hold the wound to the living coals, and she made up her mind to try the experiment. It was quite certain that she would suffer terribly by being present at this odious union, but surely it would cure her in the most radical manner. It was impossible that she could continue to love Dora's husband. That would be too insane, too ridiculous! We are never so cleverly deceived as by ourselves; and it was not only the hope of getting cured which kept her in Paris, but the secret, unavowed desire to see Lelo again.

The magnetic waves of love cause a different impression in every human brain, hence the infinite variety of sentiments and sensations it produces.

Helen's love for Sant' Anna was that of an

intellectual and not of an imaginative woman. Thanks to an imagination which self-respect had kept pure, and thanks also to her American temperament, there was little of anything materialistic in its composition. Although it did not manifest itself by wild passion and mad jealousy, it was none the less painful. Strangely enough, it had aroused within her a desire for self-sacrifice. Angry with herself for her weakness, she had attributed this love in her own mind to the Latin blood she had inherited from an ancestor of hers on the maternal side, and she was not far wrong. It was no doubt to this that she owed that sentiment of beauty and harmony which had given Lelo the advantage over her. Hypnotised by the gifts which he possessed, she considered him as a superior being whose faculties had not been developed by the necessary culture. She fancied, without owning it to herself, that she could have led him to higher aims than those he was now pursuing, and all her soul went out towards him as though she had in reality been created to complete him.

Her love was not without alloy. Absolutely pure love does not exist. It is the alloy which often makes the force of human sentiments, just as it does that of certain metals. Helen envied Dora the triumph of bearing the name of Sant' Anna, and the title of Countess; she envied her, too, the privilege of continuing an ancient race, and this envy, also, was an element of suffering.

Now that she was conscious of her love for Lelo, his presence disturbed her peace of mind more than ever. Whenever she saw him, for the first few minutes her voice was tremulous and her nervousness visible. He noticed this, and watched her all the time mercilessly. He delighted in gazing at her in such a way as to cause her heart to beat violently; he used and abused the magnetic power he had over her most pitilessly. His eyes would light up with a hypocritical expression of tenderness, and his lips quiver with the joy of his masculine triumph. Helen, who felt all this instinctively, was never long—her strong will coming to her aid—in recovering her self-possession, and she would then face him with an audacity which excited his admiration, and made him long to outrage her with a kiss.

To the intense satisfaction of Mrs. Ronald, Dora and her mother had not been able to have one of the large suites of rooms at the Hôtel Castiglione, and had been obliged to go to the Continental. Unconscious of the torture she was inflicting, Miss Carroll came every day to tell her aunt all she was doing. She dragged her about to the dressmakers and jewellers, repeated her *fiancé's* tender speeches, and told her of all their fine projects for the future. When Helen was alone again she felt bruised all over, as though she had been beaten. She bore Dora no malice, but her presence and that of Madame

Verga caused her the disagreeable sensation which the sight of an instrument does that has wounded us. Nothing gave Mrs. Ronald such relief as her daily conversations with M. de Rovel. There is in Catholicism an occult power which acts on the soul as love acts on the heart, and from which it is difficult to escape. The convincing and persuasive words of the priest very soon aroused in Mrs. Ronald that vague desire for conversion born of a tormented mind, and one day she asked her husband if he had any objection to her becoming a Catholic. Mr. Ronald, somewhat startled, looked at his wife in surprise.

"Any objection! No, none at all! But what a queer idea! Religions are merely so many spiritual forces. Does not your own suffice?"

"No," answered Helen, turning her head away.

"Then, my dear, turn Catholic if that will please you," he said, smiling as at some childish caprice.

M. de Limeray's society was also an invaluable diversion for Helen. After the first feeling of satisfaction he had had on seeing her vanquished by the love she had set at defiance, the Count, who knew that at bottom she was integrity itself, felt a friendly sort of pity for her. In spite of this, the artist within him revelled in seeing her brought to perfection so marvellously. Her beauty was wonderfully mellowed, and her present state of mind had given an entirely new

expression to her face. She had been one of those women with bright, frank-looking eyes, but now, without being aware of it, from an instinctive desire to keep her secret and to conceal the emotion she felt, she often lowered her eyelids with their long lashes. This movement, veiling as it did the large brown pupils of her eyes, was so charming that M. de Limeray took a cruel delight in causing her to repeat it, by fixing his gaze on her, or by making some intentionally trying remark.

By way of diverting her thoughts, he had offered to show her that part of the city now known as Old Paris, and to which he was such an excellent guide. He took her to see the old historic houses of the Ile-Saint Louis and of the Marais, and told her all about them, glad to be able in this way to make her forget her troubles for a time. Although M. de Limeray's education was rather superficial, he had read a great deal and had a good memory. He felt the beauty of music and pictures, and he talked of love in a delightful way, like a man who had loved often rather than deeply, and who was devoted and grateful to all women. French conversation led by a true gentleman is exquisite, like the French *cuisine* served up on Sèvres china. Eloquent and witty words are not enough to create what is known as *causerie*; it is necessary to exteriorise one's self, as it were, to enter into magnetic communication with one's

listener. The Saxon, either English or American, has too much reserve or egoism for this. He talks, but he cannot converse.

Helen was never tired of listening to M. de Limeray. His conversation, through which ran a current of sympathy and sentiment, was a new pleasure to her. He would have been delighted to have been made her confidant, and a Frenchwoman would not perhaps have resisted the temptation of confessing herself to this chivalrous and tender-hearted old patrician. Mrs. Ronald had too much strength of character to allow herself to open her heart to a stranger. Out of loyalty to her husband and respect for him, she would never have done this, and she felt that only to a priest could she ever tell her secret.

In spite of all the efforts of the engaged couple to hurry through the preparations for their wedding, it could not be arranged as early as they wished, and was finally fixed for the 11th of July.

Either for some unavowed reason, or because his business really required his presence in America, Mr. Beauchamp would not stay for it; he declared that he was obliged to go back, and resisted all Dora's entreaties. Aunt Sophie, who had had enough of Europe, elected to accompany him, and the two left Paris the last week of June.

Charley had told his sister that she would receive, as a present from him, a picture by

Willie Grey, his very best, and quite a masterpiece; but he refused to tell her the subject of it. A week after his departure it was brought to Mrs. Ronald, in a wooden case which was not nailed up, and which she immediately opened with eager curiosity. She was quite alone, fortunately, for on seeing it she turned pale with surprise and emotion. Her brother had guessed her secret, then! The picture represented "Titania's Folly!" that queen of the fairies who, under the influence of a love-philter, becomes desperately enamoured of a monster—a human being with the head of an ass. The well-known episode from the *Midsummer Night's Dream* was treated in a new and original manner. In a sheltered part of the forest, to which the first glimmerings of dawn lent a mysterious light, Titania, a beautiful woman, with long fair hair, clad in a white dress edged with gold, was reclining on a mossy bank. Just above her could be seen the head of an ass, whose body was scarcely visible at all through the thicket. Around his neck she had thrown a garland of flowers, which she had probably been wearing herself, and her slender fingers held the two ends. The creature was gazing at her with a surprised and stupid expression on his face. Her eyes were full of mute adoration, her parted lips had an ecstatic smile on them, and her whole face was lighted up with all the rays of the transfiguration. To the right and left could be dis-

tinguished, between the foliage of the trees, human faces, clearly drawn and cleverly softened down. They were contemplating the delirium of the poor, deluded woman with expressions of disdain, mockery, and pity. This picture was the work of an artist and a poet—a marvel of colouring and sentiment. Mrs. Ronald looked at it for a long time, until her eyes grew misty and filled with tears, and then, while putting the lid back on the wooden box, she murmured: “Helen’s folly! Helen’s folly!”

CHAPTER XXVI

THE THRESHOLD OF A NEW LIFE

THE civil marriage of Miss Carroll and the Count Sant' Anna took place on the 10th of July. On leaving the Italian Consulate, Lelo put his bride into the carriage with her mother and Mr. and Mrs. Ronald. He then kissed her hand, and addressed her by her new title, according to the Italian custom.

"Good-bye, Countess," he said, smiling in spite of his agitation.

Dora blushed with pleasure and surprise.

"You don't mean to say that I am really married!" she exclaimed, with an expression of dismay that was most comical.

"You really are, though, and if I liked, I could take you home with me to the Grand Hotel. The law authorises me to do so."

"Married—well, I never! Why, I did not even listen to what they read to us. What have I promised you?"

"Blind obedience and absolute submission."

"But that is appalling!"

"Do not be afraid; I will undertake to make

the obedience and submission very sweet to you," said the Count audaciously.

As the landau started he caught a glimpse of Helen's face, which was pale and drawn, but on which could be read an expression of haughty defiance. Their eyes met like two swords, and a feeling of satisfied vengeance brought back to Lelo's lips that cruel smile of the Sant' Annas, which one of the greatest Italian painters has depicted on canvas.

The religious marriage was celebrated the following day at the Nunciature by Monsignor Clari, and only the Marquis and the Marquise d'Anguillon, the Kéradiens, the Vergas, the Viscount de Nozay, the Count de Limeray, and a few Romans were present. In the chapel, all decorated with flowers, the ceremony was very impressive. Dora, who was most exquisitely dressed, looked very charming, and never had her face worn so serious and elevated an expression. The wedding luncheon took place at the Hôtel Continental, and during the repast a telegram brought the newly-married couple the benediction of Leo XIII., obtained undoubtedly by Cardinal Salvoni.

With the burden is always given the strength to bear it. Helen felt all the time, as is usually the case on life's great and eventful days, as though she were in a dream, as though everything were unreal. At the reception which followed the luncheon, she acted her part as a

relative most brilliantly. She chatted gaily with one and another, and if her cheeks had an unnatural hectic flush, and her voice faltered now and then, or her laugh sounded forced and nervous, M. de Limeray was the only one to notice it. The bride and bridegroom, who were to spend the first days of their honeymoon at Fontainebleau, went away early in the afternoon. Mrs. Ronald kissed Dora, shook hands with the Count Sant' Anna, and when this little farewell ceremony was accomplished, turned to M. de Limeray, who was watching her admiringly.

"Do you believe," she asked him abruptly, "that love is one of the great fluids of Nature, one of the agents of our destiny?"

The Count, startled by this extraordinary question, looked at Mrs. Ronald anxiously, as though he feared she were losing her reason. The expression of her face reassured him, however.

"Love a fluid!" he repeated, in bewilderment. "I do not know; I never studied it from a scientific point of view," he added, with a smile. "It may be, though——"

"It is so," said Helen, in a positive tone. "When my husband first stated this theory, I jeered at him and his science. Now I am quite sure that he is in the right."

"What makes you think so?"

"Dora's marriage."

Then, as though fearing to yield to the need

she felt of opening her heart to some one, full as it was to overflowing with regret, grief, and anger, she held her hand out brusquely to the Count. The old nobleman bowed over it, and kissed it in a more lingering way than usual.

"I deliver the idea and the fact over to your philosophical meditation," said Mrs. Ronald, with an attempt at a smile. "*Au revoir!*"

"These American women are astonishing—perfectly astonishing!" murmured M. de Lime-ray, as he moved away.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE REFUGE OF THE CHURCH

DURING the whole month which had preceded Miss Carroll's wedding, Mrs. Ronald had courageously gone on with her religious instruction. Nearly every day, and often in the intervals between trying-on at the dressmaker's, she went to M. de Rovel. She had no idea how strange she looked in that austere study, furnished in dark green, and filled with books, and with the large ivory Christ looking down from the crucifix. The sight of this beautiful woman, with her modern elegance, her well-made dress moulded, as it were, on to her figure, seated there in a high-backed chair, facing the old priest who was teaching her the catechism, would have delighted an artist or a poet.

M. de Rovel was a theologian of the first order. He would willingly have laid the axe to the root of all the petty superstitions and ridiculous beliefs which, like a weedy undergrowth, choke the great tree of Catholicism and destroy its beautiful form. He pushed them deliberately aside for Mrs. Ronald, and did his utmost to make

the logic and unity of the dogma stand out in relief—that logic and unity which are so well calculated to strike and attract the Saxon mind. The Abbé, who had instructed Mme. de Kéradieu, and who saw her often, and in home-life, knew something by this time of American women. Helen, who was more modern, and whose intellectual powers were more developed, was an interesting subject of study for him. He was both delighted and alarmed at the simplicity, the independence, and the boldness of this mind of the New World which she personified, and he foresaw that this same mind might be for the Church either a powerful aid or a formidable enemy—*un enfant terrible* difficult to discipline. When Mrs. Ronald informed him that she had decided to become a Catholic, she did so in such terms as gave him a violent mental shock.

“I was afraid,” she said, “that Catholicism was too much behind the times; but I see that it is, on the contrary, too far ahead of us. It contains scientific elements, and a power of ideality which should satisfy the modern mind. I fancy, even, that no one has yet understood it. It is to this fact that the horrors of the Inquisition, and everything with which it is reproached, are due. The tool with which an artist engraves his masterpieces may become a murderous weapon in the hands of a savage.”

On hearing these words, uttered in the simplest manner, M. de Rovel remained mute for

a few seconds. He had often tried, with an anguish born of filial love, to justify the cruelties committed by the Church—that Church whose first principle is, “Thou shalt not kill”—and he had never succeeded. He had secretly felt ashamed of its stakes and of its crimes, and had expiated them in his own way by daily self-sacrifice, and by an increase of charity. And the justification which he had searched for so anxiously, this American, this worldly woman with her clear vision, had just discovered. He looked at her with a grateful expression, and then, in order to drive her into a corner, he asked:

“Did the early Christians not understand Catholicism?”

“Not quite. They are dead; the Barbarians killed, but we must live, work, and help each other. You will see that Catholicism will have its evolution in America.”

The priest could not help smiling.

“America will respect its dogmas, I hope,” he said.

“Certainly; but she will discover, and then teach the spirit of them—the spirit which quickens.”

Helen's life at the convent and her visits to Rome had, although she was unaware of it, familiarised her with many things to which otherwise she would have taken exception. The religious ceremonies, the service, and the liturgy

she liked thoroughly; and when the priest explained the sacraments to her, her whole face lighted up.

"I understand," she said; "they are magnificent symbols."

"Symbols!" protested M. de Rovel. "Why, no, my child, you have not understood at all. They are absolute truths."

Helen gave a little smile, and then, in that decided tone in which the American woman expresses her ideas, and makes a clean sweep of all the sentimentalities of the Old World, she said:

"Absolute truths for the simple-minded—for children; but for you and me—symbols only."

The theologian was about to protest, and to argue, but something in the expression of Helen's face stopped him. That word symbol was, for the priest, a flash of lightning, by the gleam of which he could read what was passing in the mind of his catechumen. The dogma of original sin, the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Redemption were to her merely symbols! It was in this way that she understood them. M. de Rovel was horrified, troubled to the depths of his soul. He spent the whole of one night deliberating with his conscience as to whether he ought to admit Mrs. Ronald into the Church. Convinced of the impossibility of making her accept the dogmas in any other way, he said to himself that in

practising her new religion more complete faith would come to her. Faith alone would be able to make her orthodox, and it had wrought many other miracles. The Abbé had guessed that Helen was suffering from some secret grief; that it was not merely religious emotion she wanted from Catholicism, but moral aid. He felt that he had no right to refuse her this. And then, too, her example might bring about many other conversions.

Mrs. Ronald kept thinking about the confession she would have to make. At times she fancied that she should never be able to bring herself to this, and then there were moments when she felt an absolute need of unburdening her soul. When she entered a church, the sight of the confessional box gave her a thrill. It attracted, while at the same time it terrified and fascinated her. She experienced all the anguish, the regret, and the inward struggles which every convert has known.

Each time she had come to Paris she had never failed to pay a visit to the Convent of the Assumption. The year of study and isolation which she had spent there was now to her a pleasant memory, associated always in her mind with a scent of incense. The Mother Superior, who was still there, received her always with motherly affection. Mère Emilie had, without knowing it, been influenced herself by the charm of the young girl's wholesome and un-

fettered youth. Of all the foreign girls she had had under her charge, this one had inspired her with the most sympathy and esteem. When Helen had told her that she was about to become a Catholic, Mère Emilie's face had beamed with joy, and she had clasped her hands within her own.

"Oh, my dear child, what happiness!" she had exclaimed; and then, with her simple faith, she added: "It is the Holy Virgin, to whom you brought so many flowers, who has obtained this grace for you."

The climax of her joy was when Mrs. Ronald told her that she wished to renounce her former religion in the convent chapel. She wanted to be received into the Catholic Church at the altar which she had so often decorated with flowers, and which was, in a way, familiar to her.

By telling his wife that he did not mind her becoming a Catholic, Mr. Ronald had presumed rather too much on the broadness of his own views. On thinking the matter over, he had realised what a scandal it would cause in New York society, and in his own family, and he had regretted giving his consent to it. Helen had at first told him about the progress she was making in her religious instruction, but on observing that the subject brought an expression of displeasure and coldness to his face, she ceased mentioning it. M. and Mme. de Kéradiou, the Count de Limeray, and the Mother Superior

of the Assumption alone were in her confidence, and she carefully refrained from enlightening her brother, her aunt, and Dora.

As she was to start for Scotland on the 1st of August, and return from there to America, she asked to be received into the Church on the 20th of July. M. de Rovel consented without any difficulty, and on the day previous she had to go through the terrible ordeal of the confessional. This practice, for those who have not been accustomed to it from their childhood, requires nothing short of heroism.

For several minutes Helen remained mute, her heart beating violently and her temples throbbing wildly, without being able to articulate a word. Then the priest came to her aid. He encouraged her in her avowal with penetrating kindness. This spiritual magnetism soon began to act on her soul, until, hypnotised by the mysterious whispering, and this voice coming from the dark confessional box, she no longer saw M. de Rovel, and with her eyes fixed on the white surplice against the grating, she made her confession. Unconsciously, she put into it the new spirit of the times. Without any sense of sin, or of any individual fault, just as she would have told a doctor of her physical ills and infirmities so that he might cure her, she confessed to the priest her imperfections, her frivolousness, her vanity, her paltry envy, and her hopeless love, so that he might help her to

get rid of it all and to rise above it. Rarely, indeed, had M. de Rovel met with a penitent woman so determined to chase from her soul the thief of honour. When he had heard all, he assured his new convert that she would find in Catholicism the strength she needed. He then pronounced over her the words of the absolution, and added gently: "Go in peace."

Helen left the confessional as though in a trance; her knees were trembling, and she was quite dazed. When she came to herself, she felt a delicious sense of relief, an inward satisfaction such as she had never known.

The following day she informed her husband that she was going to Auteuil, not wishing to enter into details until her return. Her emotion did not hinder her from dressing with the greatest care. She had decided on a most suitable toilette for the ceremony of her abjuration. It was a dress of black silk muslin with applications of Chantilly lace, a cape to match, and a black toque trimmed with Parma violets. Nothing could have been more elegant, in spite of the somewhat severe style, or more appropriate for the occasion.

The convent chapel was decorated as though for a grand fête day, and all the *pensionnaires* had been invited. At nine o'clock precisely Mrs. Ronald entered, accompanied by the Marquis and the Marquise de Kéradiou, who were to act as her sponsors. By permission from the Arch-

bishop, the somewhat barbarous ceremony of stopping the neophyte at the church door was dispensed with. She walked on, therefore, to the *prie-dieu* which had been placed for her, whilst a pure, rich voice sang the *Veni Creator*, a hymn of invocation. M. de Rovel, arrayed in rich vestments, then went up to the altar. Helen was first baptised, and then, with her hand on the Testament, she pronounced her abjuration, and repeated the creed of her new faith. The Abbé next said mass and gave her Communion. On receiving the Host, she did not feel anything of that religious fervour which truly pious people experience, but she had the sensation—a sensation characteristic of her mentality—that she was entering into communion with the Divine, with all that there is beautiful and elevated in Nature. For a few moments she soared high above Dora, Lelo, paltry love, and all foolish vanities; and then, coming back again to earth once more, she thought, with surprise mingled with awe, of the strangeness of the ways of Providence, which had willed that this voyage to Europe should terminate for Miss Carroll and herself at the foot of the Catholic altar by a marriage and a conversion. Mass was followed by the *Te Deum*, and Helen went down the aisle again, accompanied by the last notes of the psalm of thanksgiving. Mère Emilie had an exquisite luncheon prepared for M. de Rovel, Mrs. Ronald, and the Kéradiens. She could not,

on account of the convent restrictions, join them at the table, but she was present during the repast, and was most attentive and motherly in her kindness to her *ex-pensionnaire*, at whom she kept looking with admiration, secretly congratulating herself that she had been an instrument in this conversion. On returning to the hotel, Helen went straight to her husband and put her arms round his neck.

"Henry," she said, her eyes shining with the joy she had brought back with her from Auteuil, "I have just been received into the Catholic Church."

Mr. Ronald could not help starting, and his face clouded over with displeasure.

"I shall begin to be of the same opinion as those who say that Europe does American women no good," he said. "Some of them come here and ruin themselves, or make stupid marriages, and others get divorced or change their religion. Upon my word, it seems as though all of you come to Europe to do something foolish," he added, disengaging himself from his wife's embrace.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE FAMILY AND THE NEWCOMER

NEARLY two years passed by, and this time was to Dora Sant' Anna a period of extraordinary activity. First of all there had been her wedding journey, with its two delightful halts at Fontainebleau and St. Moritz; then the arrival in Italy, and the installation in that princely villa at Frascati where Lelo was born. The young wife found a magnificent home awaiting her, with a gallery painted by Jules Romain, rooms paved with rare marble, but an absence of comfort which chilled her. Her artistic sense was not greatly developed, and if it be true that the taste for ancient things is a sign of degeneration, Dora was certainly exempt from this, as she had a decided preference for all that was modern.

The Gobelin tapestries which covered the walls, the cabinets of rare workmanship, and the Italian coffers did not appeal to her in the least. She would have preferred comfortable rooms, and, particularly, well-appointed bathrooms, to all these gilded salons, and even a

brass bedstead of good English make to the handsome couch, draped with antique brocade and surmounted with Cupids, holding in their hands the armorial bearings of the Sant' Annas, which Destiny had reserved for her. She immediately set to work, and with the aid of some furniture which she found in the lumber-room, she soon arranged a suite of rooms which looked more habitable and cosy.

In October her husband took her to his mother's villa at Sora, in Umbria. The thought of this visit had weighed on her like a nightmare. She arrived there, having made up her mind to be very pleasant, and to endeavour to win the affection of her new family. She met with a hostility too strong for her to overcome with her vivaciousness and youth. The Countess Sant' Anna received her politely, but in a frigid way that was most discouraging. The Duchess Avellina, her sister-in-law, seemed inclined to be friendly, but put on a patronising air which got on Dora's nerves. From the very first moment the consciousness that she was disliked exasperated her in a dangerous way, and, out of bravado, she exaggerated her modernism and showed the worst side of her character, with such success that, in private, Lelo's family deplored more and more the choice he had made.

As it was impossible to get rid of the people who had taken the suite of rooms on the first

floor of the Sant' Anna Palace, the young couple had rented the Fardelli Palace, Via Bocca di Leone, an abode more suitable for a banker than a prince, but admirably furnished, and with a magnificent conservatory, quite unique of its kind, and the envy of all hostesses.

The Marquise Verga, in spite of her frivolous manner, was well up in worldly matters. She thoroughly understood Roman society, and gave her compatriot valuable advice, which enabled the young wife to launch her bark skilfully.

Dora was not long in gathering round her a pleasant circle of friends.

An Italian rarely becomes a constant visitor at a house unless he likes the hostess, and finds her pleasant and not exacting. Dora had these qualities, and, in addition, was amusing, original, had wonderful eyes, and dressed to perfection.

All Lelo's friends were enthusiastic in their praises of her, but her success was not so great with the women. They criticised in the most merciless way her abrupt manners, her rather loud voice, and her unconventionality. She, on her side, did not care for the Italian women. She did not understand them at all. Their innate grace and their subtle coquetry made her vaguely uneasy. She kept saying to herself that she was their superior in education and knowledge of life; and yet, in spite of this, she felt that they possessed an occult power which she

could not define, but which exasperated her secretly, and which she knew was dangerous.

She was obliged to exchange visits with her sister-in-law, at whose house she came into contact with people of the Black party. They treated her with great courtesy and kindness, and, indeed, made the most flattering overtures to her, but she guessed the end they had in view, and consequently stood on the defensive.

Although Dora endeavoured to appear quite at her ease in these Roman surroundings, she had a kind of stifled feeling, a longing for more freedom, and "to be able to stretch herself," as she quaintly put it. She thought herself very fortunate in having her mother near her.

Mrs. Carroll had not returned to America, but had taken a suite of rooms at the Hôtel Quirinal. Dora went to see her every day, and this visit was the object of her morning walk. In the afternoon, too, she would often drop in at her mother's daily receptions, and find herself among a crowd of American spinsters and elderly ladies whom she would formerly have avoided, but who now seemed quite a relief to her.

Mrs. Carroll was on the best of terms with her son-in-law. He was always most attentive, and talked to her in a charming way; and, as though out of gratitude, her greatest delight was to overwhelm the young couple with presents.

The intercourse between Dora and the Countess Sant' Anna was far from being as cordial

as this. Their mutual hostility manifested itself on all occasions, and Lelo's family was, as a matter of fact, the only dark cloud on the young wife's horizon. She, nevertheless, succeeded, as she had intended, in making a conquest of the Cardinal.

The combinations of human life are very much like those of a certain game of cards—one frequently holds in one's hand for a long time the decisive ones.

Dora's father, who had been a great billiard player, had taught her the game as soon as her little fingers could manage the cue. She was soon a capital player, and this accomplishment was destined to help her considerably in winning the good graces of her future uncle.

His eminence, Cardinal Salvoni, was passionately fond of billiards, and was both surprised and delighted to find in the young American an adversary worthy of him. Her straight eye and her free, bold play gave him an excellent idea of her character. During the many games they had together he learnt to know and understand her better. It was the first time he had come into contact with the American intellect—that brilliant intellect which is as clear as electric light, and, like it, without warmth. It was quite a revelation to him, and he studied it with all the more interest from the fact that it was beginning to manifest itself in a most alarming manner in religious questions, and more than

once his lowered eyelids served to hide the astonishment and the uneasiness it caused him.

In spite of his cold and haughty mien, the Cardinal was extremely sensitive to the sufferings of humanity. Don Agostino, the minister of his good works, was a simple country priest, with the heart of a St. Vincent de Paul. He lived in a modest room of the Salvoni Palace, spent his life in taking help and consolation to the needy, and was received by the prelate at all hours.

Lelo had told his wife all this.

One evening, after a very brilliant game, which the Cardinal had won, Dora happened to be alone with him for a few moments. She began to roll the balls along the billiard-table nervously, and then at last, with a slight flush on her cheeks and an embarrassed look, she said:

"I want to ask you something."

"Ask me, my child, by all means," answered his Eminence, who was in a very good humour after his victory.

"Well, it's just this; I am not accustomed to keeping all the good things Providence has given me to myself. As I live here, the poor of Rome must have a share in them. I want you to tell me of some families, or some people, that I could help out of their poverty, and put into a position to earn their living. I will do all that is necessary with pleasure, on one condition, and that is—they must do for others

what I do for them. There must be no charity, but just mutual aid. That is my system."

This time the Cardinal opened his eyes wide, showing the pleasure which this offer caused him.

"Very well; I will send Don Agostino to you, and you shall explain your system to him," he said, smiling. "You will have to look after him, for he is most deplorably weak when it is a question of his poor people"; and then, laying his hand affectionately on his niece's shoulder, he added: "*Dio vi benedica, figlia mia!* [God bless you, my daughter!] I am glad to see that on such questions as these we shall always agree."

And Dora had not failed to explain to Don Agostino her ideas concerning benevolence. They caused him profound astonishment at first, but in the end he owned that there was some good in them, and he threw himself heart and soul into the system of the young American. He was charmed to see the interest she took in her protégés; he forgave her for being a heretic, sang her praises to every one, and prayed for her with a fervour that was most touching.

Ten months after her marriage, the young Countess presented her husband with a son, a perfect marvel of strength and beauty. She was very delighted herself, for she had had time to find out how strong the sentiment of race and paternity is with Italians. The birth of the

child did not mend matters in any way between herself and her mother-in-law. Feeling herself stronger by virtue of her maternity, Dora was still more wayward and unyielding. Every morning the nurse took the little Guido to the Sant' Anna Palace, and in the afternoon the Dowager Countess arranged to go and see him again at the Pincio. The English way of rearing the child filled her with dismay. His head bare, his limbs free, plenty of fresh air in all sorts of weather, and this in Rome, above all places! It was simply madness! At his mother's entreaty, Lelo had endeavoured to remonstrate, but the young wife had declared categorically that she intended to bring her son up in the American way, so that he should have muscles and a constitution which would fit him for an active life. The perpetual fear lest the baby should be a victim to these innovations kept the grandmother in a chronic state of exasperation.

On the whole, Dora had been very happy and contented ever since her marriage. One evening, at the beginning of April, the electric light was tried for the first time at her Thursday reception. She had had it put in at the Fardelli Palace at great expense, and it seemed to give new life to the beautiful Italian rooms, with their painted ceilings and wonderful gilded decorations. The flowers and plants, the arrangement of the furniture, the conservatory artistically lighted up, the open doors of the

billiard-room, the smoke from the cigars and from a few feminine cigarettes, made up a charming picture, pleasing to the eye, and very modern. Every one was chatting, discussing, or flirting. There were Italian women of rank, their expressive faces varying every minute, wearing with perfect grace royal jewels, and dresses which were of questionable taste. And then there were American women with their cold, serene faces, better dressed, but less elegant. It was a curious contrast of different races and educations, a living illustration of the Old and the New World. Among these feminine surroundings were to be seen some handsome masculine faces, with melancholy eyes and figures, the sculptural lines of which lent something noble and manly-looking to the evening coat.

Dora, as slender as ever, and looking prettier than she had ever done, in her dress of white lace over pink, was walking up and down in the conservatory with the Marquis Verga.

"Do you think," asked the latter, "that your husband will accept this post of master of the ceremonies? I know he has been sounded, for I was talking to him about it this morning, and he said he would think it over."

"A bad sign," said the young wife, shaking her head. "When an Italian says to you, '*Ci pensero*' ['I will think about it'], it is because he has not the courage to utter the refusal he

has in his mind. I do not know whether this is weakness or good-nature."

"Both," answered the Marquis, with a smile.

"Perhaps. No, believe me, Lelo will not accept. He has too many ties on the other side, and his family has an occult influence over him. He will not admit this, but I can feel it. If anything, he has less sympathy with the Whites than when I first knew him. It is rather humiliating for me, but I console myself with the thought that his dear friend, the Princess Marina, did not succeed any better than I have in converting him." Dora gave a little nervous laugh, and then continued: "The fact is, the Italian character is so perplexing that I feel at sea. You are charming, but as slippery as eels. If, for instance, I blame Lelo for anything, and give him a minute to think about it—just one minute—he will prove to me that I am in the wrong myself, and at the time I am silly enough to believe him."

"That's it—that's just it!" said the Marquis Verga, laughing heartily; and then speaking seriously again, he added: "Your husband thinks a great deal of your judgment, though, and he always asks your opinion."

"About all that concerns business matters, or the house, but for everything else, I can get no further with him."

"It is a very fortunate thing that you have a son. It gives you a power which you would

never have obtained during the lifetime of the Countess."

"I know that. You Italians are regular Orientals, and you do not know what women are yet."

"That's possible—very possible. But to come back to the question, you must try to persuade Lelo to go in for this post."

"I will try, but I have no hope whatever of succeeding. He would not like to give his mother another blow—she has not yet recovered from the one he gave her in marrying an American."

"No matter; don't be discouraged. Do you know that the Marquise d'Anguilhon persuaded her husband to offer himself as a candidate for Parliament, and he has been elected."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and if any one appeared to have made up his mind to do nothing, it was certainly Jacques d'Anguilhon."

"It has taken her some time to convert him. Europeans do seem to me to be rooted in their own prejudices and ideas. If one proposes anything to an American, he very soon answers 'Yes' or 'No'; but as for you—why, you have to go down to unheard-of depths before you can come to any decision. I am beginning to get used to it now, but I can tell you it has made me gnash my teeth. You know I have done marvels considering that I have been married

only about twenty months; and then remember the obstacles of all kinds, and the prejudices I have had to contend with! When I think about it, I can't help feeling some admiration for myself. If I had stayed in America I should never have known my own worth."

"I must own that, knowing your character and Lelo's, I should not have thought that your conjugal chariot would have run so smoothly."

"Ah, but it is because I am always oiling the wheels—and with the oil of wisdom, which costs me a great deal!" said the Countess, looking very serious; and then suddenly, as though to change the subject, she added: "By-the-bye, do you know that the Ronalds are in Paris?"

"Really?"

"Henry has been sent there as a delegate to represent the United States at the International Chemistry Congress."

"Will they come to Rome?"

"To Rome! Oh, certainly not! My worthy uncle has not yet forgiven me for my marriage, and we do not write to each other. Helen's letters, even, are not very cordial, but I have kept up my correspondence with her, as I did not want to break off all bonds with my family and my country. It is very odd—I never liked America so much as now that I am away from it."

"When you write to Mrs. Ronald, will you remember me to her?"

"I will, and I am going to write to her this very evening, as I want her to choose me some pretty spring dresses. I promise you, too, that I will besiege my dear husband once again about this post, and if I fail, I will return to the charge when there is another vacancy. Give me time, for you know Lelo is very stubborn."

As Dora spoke, some of the guests rose and came to take leave of her. This was the signal of departure, as it was nearly midnight.

"Wait a minute," said Sant' Anna to one of his friends. "I will come with you as far as the club."

"Are you going out at this hour?" said Dora, not very well pleased.

"Yes, I must have a breath of fresh air. I shall be back in a few minutes."

The necessity of having a breath of fresh air is a favourite pretext with the Italian husband.

After giving orders for the lights to be put out, the Countess went to pay her usual visit to the little Guido. Standing near to his cradle, with a gentle expression which was very rare on her face, she looked down at the lovely head covered with thick curls of golden-brown hair. She watched the child for a few minutes as he slept, then, after taking one of his little hands in hers, to try his temperature, went quietly away again.

In spite of her husband's repeated injunctions,

she nearly always waited up for him. Her days were so full that she often found no other time for her correspondence. This evening she wanted to write to Mrs. Ronald, and to keep the promise she had made to the Marquis Verga. She herself was most anxious to see Lelo at Court. He had presented her to the King and Queen, and at her repeated entreaties had taken her that winter to two of the Quirinal balls. This had been to a certain extent the origin of the indirect offer he had received, but Dora felt sure that he would not compromise himself any further.

The young wife took off her dress and put on an exquisite peignoir of pale pink, trimmed with lace and ribbons, and seating herself near the fire, just under the light of a tall electric lamp, with her writing-case on her knees, she began her letter. Without stopping once, she filled eight pages with her large handwriting—an extravagant style very characteristic of her originality. When she had finished her letter she glanced at the clock. It was one. Lelo had promised to come back promptly, and, as usual, had not kept his word. As she thought of this, her lips contracted slightly at the corners. When Sant' Anna promised his wife anything he always intended to keep his word, but as he had never been accustomed to struggle against the tide, he invariably let himself be persuaded by a friend, or tempted by a game

of cards, or anything else. He was always ready afterwards with glib excuses, such as an Italian alone could invent, and with pretty speeches which quite disarmed Dora. She always forgave him, and was angry with herself afterwards for her weakness. While she sat there, waiting for him in the silence of the night, she began to think of everything that had happened during these past twenty months. Events and impressions of all kinds crowded to her mind, until, her imagination getting dulled with fatigue, the pictures she had called up grew hazy, and at last, leaning her head against the chair, she fell asleep. It was nearly two o'clock when Sant' Anna returned. Instead of merely accompanying his friend to the club, as he had intended, he had gone in with him. Some one had proposed five games of *écarté*, and he had played ten, and then fifteen, with worse and worse luck every time. Bad luck exasperates the Italian more than the loss of money, so that when Lelo entered the little salon, with his candle in his hand, he looked very bad-tempered. His wife, deep in her first sleep, had not heard him come in, so that he found her in her arm-chair.

"Dora!" he called, and with a start she opened her eyes, and stood up. "Why didn't you go to bed? It's insufferable to find you always curled up like a cat waiting for me."

"You promised to come back at once, and I

had a letter to write; and then, too, I wanted to speak to you about this post."

If Dora's eyes had not been full of sleep, she would have seen, from her husband's expression, that the moment was ill-timed.

"Now I'm in for it!" said the Count, putting his candlestick down on the chimney-piece.

"Have you thought it over, as you promised Verga?"

"Certainly."

"And what do you intend doing?"

"I intend thanking them—and refusing."

"Oh, Lelo! I had so hoped——"

"You were mistaken, then. I do not care to give up my liberty, and to have all sorts of worries and bothers."

"You might as well say that you are afraid of displeasing your family."

"That's just it. You have guessed right."

"My wishes don't count, then, with you? Your mother and your sister are more to you than your wife?"

"You want to get up a scene? Oh, well—good-night!" and Lelo, who had picked up his candlestick, turned round and left the room.

Dora remained there for a few seconds, as though petrified with amazement, then a rush of blood mounted to her cheeks, and her eyes flashed ominously, while the lower part of her face was quite drawn with anger.

"Ah! that's it—is it?" she exclaimed aloud.
"Very well—we'll see!"

CHAPTER XXIX

A PARTISAN OF THE WHITES

AS a rule, people have utterly wrong notions with regard to Italians. The general idea is that they are ardent, passionate, enthusiastic, false, and treacherous. This is quite a mistake. The fire which animates their eyes and gestures, that fire which love, jealousy, or politics will bring to a flame, is only on the surface. They are cold, calculating, and subtle—reasonable beings, but subject to sudden blazes of passion—weak, but capable of fits of energy—egoists, swayed by the impulse of the moment to acts of kindness and self-sacrifice. Their language, which one might think was specially invented for the guitar, is, on the contrary, severe, noble, and difficult to employ. It neither lends itself to conversation nor to romance, but is pre-eminently the language for poetry and philosophy. The Italian race and tongue are classic, carrying out fixed and rigid laws of harmony. They have at last commenced their evolution; and this evolution, helped on by regained liberty, science, and foreign marriages, is preparing a glorious resurrection for them.

The Italians and the French have had the same father, but not the same mother. The Italians are the eldest and the legitimate sons of the Latin race, which gave to them their beautiful form, their noble bearing, and feminine gentleness. Their Italian mother was violated by Barbarians on the battle-fields, and to this violation the French owe their birth. Gauls and Franks have left on them their impress, something of their dreams and of their genius; they gave them their agile bodies, their irregular features, which are always ennobled and idealised by the maternal soul. This semi-fraternity explains the latent antagonism which exists between the two nations, their quarrels, their reconciliations, their fits of hatred and of affection. This hereditary dissimilarity of character is particularly remarkable in their love affairs and marriages. It is an accepted fact among American women that the Italian makes a better husband for a foreigner than the Frenchman, and this is incontestable. His nature, although refined, is much more simple. In conjugal life he needs no art, no illusions, and no ideality. All he asks is that his wife shall be pretty, that she shall bear him children, encroach as little as possible on his liberty, not wear him out with sentimentality, and make allowance for his nerves. As Madame Verga had said, he is unfaithful but constant. He has a decided preference for the Saxon race, and instinctively he

seeks out the English or American woman, while on their side the English and American women are inevitably attracted by the Italian. Accustomed though they are to men of action, they fall in love most easily with this dreamy, idle being. They do not understand him, but they love him all the more blindly on that account. This was the case with Dora. Her husband was a living mystery to her, but he interested, exasperated, and charmed her. Like most of his compatriots, he was quick-tempered, but his anger was quickly over; at times, too, he had fits of sullen silence, which were more trying still, and which were caused by the least thing that went wrong, by too hasty a word from his wife, or even by the presence of some person he disliked, and often only the result of those melancholy turns and strange reveries to which men of very ancient race are subject. Dora declared that at such times he rolled himself up like a hedgehog, and she would say to him in the most serious tone:

"Lelo, please, don't curl up!"

The comparison, which was so exact, and the comical expression in English, had had great success in the Italo-American clan, and was constantly repeated. When the Countess saw that her husband had "curled up," she kept quiet, and at a safe distance; and when he was himself again, he would thank her with a smile, or a few affectionate words, for having let him alone.

Sant' Anna had said one day to his wife, when there had been some difference of opinion between them, that she would never comprehend the Latin soul, and this had stung her to the quick. His words, and the fact itself, had roused her, and she had replied in the most merciless way; but she was perfectly well aware that the Latin soul is made up of sentiments and sensations which escaped her altogether. It had been no vain boast when she had told the Marquis Verga that she "oiled the wheels of the conjugal chariot." She had learnt to weigh her words, and had endeavoured to soften down her brusqueness. Mrs. Carroll, who knew her character, was perfectly astonished. Up to the time of her marriage, Dora had never considered any one but herself. She was no longer self-centred, for Lelo had become her one object in life, and it was his will and pleasure that she now consulted, instead of her own.

Dora saw her husband's faults and weaknesses quite clearly, but she attributed them to his education. She considered his family to blame for his fits of bad temper, his injustice, and his obstinacy, and it was with his family alone that she was angry.

After the scene which we have related, holding her mother-in-law and sister-in-law responsible for it, she went into her own room boiling over with indignation; and as she undressed, her fingers trembling with rage, she kept repeating:

"And so that's it, is it? Very well—very well—we'll see!"

When men have been in the wrong about anything, they can generally forget the matter with the greatest ease. The Italian is cleverer than any other man at making good his offences.

The following morning Lelo, looking perfectly refreshed, and his face beaming with good humour, entered his wife's room and proposed to take her for a drive in the phaeton that afternoon. This was one of her greatest enjoyments, and she had not the courage to punish herself by refusing. She accepted, but in a cool, indifferent manner that was very well feigned. In addition to this, on waking up that morning a brilliant idea had come to her, an idea which had made her utter a cry of delight, and had completely brought her round. The previous winter, before Dora was quite settled in her new abode, she had taken a fancy to give some dinners, suppers, and teas at the hotel, as she would have done in New York. Her husband had consented to this, but not without some difficulty. The innovation had been criticised, and among the Blacks much fun had been made of it. In spite of this, her entertainments had gone off very well, and princes, dukes, owners of palaces and houses with the most sumptuous appointments, had also commenced receiving their guests at the hotel, as they found it simpler and less expensive. Their example was soon fol-

lowed, and at present in Rome many great ladies exhibit their toilettes, their shoulders, and their hereditary jewels in the commonplace surroundings of a restaurant. These little American diners, in place of the splendid, aristocratic repasts of olden times, seem incongruous; and Dora, who introduced them, has, without being aware of it, a great sin on her conscience. This year, as her house was quite finished, she had been able to invite her friends to her home, and Lelo intended that it should always be thus from henceforth.

The second day after the little scene which had mortified her so cruelly, Dora was giving a grand dinner in honour of the new Minister of the United States, who was a particular friend of the family. The invitations had been sent out more than a week before.

The guests were to be the members of the Diplomatic Corps, some Romans, and Lelo's sister and brother-in-law. It should be a white dinner—everything should be white! This was the triumphant idea which had come to her. They had wanted to win her husband back to the Black party, but she would arrange her *coup d'état*, and let every one know definitely to which side she and her husband belonged. It was a capital way of retaliating, and the idea of it made her eyes shine all day with mischief.

She asked Lelo to leave her the entire responsibility of all the orders and arrangements, tell-

ing him that she wanted to try whether she could manage everything creditably herself. He was not to see or know anything. He promised gaily to shut his eyes, and, as it happened, chance favoured Dora's plan. While at luncheon, the Count received a telegram from his head groom at Frascati, telling him that his favourite horse was ill. He started off at once, taking with him the veterinary surgeon.

All the flowers that the Countess had ordered arrived in the afternoon, and, with the doors closed, she spent some hours in decorating the table and the room. She worked away under the impetus of the rancour she felt, revelling in the thought of the dismay of her brother-in-law, her sister-in-law—and her husband. She was not quite so satisfied with herself when she thought about the latter, and she wondered whether he would be very furious. She suddenly realised the boldness of the action she was about to commit, and for a moment she hesitated, feeling remorseful because she knew it would displease the Cardinal. The next minute she shrugged her shoulders.

"It can't be helped," she said to herself; "it is absolutely necessary to give all these Sant' Annas a lesson, and show them of what an American woman is made!"

Lelo returned from Frascati just in time to dress, and at eight o'clock all the guests were assembled in the salon. When the footman had

pronounced the traditional phrase, the Count offered his arm to the wife of the American Ambassador. On reaching the doorway of the dining-room, his eyes fell on the table, magnificently laid. He turned pale with the shock, and had to bite his lip in order to control the sudden anger which was aroused within him. A white dinner! Dora had dared to go as far as that! No one could make any mistake about it. The gilding of the ceiling, the mahogany wainscoting, the red and green livery of the footmen, all served as a background to show up in the most merciless way the symbolical colour. The little candle-shades were white; there were exquisite white roses in the silver *épergne*, and white camelias, carnations, and lilies-of-the-valley scattered about artistically on the fine Flemish table-cloth, in which was woven the crest of the Sant' Annas. On taking her seat opposite her husband, Dora met his flashing eyes fixed on her. She held her own, without any appearance of bravado or any sign of flinching, and only pressed her lips more tightly together in order to strengthen herself inwardly. Turning towards the Duke and the Duchess of Avelina, she saw with intense delight the expression of surprise and discomfiture which was written on their faces. Donna Pia soon recovered, and looking from one end of the table to the other, she remarked, somewhat imprudently:

"This looks like a bridal dinner!"

"Or rather a political dinner," said the Countess; adding, with a smile, as she turned to her compatriot: "White is the right colour, when one is receiving a Minister accredited to the King of Italy."

"Ah, true, I had forgotten!" said the Duchess, with the impertinence which a woman of high degree knows how to carry off. "It is a very pretty idea of yours."

"Yes, is n't it?" agreed Dora, with a most innocent expression. "I'm glad you like it."

The Romans who were present were the only ones to hear the animosity and the anger hidden under the apparently amiable words. There was a moment of constraint caused by the fluids which had materialised the hostility of the two women, but thanks to her easy good-humour, the Countess soon dispersed the cloud, and during the rest of the repast she was careful to avoid anything which might have disturbed afresh the serenity of the atmosphere. The dinner was followed by a reception, at which there was to be music. Directly after the coffee, the Duke and the Duchess Avellina excused themselves on the plea of an engagement; but every one of the guests understood that this manœuvre was nothing more or less than a political protest.

The Marquis Verga was the only one who suspected the exact truth, and curious to know whether he had guessed rightly, he took advan-

tage of a propitious moment for waylaying his friend.

"What a happy inspiration you had in giving this white dinner!" he said.

"You think so!" answered Lelo, gnashing his teeth. "Well, you can congratulate my wife, for the idea was hers. You might have guessed that. It was a surprise she had arranged for me!"

"Oh, that's a good joke—that really is a good one!" exclaimed the Marquis, laughing.

"I think it a very bad joke," answered Sant' Anna, still looking grave. "These American women have got the very devil in them!" he added, with a fresh burst of anger.

"You need n't tell me that, for I know it. In this instance, though, the Countess has really done you a service, in showing the true colour of your opinions. It will silence all those who declare that you are reserving yourself lest your uncle should be elected Pope."

Lelo's face flushed all over.

"*Imbecilli!*" (imbeciles!) he exclaimed, with that expression of stinging contempt which the Italian puts into this word. "They don't know me, then. If my uncle were elected Pope, and were to continue the policy of his predecessors, I should immediately ask for some office at Court in order to show my loyalty to Italy, for I am Italian, and I felt that in every fibre at the defeat of Adona," he added, instinctively lowering his eyes.

"I do not doubt that. Meanwhile, this white dinner in honour of the Minister of the United States will be looked upon as a courageous initiative. Do not attempt to disown it!"

"If I do not, it is out of consideration for myself. Dora deserves a lesson."

During this conversation, the subject of which the young wife had guessed, she had watched, not without anxiety, the face of her lord and master, and she did not feel quite at her ease. A few minutes later the Marquis managed to draw her aside.

"Oh, Countess, Countess!" he said, with a smile; "you go ahead rather too quickly!"

"You disapprove?"

"As a husband—yes. A wife has no right to take upon herself such initiatives. Lelo, from a spirit of contradiction, and to appease his people, will now go a step back."

"No matter, I have had my little satisfaction, and every one will know to-morrow to which side we belong."

"Yes, but do not forget our proverb: '*Chi va piano va sano*' ['Slow and sure']."

During the rest of the evening, Dora tried in vain to catch her husband's eye. In spite of her natural courage, she could not help dreading the moment when she would have to face his reproaches. As the guests began to depart, her alarm increased. When, towards one o'clock in the morning, every one had gone, she gave her

final orders and then went to her husband, who, on this particular evening, had not needed to go out for a breath of air.

On entering the little salon where he was waiting for her, standing up in front of the chimney-piece with "his savage expression on," as she said to herself, she gave a little nervous laugh, and then, going towards him, bent her head and clasped her diamond-covered fingers together above her forehead, as though to protect herself from some projectile.

"Don't slay me!" she said, and she looked so droll that the Count had the greatest difficulty to repress a smile.

"It was wrong of me," added Dora, drawing herself up to her full height.

"Ah, you have the grace to acknowledge that!"

"Yes, because my conscience tells me so—rather late in the day, certainly. I was carried away by the pleasure of avenging myself for your snub the other night, and by my wish to see you Italian."

"Italian!" repeated Lelo, opening his magnificent eyes wide. "What am I then, pray?"

"Roman! Your family is Roman—it has a religion, but not a *patrie*. One's *patrie* is the flag, and not the Church."

Sant' Anna was taken aback.

"Indeed!" he stammered out.

"It is the truth. Your son will be Italian, and you cannot be in an opposite camp."

The Count's eyelids twitched, and he pulled his moustache nervously.

"I do not blame your people——"

"You are very kind."

"I do not blame them," continued Dora calmly, "because they could scarcely think otherwise than as they do, but they are trying to get you back to the Vatican, and that is what makes me mad."

"What makes you mad is not to belong to the Court yourself. Your ambition is not so much to see me master of the ceremonies as to be lady-in-waiting to the Queen. You American women are insatiable. One of these days you will be asking me to take that title of Neapolitan Prince which we have in the family."

"No, no—never! I am not stupid enough to want to change the great historic name of Sant' Anna for that of a man of whom no one in Rome has ever heard. Besides, a princely crown would frighten me."

"That's fortunate! And now we are Whites—Whites!" repeated the Count furiously. "You have proclaimed it, and I am not going to deny it. That must suffice, though; for as long as my mother lives, we shall go no further with our political demonstrations. I do not wish to offend her, nor to grieve her any more. You look upon this deference as contemptible senti-

mentality. Such sentimentality is in my Latin nature and character, and I beg that in future you will respect it. To-morrow the confounded newspapers will have your white dinner for the subject of their society gossip, and some folks will praise me, and the rest will insult me. This is all that you have gained."

"I never thought of that," said Dora, greatly abashed. "I am so sorry!"

"No, you never thought of it. If there are a few women who think, there are precious few who reflect, and certainly you are not one of the latter. You ought to have known that you cannot make so free with things and people in the Old World. Rome, which was not built in a day, cannot be demolished in a day—even by American women."

"After all," said the young wife, rather impatiently, "there is no great harm done. It is always honourable to have the courage of one's opinions."

"When it is necessary, yes; but when it only serves to bring you all kinds of annoyance, why, it is idiotic!" replied Lelo.

The Countess, who was still standing, put her arms round her husband's neck.

"Come, now, Lelo; don't you think you have said enough disagreeable things to me for to-night?" she said, in a droll way. "You must feel quite relieved."

She was in front of her husband, with her

cheeks flushed and her eyes shining between their long lashes. She looked very pretty in her dress of soft white satin, all scented from the flowers she was wearing in her bodice, and Sant' Anna looked away, in order to escape the seduction of her youth and her charm. He tried to disengage himself from her embrace, but she clasped her hands more tightly round his neck, and then, seized with an inspiration extraordinary enough in the former Miss Carroll, she said:

"Let us go and see baby!"

And the Count, suddenly pacified, his face softening as he thought of his son, allowed himself to be led away without any further resistance.

CHAPTER XXX

OLD SCENES AND NEW IDEALS

LOVE had changed the course of Mrs. Ald's life as well as of Dora's, and the twenty months which had glided by had been for her, equally, a period of great activity. Her change of religion had caused a great sensation in New York society. The president of the Colonial Ladies abandoning the fashionable Episcopal Church of America to become a Roman Catholic was an outrageous thing! The Association veiled its face, but it did not withdraw from her its honours.

Her conversion scandalised every one all the more from the fact that, in the United States, Catholicism is generally looked upon as the religion of the Irish and of the poor. Vanity is a formidable obstacle to it. When a few converts of high social rank have made Catholicism fashionable, it will not be long in winning the battle. In the meantime, it seems to be making rather rapid progress, and the question is, will it take root definitely? Religious beliefs are like germs—the ground on which they fall either

nourishes or kills them. If Catholicism should live in the United States, it will have its evolution there; it will develop there in the same way that it developed in Mrs. Ronald's soul. The American brain will be the crucible from which it will come forth, purified from all the dross produced by ignorance and superstition. It will become more vigorous, more wholesome, less sensual, and less mystic. It will accept scientific discoveries as so many revelations, and recognise the psychical and natural forces which produce miracles. It will no longer practise charity which humiliates, but fraternity which ennobles. It will reveal to man his true mission, his rôle of artist and workman in the universal work. It will either become all this, or it will remain the heritage of the Irish, of the poor and the ignorant. As a matter of fact, Catholicism, intangible in its essence, has as many characters as there are peoples and races. In England, it is rigid, simple, and virile; in Spain, sensual, savage, and fanatical; in Italy, feeble and superstitious; in France, sentimental and idealistic. One may say that it has its body in the Saxon race, its soul in the Latin race, and it will probably have its mind in America.

On her return, Helen was interviewed and assailed with questions. She had to hold her own against the most furious attacks. Her friends were astonished that she could have embraced a religion made up of coarse superstition.

She answered, in her most peremptory tone, that they were talking about things they did not understand; that there was a higher and a lower Catholicism, and that the former, the one that she knew, was a religion which was extremely advanced—the religion of the future, in fact. She pointed out triumphantly the logic of it, the series of symbolical dogmas starting with the legend of the Garden of Eden, and then the poetry, the spirituality of its form of worship. She finished up by declaring that she preferred belonging to a Church which had a chief, because a body which had even an imperfect head was better than a body with no head at all. Into her strange apology she put that characteristic ardour which the American woman always employs when she wishes to propagate an idea. She never for a moment imagined that, with her advanced conception of Catholicism, she had rushed into absolute heresy. If the Abbé de Rovel had heard her, he would have been amazed and horrified to see how his teaching had developed in this lucid and modern transatlantic mind.

Miss Beauchamp was deeply grieved at what she termed her niece's folly. She attributed it to her sojourn in the Convent of the Assumption. She did not reproach her with it, and never even made the slightest allusion to the subject, and this very reserve proved how painful it was to her. Helen, having invited herself to luncheon

on a certain Friday, found the menu specially prepared for her fasting-day. She could not help admiring the conscientious scruples which had dictated this.

"You shall have a good mark, Aunt Sophie," she said smiling. "You deserve to become a Catholic."

"Thank you," answered the worthy spinster, drawing herself up to her full height, morally and physically, "the religion of my parents suffices for me. It has served for several generations of honourable men and women."

Although Mrs. Ronald did not find in her new faith the absolute peace for which she had hoped, still it gave her much happiness and an ever-increasing inward satisfaction. Her soul was becoming spiritualised, and had been transformed in a marvellous way, but it was still incapable of soaring aloft in one of those flights which break for ever all terrestrial bonds.

Among the priests of St. Patrick's, her parish, Helen had been fortunate enough to meet with an American of Irish descent, upon whom it seemed that Cardinal Manning's mantle had fallen. Father O'Neill was a man who loved humanity for its own sake. He managed to turn the new convert's heart and mind towards the poor and unfortunate, and under his inspiration Mrs. Ronald put into execution that principle of mutual aid which is the higher force of charity. She gave herself up to saving hu-

man beings, body and soul, and in this work she found an interest and an excitement which grew more and more intense. Instead of the famous league against luxury which she had been tempted to create, she founded a league against vice, dirt, ugliness, and sickness. She enrolled as apostles young girls, young men, and millionaires, asking the latter for money, and the former for their active help. No one had the courage to refuse her anything. Her beauty and her fascination brought her in now not only useless admiration, but magnificent gifts which were used for humanitarian works. In twenty months she had done a great deal of good, and she had acquired such power that some of her best friends accused her of making charity serve as a means of coquetry.

This new life kept her naturally from indulging in dangerous souvenirs, but did not root out of her heart the cruel love she had brought back with her from Europe. That seemed impregnable, for the united forces of religion and charity had been powerless to drive it away. Each letter she received from Rome unsettled her for a week or two. Dora had always been accustomed to tell her everything, and she continued to do so, although she received no encouragement whatever. Lelo's name was on every page, and that name had not lost its occult power over Mrs. Ronald;—Lelo, two syllables, mere black letters on white paper, but at sight

of them her heart beat faster, the colour came into her face, and her lips quivered. Like a warm iron on sympathetic ink, the four letters revived in her mind the features of Count Sant' Anna, the sound of his voice, and carried her back to that beautiful Lucerne and Ouchy dream which had retained all the seduction of the unreal.

She felt that she had not regained her liberty, and she was furious at this thought. She dreaded, and yet longed, for these letters from Rome. She glanced through them first hastily, as though they might burn her, and then she read them again and again. All of them contained some message from Lelo, a few kind, affectionate words, which at times seemed to her ironical and hypocritical, and which gave her a wild desire to avenge herself. When she read between the lines some of Dora's disillusion, she experienced a mean, petty delight, and this, proving as it did her own inferiority, made her feel thoroughly ashamed of herself. At every fresh crisis of this kind, which was like a painful relapse, her life, which was so brilliant and so full, seemed to her dreary and empty. An immense discouragement would take possession of her, and she would keep saying to herself over and over again, in utter weariness of soul: "What is the good of it all? What is the good of it all?"

At such times she was insensible even to the

joy she was giving to others; her thoughts wandered from the suffering poor, and instinctively her eyes would turn to Willie Grey's picture of *Titania's Folly*, which she had hung in her dressing-room. And it was not the dumb face of the ass at which she gazed, but the transfigured countenance of the poor, love-sick woman. She would have liked to love in this way, blindly and fervently.

These fits of weakness were not of long duration with her; they were the outcome of a fleeting instinctive desire, after which she was soon herself again, and would then thank Providence sincerely for not having allowed her to succumb to that horrible temptation at Ouchy.

During these bad times Helen would cling in desperation to her husband, for it was his goodness, his superiority, and his personality which helped her the most efficaciously to drive away the vision of Sant' Anna. She would recall with pride the little scene at Monte Carlo, and the manly way in which Mr. Ronald had punished the insolence of her admirer. She saw him over and over again, with his tall figure and his flashing eyes. Yes, he certainly was a man to be proud of! She liked to remember the feeling of security and of protection she had experienced on taking his arm once more after all those months of separation. The idea that she was no longer the impeccable wife he believed her had humbled her. She was less ex-

acting with him now, less tyrannical, and did not take up so much of his time. When he could come as usual to sit by her dressing-table and talk to her before dinner, her thoughts did not wander off to foolish trifles as they used to, and she would follow him as closely as possible. They started the most interesting discussions together, and she never lost an opportunity of trying to prove to him that her higher Catholicism, the discovery of which she might claim as her own, was in accordance with science. She argued in a triumphant, ingenious way, which amused Mr. Ronald infinitely. She was constantly bringing her husband back to the subject of love, for she delighted in hearing him affirm that it is one of the forces of Nature, and that it acts on human beings as light does. She would then stop in the midst of her toilette, with the comb or the powder-puff in her hand, her beautiful brown eyes fixed on him as she listened in rapt attention while he developed his conception of life, of the universe, of his scientific philosophy, the only one which can ever arrive at the truth of things; and as she listened, the consciousness that she was nothing but a living act of a divine will came to her more clearly, and this consciousness filled her with a sense of peace and tranquillity which nothing else could have given her.

As for Mr. Ronald, he felt for his wife that intense love which one has for those who have

only just escaped being taken away for ever. Without understanding it himself, by a sort of retrospective intuition, probably, he often felt surprised to see her there at his side, and a shudder would pass through him at the thought that she might never have come back home.

He attributed the change in her—a change which delighted him—to her new religion, and, out of gratitude, he would accompany her occasionally to St. Patrick's Cathedral or to St. Leo's Church.

Providence sometimes brings about certain results with the most contrary elements, as though it took an artist's pleasure in creating and then conquering difficulties. It was in this way that everything which had seemed doomed to separate Helen and her husband served to unite them more closely and more indissolubly.

As Dora had told the Marquis Verga, Mr. Ronald had been sent to Paris to represent the United States at the International Chemistry Congress. His wife accompanied him, and they found themselves once more installed at the Hôtel Castiglione.

Climate and the atmosphere may quicken into being the latent germ of some fever, and in the same way the sight of places associated with love or sorrow revives either in the most cruel way.

This was Mrs. Ronald's experience. The first time she found herself again in the Rue de

Rivoli, at the spot where Count Sant' Anna had first crossed her path, a wave of sudden emotion brought the blood to her cheeks, and caused her heart to beat more quickly. By a psychological phenomenon, which was entirely subjective, she suddenly felt the presence of Lelo, and, as though urged on by an irresistible force, she went over the same ground, and ventured as far as the Avenue Gabriel of dangerous memory. At a certain place she had the illusion that the young man was there quite near her. She drew herself up, and pressed her lips together with an instinctive movement of dignity and of revolt against him. As she walked along in the strange atmosphere created by her imagination, she saw herself again just as on that fateful day which was to stamp her existence in an indelible manner. She remembered the hat trimmed with pale pink roses which she was wearing, and the light beige costume. It was lovely weather, and there had been a delicious scent of flowers and trees in the air. She was strolling along with a light heart, free from all care, and with no presentiment.

"No—not any more than that poor Madagascar spider, whose substance and liberty man is now going to appropriate to himself," she said bitterly, drawing her comparison from an article in a magazine she had just read.

That walk, the object of which had seemed to be just a visit to Mrs. Kevins, was in reality

destined to bring about Dora's marriage, Jack Ascott's unhappiness, her terrible trial, and her conversion to Catholicism. Her conversion—the thought of that was like a ray of light in her troubled soul; her face brightened suddenly, and she had a longing to see the Convent of the Assumption again. Hailing a cab which was passing down the Champs Élysées, she drove to Lachaume's, in the Rue Royale, bought some azaleas and an enormous armful of roses, and an hour later arrived at the convent with her magnificent offering of flowers.

The Mother Superior, pleasantly surprised, received her with heart and arms as open as her austerity would allow. After a long talk, Mrs. Ronald asked to be permitted to decorate the chapel as in the old days. Mère Emilie consented, and sent for one of the Sisters to help her.

Helen felt deeply moved on entering this sanctuary in which she had become a Roman Catholic. How changed she was! As she moved silently backwards and forwards round the altar she remembered her Protestant irreverence. That little golden door of the Tabernacle, which she would have opened so boldly then, inspired her with awe, and she would not have dared to touch it now for anything in the world.

As she handled the vases and candlesticks, and touched the altar-cloth, it was to her as though there were a sort of fluid at the tips of her

fingers which put her into communication with the soul of these consecrated things, making their contact seem sacred and penetrating. When her work was finished she knelt down at the foot of the altar, which she had just adorned as though for a festival day.

With the lucidity of her keen intellect, she realised the transformation which had taken place in her; she knew that her inward vision was clearer, that she had more spirituality. She congratulated herself, for, like the majority of her compatriots, it seemed to her that mental progress and the development of one's faculties are the most desirable things of all. With profound conviction, and a confidence that was most touching, she murmured:

"It will all come right in the end!"

This declaration of faith, the highest of which a man's mind is capable, and which comes instinctively to the lips of the American, formulated itself anew and still more clearly in Mrs. Ronald's mind.

"Yes, it will all come right in the end!" she repeated, as she rose from her knees.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE FATE OF A PORTRAIT

M. DE LIMERAY was delighted at Mrs. Ronald's return to Paris. During her absence they had corresponded with each other regularly, and this had given to their friendship a charming character of intimacy. The Count endeavoured at once to find out how matters stood with regard to Helen's affections. He had no faith in the duration of an unhappy love with a pretty woman any more than in the duration of sorrow with a woman who is very fond of dress. His theory was that admiration and finery soon get the better of grief and love troubles. When, however, he mentioned the Count and the Countess Sant' Anna for the first time, the way in which Helen avoided his gaze, and the hard tone her voice took, proved to him that she had not recovered her superb indifference of old. Although this upset his own little theories, he was glad to see that she was capable of deep feeling. He had a hundred opportunities of convincing himself that she had not yet succeeded in forgetting. It really seemed

as though living in Europe were baneful to Mrs. Ronald. It may have been the feeling that the distance between herself and Lelo was less, or perhaps it was the effect of the letters with which Dora tormented her; but whatever she did and whatever she said, her thoughts always reverted instinctively to Rome.

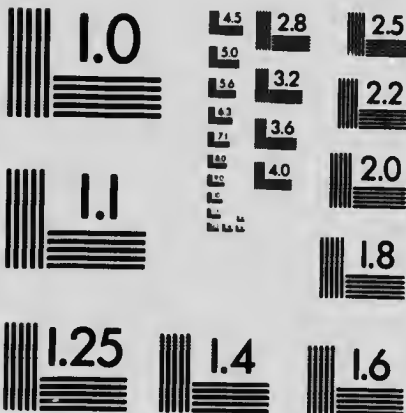
One evening, on returning from the theatre, she found a large yellow envelope, bearing the Italian postmark, on her dressing-table. She took it up, felt it, and, guessing what it contained, tore it open with trembling fingers. Yes, it was just what she thought—the photographs of the Count and of the Countess Sant' Anna. She threw them down again quickly, and they fell on her brushes. The harm was done, though, for she had seen Lelo's face, and it had made her heart stand still, and sent a thrill through her. She at once dismissed her maid, whose presence made her feel ill at ease, and no sooner was she alone than she took up Dora's photograph again and gazed at it with feverish curiosity. The young wife, in her white evening dress, looked quite pretty. Her features were not as sharp as formerly, and her expression was softer and more gentle.

"She is quite capable of having grown pretty," said Mrs. Ronald aloud. "She is capable of *anything!*" she added, with a burst of anger that was almost comical, as she threw the photograph away from her.



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Helen paced up and down her room for some time. She then began to undress, and coming back to her mirror, sat down in front of it, and after brushing her hair, coiled it up coquettishly on the top of her head, resisting all the time her longing to glance again at the other photograph, which was there before her. Finally, not being able to hold out any longer, she seized it brusquely, and with her lips pressed tightly together, and a hard expression in her eyes, she gazed at it for an instant.

"Flattered—touched up!" she said, with an inflection of disdain.

Photography is not artistic, but it is scientifically brutal and true. In a portrait the artist always puts something of himself, and his vision is not absolutely exact. Light, on the other hand, is implacable. It seizes hold of the features and even of the soul of the individual. It can reveal the very thoughts, the criminal mind, the secret malady. We have not yet learnt to read its revelations. On this piece of cardboard which Helen was holding, Sant' Anna's handsome Italian face stood out boldly. It was most lifelike. He was looking at her just as he had often looked at her at Lucerne and at Ouchy, and under the magnetism of his fond gaze her face softened, and without being aware of it herself, a tender look came to her eyes such as had never been there before.

By one of those ironies of fate, which seem to

be ordained, and which give to our destinies the character of a comedy, it happened that that very morning Mr. Ronald had bought a magnifying-glass, declaring that there were better ones to be had in Paris than anywhere else. He had brought it in to show his wife, and had left it on her dressing-table. It was still there, and Helen was inspired with the strange idea of holding it over Lelo's photograph. Her heart immediately began to beat violently. She could see those wonderfully set eyes quite near to her, and then the clearly cut nose, and the lips of classic beauty. In the pupils of the eyes there was that warm light which is the very reflection of the Latin soul, while on the sensual mouth hovered a tender smile. The whole face seemed so alive that it startled her, and the magnifying-glass fell from her hands. She rose from her seat, pale with emotion, trembling from head to foot, and, acting under the impulse of remorse and intense suffering, she flung the portrait into the grate, where a wood fire was crackling. It fell with the face looking towards her, and the fire caught it slowly, as though regretfully. Under the combined action of the acids and the heat, the face on the paper seemed to become animated, and from the midst of the bluish flames which surrounded and were warping it, its eyes gazed at her and its mouth smiled. Helen, who had never before seen this effect, stood still, petrified with horror. With the

pupils of her eyes dilated with anguish, she watched the progress of her *auto-da-fé*. When the likeness of Sant' Anna was nothing but a light-grey cinder, she wiped her face, which was damp with perspiration, as though she had just had a nightmare.

"It is awful—perfectly awful!" she said aloud; and then to herself she added: "Perhaps there are some particles of human life in a photograph."

This little incident made a deeper impression on Helen than anything had done for the last twenty months.

She was suddenly seized once more with that longing for something indefinable which makes all pleasures, affections, and life itself tasteless, and which is harder to bear than a definite grief. Happiness and the cure for our ills frequently come to us in just as unexpected a way as misfortune and sickness. One morning, while reading her *New York Herald*, Helen happened to glance at the announcement of a lecture to be given that very afternoon at the Bodinière by the Brahmin Cetteradji, on the influence of the Great Teachers who have passed away. The Hindoo was to be introduced by Jules Bois, the French archpriest of occultism, whose name is well known in the United States. The curiosity of the American woman may be considered a veritable force; her mind, eager for light and knowledge, is ever in search of something new.

Nowhere in the world, perhaps, is so much attention given to psychical science as in America. Mrs. Ronald was intensely interested in all connected with it. In New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, Buddhism is in great favour, and Cakya-Mouni has plenty of worshippers. Buddha, the symbol of peace and rest, is to be seen, by a strange contrast, in the houses of women who are the most active and the most restless in the universe. The announcement of a lecture by a Brahmin tempted Helen. She immediately sent a note inviting one of her friends to accompany her. The invitation was accepted, and the two American ladies started for the Bodinière, and were fortunate enough to get two tickets which had just been returned to the office. The little theatre was filled with a public quite different from the ordinary audience. They were not brilliant-looking people who were assembled there, nor yet particularly elegant, but most interesting. There were grave-looking men with long pointed heads, priests, Protestant clergymen, badly dressed women of over thirty, with hyper-sensitive faces and eyes restless and eager. In the midst of these imaginative, excitable people stood out, as in relief, the cold, serene-looking faces of some half-dozen pretty and well-dressed American women.

And on this little stage, where such various spectacles succeed each other, appeared the young and majestic-looking Brahmin priest, ac-

accompanied by Jules Bois and an interpreter. Cetteradji was wearing a robe of soft white silk, with a stole crossing it, and tied on the left side, the ends of which he was holding in his brown fingers. The graceful Indian turban which was twisted round his head was placed like a mitre on his rather long black hair. His complexion had the warm colouring of the extreme Orient. His face, with its big cheek bones and heavy features, would have looked common had it not been transfigured by eyes full of mystic fire and of the inner life. His whole person gave an impression of force, purity, and gentleness. His luminous eyes wandered for a moment over the audience, as though he wished to take possession of his hearers. The spectators, and particularly the feminine element, felt a sort of thrill pass through them as they met his gaze. The psychological communication thus established, Cetteradji, in English which the Hindoo accent rendered singularly harmonious, began to speak of the Teachers of old, of Plato, Aristotle, Buddha, and of Christ. He maintained that they had not left our planet, that they were around us in the ether in which spirits live, the great invisible ones, and that they exercised a never-ceasing influence over our progress, and even over our civilisation. He went on to say that he had had tangible proofs of their presence, and that there existed between them and us a means of communication. At these words

there was an eager look in all the eyes which were fastened on him. So intense was the silence that it could be felt. Every one hoped to hear the magic words which would open the gates of the Hereafter. Alas, the Brahmin avoided coming to the point, as so many others had done before him! He declared that, in order to enter into communication with the Great Teachers, it was necessary to have attained, by successive incarnations, a high degree of spirituality. At this that pathetic sigh could be heard which comes from the heart of humanity after each of its vain expectations. In order to soften down the disappointment he had just caused, Cetteradji added that by living very pure lives, and having high aspirations, it was possible to attract the great spirits, so that they would draw near to us.

Although the translation into French of each of the English phrases had rather spoilt the lecture for Mrs. Ronald, she was very much affected by that magnetism of the true apostle which the Brahmin possessed. He had not told her anything new, but, either by means of her own imagination or some psychical effect, his words had done her good. When Cetteradji had finished his discourse, he announced that he was prepared to receive at 4 Rue Boccador any persons who wished to question him.

Jules Bois then rose, and said a few words in that unctuous voice which he has adopted. He

maintained that we need the psychical forces in order to fight against the evil with which we are beset, and against the darkness of materialism. He went on to say that he hoped a large number of the persons present would go to the Brahmin, and ask him to help them with his prayers and his superior will-power, so that they might receive from him the impetus they needed in order to walk without faltering towards the light.

This was very prettily uttered in a minor key, and in a fairly mystic way, but after the heartfelt words of the Hindoo priest, the speech of Jules Bois fell flat. Added to this, the French apostle of occultism, with his inartistic-looking European clothes, made a sorry figure by the side of the Brahmin, in his flowing white silk robe.

Mrs. Ronald at once realised the cause of this inferiority.

"Decidedly," she said to her friend, "these things cannot be talked about by men with fashionably cut beards and frock coats. A clean-shaven face is necessary and flowing garments—or wings even!"

"Yes, as I always maintain," observed Mrs. Carrington, who worshipped dress, "the costume is half the individual."

"The whole of the individual, sometimes," declared Helen, in her pretty, philosophical tone.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BRAHMIN OF RUE BOCCADOR

RUE BOCCADOR! The whole of that evening the address which the Brahmin had given haunted Helen's brain, until at last a strange idea came to her.

Cetteradji had undoubtedly superior psychical power. She had felt it, for while listening to him she had experienced something like that spiritual fervour which the words of Christ had produced in the hearts of His disciples. Why should she not go to him as Jules Bois had suggested? By means of his will-power he would, perhaps, be able to blot out from her memory Sant' Anna's face, that face so deeply graven on her mind, and which, in spite of all she could do, would keep reappearing triumphantly.

An American woman never hesitates long, and Mrs. Ronald decided to try this experiment. The following day, somewhat feverish with the agitation caused by her strange resolution, she went to the Rue Boccador. Wishing to be the first to arrive, she had gone very early, but two

men were there before her. One was a clergyman and the other a middle-aged man of the world. The latter looked at Helen in an inquisitive way which made her cheeks flush. In order to start a conversation, he asked her if she would prefer taking his turn. She accepted, but her manner was so distant that he could not get any further. While waiting, she tried to think how she was going to broach the subject on her mind. What was she to say? She had no idea at all. Good heavens—it would be much worse than the confessional! What a silly, ridiculous idea to have come! She was tempted to rush away again, and only the presence of the two men kept her from doing so.

Precisely at two o'clock the door to the right was opened by a Hindoo, dressed in a robe, and with a dark-coloured turban. Helen rose, feeling more dead than alive. With a gesture, the servant invited her to follow him. He took her through a second room, and showed her into a large salon just as Cetteradji entered by another door. After bowing low to his master, the Hindoo moved away, with the silent tread peculiar to Orientals. The Brahmin acknowledged his visitor's presence by a stiff inclination of the head. He motioned her to a seat, then took his place in a high-backed arm-chair by a table covered with papers, among which could be seen some yellow rolls of parchment.

A king would not have made as much impres-

sion on Helen as the white hieratic figure of the Hindoo priest. He seemed to her more imposing even than he had done on the Bodinière stage, and so much above other men and above all human passions that, in his presence, her unhappy love appeared to her all at once ridiculous and puerile. She would never dare to speak to him about it, and yet she must say something. Her worldly experience came to her aid.

"I was at your lecture yesterday," she began, her voice faltering from the beating of her heart, "and it interested me immensely. I am American, and in New York we make a great study of psychical phenomena. Unfortunately, they lend themselves to fraud, and we have frequently been deceived by clever impostors. I should like to know whether magnetism, suggestion, and hypnotism are natural or supernatural forces?"

Helen had, after the manner of women, gone a long way round to come to the point.

"They are natural forces," answered the Brahmin, without any hesitation, "and the noblest with which man is endowed, but the development of them is not easy. In order to become a true magnetiser, it is necessary to live a very pure life, to have perfect health, and to keep the will in constant training. All priests, without knowing it, have more or less the power of suggestion, and this is, in fact, the secret of their influence.

The saints possessed it in a very high degree, and it was by means of this force that they healed the sick in body and mind, and worked miracles."

"Yes, yes, it must be as you say!" interrupted Mrs. Ronald eagerly. "Yesterday, while listening to you, I felt as though I were being lifted up morally, and I was seized with a desire to do some good in the world."

The priest's eyes beamed with delight.

"I am glad that my words should have had this effect on you," he said simply.

"I felt that you had a higher power, and, as Monsieur Jules Bois advised, I came to ask you to help me."

"In what way?"

Helen blushed, an expression of anguish and distress came into her eyes, and her lips quivered. Oh, if only she could have rushed away!

"Tell me!" said the Brahmin, in a gentle, but at the same time, imperious tone.

"Why—it is just this—I want to be cured of a love which is spoiling my life, making me wicked—and, in short, which is causing me great sorrow," said Mrs. Ronald, with a nervous brusqueness which betrayed her suffering. "I thought you might be able to help me. It may seem strange to you—" and then, looking anxiously at the priest, she added: "I hope you do not think I am mad?"

"On the contrary, I think you are very wise," answered Cetteradji gravely.

"Oh, I am glad!" said Helen, with a sigh of relief. "You see, I know that love is nothing but a fluid, like light—a sort of ether."

"You *know* that, do you?" exclaimed the Brahmin, with an expression of astonishment which belied the impassibility of his bronze face.

"A savant told me so, and I laughed at the idea. I am convinced though, now, that it is true."

"Yes, it is true," affirmed the priest. "Men of science are continually being inspired. They are the veritable mediums of God. Great discoveries are made at their appointed time, but they foresee them often. The day is not far off when love will be scientifically studied. It is one of Nature's great fluids, the one which is always working on humanity, bringing life, death, joy, and grief in its train."

"Yes, and I thought that psychical force must be stronger than this blind agent."

"There are no blind forces," said the Brahmin; "it is only men who are blind."

"Perhaps so. Anyhow, yesterday, after hearing you, it occurred to me that you might be able to turn my thoughts into another channel, to efface certain souvenirs from my memory, to free me from this obsession against which I am struggling in vain—for it is an obsession," said Helen angrily. "As you are able to put indi-

viduals into communication with each other, it must be easy for you to cut off the communication also," she added, just as though she were speaking of an electrical current.

The priest did not smile.

"I can do that," he said confidently.

"Then do set me free!" implored Mrs. Ronald in a broken voice.

"To what religion do you belong?"

"I am a Catholic. I was converted——"

"So much the better. You have made a great step towards spirituality. Have you a sincere wish to regain your peace of mind, and are you determined about it?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! You do not know, you cannot possibly know, what suffering a hopeless love causes!" said Helen rashly. "It is worse than physical pain."

A strange expression, a sort of wave of emotion, passed over the Brahmin's face. It was like a beam of humanity, and then the impassible look came back again as before. He gazed at Helen fixedly, but he saw neither the colour of her hair nor yet her beauty and elegance. It seemed as though that gaze would penetrate through her forehead and read her very soul.

"The suffering you have endured has been good for you," said Cetteradji, speaking slowly; "it has developed your higher faculties, and made you less vain and frivolous. As you have come to me, it is a proof that the trial has lasted

long enough. I can put an end to it, and can turn your thoughts definitely in the right direction—towards the poor and unfortunate; I can give you the sentiment of fraternity which makes charity a divine joy. Do you wish me to do this? ”

“With all my heart!”

At these words Cetteradji rose, and laid his two first fingers on Helen’s forehead. He seemed to grow taller, an extraordinary expression of energy came into his face, his eyes were full of light and strength, and his lips moved slightly. Under the pressure of his fingers, charged with fluid, Helen felt a strange palpitation, a violent emotion, and even a sort of resistance, followed by a sudden calm.

“Go now in peace!” said the Brahmin, letting his arm fall helplessly at his side, as though it had been broken by some superhuman effort.

Mrs. Ronald rose from her seat. The mental shock she had just experienced had ended in a sort of giddiness and stupor. She drew a long breath, as one does after some mental strain.

“Oh, I feel so relieved!” she said.

“My thoughts and my will-power shall remain with you as long as it is necessary,” said Cetteradji.

“How shall you know?”

“I shall feel it,” answered the Hindoo simply.

Mrs. Ronald was too American not to understand that the priest has to live by his science

and his capabilities, just as a doctor does. For the first time in her life she felt embarrassed about giving money. She fumbled nervously with her card-case for a few seconds, and then, drawing out an envelope in which she had put a banknote of the value of twenty pounds, she laid it on the table.

"To do good with," she said gently.

"It shall be used for that," answered the Brahmin, bowing slightly.

He then rang a bell, and the Hindoo servant appeared to show the visitor out. Cetteradji lifted his two fingers again.

"Peace be with you, now and always!" he said, as a farewell salutation.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"TITANIA'S FOLLY"

THE Brahmin's will had acted on Mrs. Ronald's mind with a mesmeric influence that was quite marvellous. It seemed to have set her free, as it were, and made the memory of Sant' Anna powerless to affect her.

Its influence was not merely fleeting, either, but increased in the most mysterious way as time went on; and Helen was not even surprised when she began to feel once more the joy of living and of being beautiful. Her eyes were limpid again as of old, her expression serene, and her gaiety quite natural. She chose lovely dresses to send to Dora, and asked for news of the child, which was what she had never hitherto done. And all this was without any effort on her part; it was as though the current of her thoughts had merely been turned in another direction.

Curiously enough, though, she still seemed to feel on her forehead the light but firm touch of the Brahmin's fingers, just as when she had entered into communication with him. She could see him distinctly, and she kept feeling

afresh the magnetism of his gaze. All this caused her, over and over again, a few seconds of agitation followed by a strange sense of inward satisfaction.

M. de Limeray was not long in discovering the change in Mrs. Ronald. It was evident that she had recovered her equilibrium. Her face was still rather serious, but it had lost that pathetic expression which so many times had betrayed her trouble. A more certain sign yet was that at the mention of Sant' Anna's name her eyes no longer drooped and her lips did not quiver. Helen felt a convalescent's joy at being thus freed from her love-sickness, and from the haunting thoughts which had burdened her mind for so long, and this caused her at times to be in such exuberant spirits as seemed suspicious to an experienced man of the world like M. de Limeray. He began to wonder again, and to ask himself, "Who is it?" His first idea was that it might be Willie Grey, but he soon saw that he was mistaken. What could have happened to bring about this change in her? Had her cure been wrought by a skilful confessor or by some disillusion? He was annoyed at not being able to solve the mystery, and kept hoping that she might let a few words slip which would give him the clue to it.

The week before the Ronalds were to return to America, M. de Limeray, who had lunched with them, wanted to take Helen to an Inter-

national Exhibition of pictures at Georges Petit's. He was particularly fond of roaming about in the museums and picture galleries with a pretty woman. They walked there, as it is not far from the Hôtel Castiglione to the Rue de Sèze. On the way, Mrs. Ronald began to talk about the lecture she had heard a month ago at the Bodinière. Some vague instinct had kept her from mentioning this subject to him hitherto. She told him what Cetteradji had said about the Great Teachers who have passed away. She described the Brahmin and his costume, and her enthusiastic admiration amused the Count.

"Do you believe in suggestion?" she suddenly asked, leading up to the very secret that she wanted to keep, after the manner of women and children.

"Certainly! We are constantly exercising it, more or less, on each other and on ourselves even. It is probably this power which is the great force of all conquerors and leaders of men. People say that it is a means of cure in mental and nervous maladies; but the healers are rare, I should fancy."

"Well, Cetteradji must be one. He has the most extraordinary power in his look and in his words. While listening to him, we were all hypnotised. Our hearts burnt within us, as it says in the Testament. We would have given him anything he wanted—our money, our help—"

"And he did not ask you for anything?"

"Nothing at all."

"Oh, well, so much the better!" said M. de Limeray, in a mocking way. "Anyhow, beware of playing with magnetism, hypnotism, and all those dangerous things. If there are good spirits, there are also evil ones. Remember the lesson of the Garden of Eden, O Eve!" added the Count, with his shrewd smile.

The Exhibition of the Rue de Sèze could scarcely interest any one but artists or real lovers of art. There were sketches and rough outlines, which were interesting as revealing the conception of pictures now well known and admired.

There were not many people in the room when Mrs. Ronald and M. de Limeray arrived. After glancing round to see what there was, they moved towards Willie Grey's pictures, which they recognised at some distance by the tone of the clever young artist's work.

"*Titania's Folly!*" exclaimed the Count, with an expression of pleasure. "Oh, the sly fellow! He never told me about these studies. He might have let me have them by way of consolation for the loss of the picture that I wanted so much. But now I come to think of it, was it not your brother who bought it?"

A shade of annoyance and emotion passed over Helen's face.

"Exactly, and for a present to me," she answered, with a strange little laugh. "I have *Titania's Folly!* it is in my dressing-room."

"In your dressing-room!" exclaimed M. de Limeray, in surprise.

"In good society, I assure you. It has some of Leloir's and some of Corelli's pictures to bear it company."

"Upon my word! You arrange your dressing-room in fine style."

"Yes. As I pass plenty of time there," said Helen, smiling, "I like to have good pictures to look at. They rest one's eyes, and then, too, it is always so much beauty to absorb."

M. de Limeray returned to Willie Grey's sketches. He examined the last one, in which the artist had finally embodied his inspiration.

"A masterpiece!" said the Count. "This bit of forest gives one the sensation of the dawn of day and of spring. Titania is adorable on that couch of moss and violets. It is exactly the couch for a queen or for a fairy. One feels that she has just awakened. In her eyes, as they are raised to the ass, there is that stupor caused by dreams and by love, which creates for itself illusions. Why, this is an example of hypnotism!" added the Count, his face lighting up with a sudden idea.

"An example of hypnotism!" repeated Mrs. Ronald, bewildered.

"Precisely—and in Shakespeare! Ah, now that is odd!"

As he spoke, M. de Limeray led Helen to the chairs placed opposite the pictures, and they both sat down.

"Don't you remember? Oberon and Titania, the king and queen of the fairies, came to be present, invisibly, and to dance at the marriage of the Duke Theseus. They had each come separately, with their escort of aërial beings, genii and sylphs. They had had a dispute, because Titania had refused to let her husband have one of her pages, a beautiful boy from India—the son of a friend who was dead. They meet in a quiet part of the forest, and quarrel and insult each other, like any commonplace couple. Titania persists in her refusal, and Oberon, perfectly incensed, imagines the idea of making her fall in love with some inferior being, an animal of any kind, a lion or a monkey, he does not mind what—not an ordinary vengeance, either, by the way."

"On the contrary, a very ordinary one," said Helen. "It is just like a man to humiliate the woman who resists him."

"Come, come, we are not so bad as that!" protested the Count, smiling. "However, Oberon sends his messenger, Puck, to gather him a certain flower, the little love-flower which Cupid's dart had reddened. He presses it against Titania's eyes, saying:

"What thou seest when thou dost wake,
Do it for thy true love take,
Love and languish for his sake:
Be it ounce, or cat, or bear,
Pard, or boar with bristled hair.
In thy eye that shall appear
When thou wak'st it is thy dear.
Wake when some vile thing is near."

Is that not hypnotism?"

"Why, yes, of course it is!"

"It is a clown disguised with an ass's head that Titania sees on opening her eyes. He appears to her divinely handsome, and she falls in love with him. She covers him with flowers, and persists in providing delicious food when he asks her for hay and barley. In order to have her foolishness forgiven, she agrees to let her husband have the page, whom she would not give up before for all fairyland. Oberon is satisfied, and taking pity on her, decides to let her have back her reason. For this purpose he squeezes another flower over her eyelids, saying:

"Be as thou wast wont to be,
See as thou wast wont to see."

"Yes, and the proud Queen of the Fairies sees that she has been in love with a creature unworthy of her. Poor Titania!"

"Who has not had a disillusion of this kind? It is painful always, but not humiliating, for we

generally have the qualities ourselves which we attribute to the persons we love. I have read at least twenty times this episode of Titania's folly, which is set like a jewel in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and never without finding something fresh in it. This time it is hypnotism."

"It certainly is that," said Mrs. Ronald. "It is marvellous in its modernism."

"I verily believe that those whom we call the Great Teachers have written, as mere mediums, by some higher inspiration, the books which humanity was to spell out. It will take centuries and centuries to understand them, but these books will take humanity on to the end of its journey, for all philosophy, all psychology, and all science is contained in them. Man is a being who is destined to continue spelling out words, but who will never read fluently. We do not yet understand either the Bible, the Testament, Dante, or Shakespeare, and hence their immortal charm. Then, too, the book which can be understood the first time it is read does not live. Speaking of the Bible, just fancy,—an English friend of mine, a bishop, pointed out to me a passage in Ezekiel's vision which makes one think that the prophet had seen men on wheels! He uses these very words:

"When the living creatures went the wheels went by them. Whithersoever the spirit was to go they went, and the wheels were lifted up over

against them, for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.' "

"Oh, that is curious—very curious indeed!"

"Do you remember what you taught me about love?"

"I taught you something about love?" exclaimed Helen, laughing in order to hide her embarrassment. "You astonish me!"

"Yes, the day of Miss Carroll's wedding you told me that love was nothing but a fluid. If that be so, the poets who, from the beginning of things, have called it a fiery dart must have been inspired."

"Certainly."

"This idea, which you delivered over to . . . meditations, startled me at first. It seemed to me abominable—particularly coming from a woman. Gradually it forced itself on my mind, and obliged me to use my powers of observation. You see that, without knowing it, your suggestion has acted on me. The result was that I found myself wondering whether all our sentiments, love, friendship, hatred, sympathy, antipathy, are not perhaps all produced by magnetic waves over which we have no control. It is a fact that when one is in a room with two lovers, one is affected as though by an electric current. I have had long conversations with your husband on this subject. He maintains that if we were not put into communication with each other by means of fluids, we should

neither be able to see nor to hear each other. According to him, Nature alone knows where to go in search of the elements which are necessary for the creation of her instruments—for a Leonardo da Vinci, for instance, a Napoleon, or an idiot. He declares that all the discoveries of science tend to prove that man is governed just like the atoms, the stars, and the worlds. I believe that he is right. Humanity first believed in fatalism, then in free will, and later on it will believe in Providence. Do you know, Mrs. Ronald, that I am very grateful to you?"

"To me?"

"Yes; you turned my thoughts into a fresh channel. You have taught me to feel that I am entirely in God's hands. This conviction will help me to bear with more courage and resignation the trying days of old age which are in store for me. And it was an American who was to bring me this spiritual viaticum! Is it not strange?"

"I wish I could believe that I had had such beneficial influence over you."

"Believe it, for it is quite true."

"I am surprised that the poets and novelists do not make use of the discoveries of science. They might inspire them with new variations of immutable themes."

"Quite so! Love cured by hypnotism, for instance. That would be superb!"

At these words, uttered without any premed-

itation, such a vivid blush covered Mrs. Ronald's face that the Count was quite taken aback. It was a sudden revelation to him, and he was convinced that he now had the key to the enigma.

"For instance," he continued mercilessly, "a handsome Brahmin, robed in white like your Cetteradji, laying his hands on a pretty woman—a modern Eve—in order to drive away the thought of the tempter. Titania's cure! What a charming picture! I shall talk to Willie Grey about it. I can see it, just as though it were already painted."

"And I can see that we are not looking at anything," said Helen in rather a dry tone, rising abruptly. "Ah, here is something by Carrier-Belleuse!"

M. de Limeray did not persist, but followed Mrs. Ronald. He went all round the room with her most conscientiously, but it was evident that he was thinking of something else. He kept looking at her stealthily. It was Cetteradji, then, who had worked the miracle. She must have confessed to him, and asked him to heal her mind. The lucky Brahmin! The little picture he had just been describing came back to his mind.

"I will have my Titania," he said to himself; and then, looking at Helen admiringly, he repeated to himself the words he had used once before: "These American women are astonishing—perfectly astonishing!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER

DURING the whole week the Sant' Annas' white dinner was the one topic of conversation among both the Whites and the Blacks. In Rome these little political manifestations generally produce in the two camps an increase of antagonism and animosity. On the surface everything may appear smooth, but a little more hatred and rancour are left in the heart.

As Lelo had foreseen, this dinner had brought him all kinds of annoyance and worry. He had to endure the criticisms of the journalists, the congratulations or blame of his friends; and then, into the bargain, the reproaches of his mother and of his uncle, the Cardinal. It does not require very much to exasperate that most susceptible of individuals, the Italian. Like a true husband, Lelo did not fail to visit on his wife the bad temper which all this caused him. He often came home, his eyes black with anger, his nerves highly strung, and more than once he had "curled up." Dora, knowing that she had been to blame, was most patient, and, thanks

to her famous oil of wisdom, she managed to keep back the sharp words which came so readily to her tongue. One evening she went to the Count in his dressing-room to consult him about some arrangement. As he did not answer her question, she reproached him with not being amiable.

"Amiable, indeed! Ask that pin-cushion to be amiable!" he exclaimed, poking his cravat-pin furiously into the little satin cushion by his glass. "For the last week—thanks to you—I am just like that thing, and am being pricked on every side."

The droll comparison made his wife laugh.

"Oh, well," she said gaily, "it is not very generous of you to pass the pin-pricks you get on to me. I acted thoughtlessly, and did not realise what the consequences of my initiative would be. I have told you that I am sorry. What else can I do?"

"Leave me in peace," answered Sant' Anna brutally.

"Very well!" and with this word, uttered angrily, the Countess left the room, slamming the door after her.

This burst of temper was the storm which cleared the sky. Lelo felt that he was now to blame in his turn, and, as though by magic, he suddenly became amiable again, and managed to win forgiveness without great difficulty. The Italian is specially clever and irresistible when

he is repentant. He has a way of accusing himself, and taking all the blame, which completely disarms one, and makes reproaches appear useless, so that he gets out of all scrapes very easily. Dora congratulated herself that the consequences of her *coup d'état* had not been worse. She was reckoning, though, without having taken into account the Roman character, which has been formed by centuries of ecclesiastical tyranny, and which, among the Blacks, has remained strangely vindictive and implacable.

One morning, as she was finishing breakfast, a letter was brought to her. It was a dainty-looking missive, on thin, bluish paper, and bearing the postmark of the city. The address was in a handwriting quite unknown to her, and had a strange appearance. She opened it, feeling some curiosity, and glanced rapidly through the lines it contained. The blood rushed to her face, and then to her heart, leaving her lips colourless and dry. She read it through again :

“ If you care to know where your husband goes every day before dinner, pay a little visit yourself between 6.30 and 7.30 to a certain villa on the Piazza del Indipendenza, and you will be edified. One always returns to one's first love. A word to the wise is sufficient.”

There was no signature. The handwriting was cleverly disguised, with letters half an inch large, very much cramped, and looking as though

they had been formed by the crawling up and down of some insect. The anonymous missive was in Italian, and Dora, who had taken lessons in that language since her marriage, understood it perfectly well. Each one of the cruel words penetrated to her heart, causing her the most intolerable suffering she had ever yet experienced. The Princess Marina! There was no need to look further, for this name came to her mind at once. She lived in a villa in the neighbourhood of the Macao, which is peopled by a number of great ladies whose marriages are unsatisfactory, and who have taken refuge there while waiting for the divorce law.

Lelo had formerly been one of the Princess's admirers. Madame Verga and Helen had told her so. The word "admirer" is taken in a very elastic sense, as a rule, by the American woman. It does not state anything precisely, and Dora had never imagined, not even since her marriage, that Donna Vittoria might at some far-distant time have been her husband's mistress. Very naïvely she had thought her too much of a lady. If she had had a suspicion of the truth, she would never have allowed the Princess to cross the threshold of her house. The two women met daily, for they were both in the same set. They visited and invited each other to grand dinners and parties, but they had always been somewhat ceremonious and cool, and were ever ready to criticise each other unsparingly.

"One always returns to one's first love."

These words implied clearly that Lelo had loved Donna Vittoria, and that he still loved her. At this thought a whirlwind of violent thoughts rushed into the young wife's mind, and, as a result of her vivid imagination, her eyes flashed, and her face took an incredibly hard look. She had been deceived! Lelo had played her false! Ah, if she had a proof of this, how quickly she would be divorced! She remembered that in Italy the divorce law did not exist. Oh, well, she would demand a separation, and she would take her boy and go to live in India, China, or no matter where, and she would never see Lelo again. She gave a little nervous, forced laugh. Ah, she was not one of those women who forgive—thank God, no!

The less complicated a woman's nature is, the more she resents a man's infidelity. This is what makes the American woman so relentless and implacable in such matters. The European woman can forgive, because she knows more of life and of human nature, and because in her complex soul there are treasures of generosity and goodness which love has called into being. She forgives, but she does not forget. Infidelity and betrayal are for women what hoar-frost is for the plant—their effects are the same and just as irreparable.

If Dora was not one of the women who can forgive, she was one of those who can reason

with some lucidity. When she was moderately calm again, she began to consider whether there was anything in her husband's manner to betray him. At first she saw nothing to alarm her,—quite the contrary, in fact. He was certainly very attentive to the Princess Marina, but not more so than the Marquis Verga and all the other men. It was surely the influential great lady whom they courted, and not the woman. Why, she was at least forty-five, perhaps fifty, even, and she dyed her hair, and touched up her eyebrows and lips! How could Lelo be in love with that old thing? It was all nonsense, and quite impossible. That old thing!—and herenpon the clearly cut profile of Donna Vittoria, her willowy figure and graceful carriage, together with the inimitable way in which she used her light tortoise-shell lorgnette, came instantaneously to Dora's mind, and the corners of her mouth twitched. Strangely enough, an impression she had had a few days before came back to her, too. Donna Vittoria had arrived very late at a grand dinner to which she had been invited. Any other woman would have been embarrassed, and would have stammered out some stupid or awkward excuse. She had simply said: "*Scusate mi tanto, tanto!*" ("I am very, very sorry!"), but with such perfect ease and grace that Dora had envied her. Yes, it was impossible to deny it, this woman possessed the most extraordinary fascination.

And then, too, she had that Latin soul which Lelo thought so superior! For marriage, the Saxon soul sufficed; but for love, perhaps the Latin soul was necessary! This thought crushed her. Could it be on account of the Princess that her husband turned a deaf ear when she spoke to him of accompanying Mrs. Carroll to America? He had not positively refused, but it was evident he did not care for the idea, and he had several times expressed a desire to go to Ceresole, in Piedmont, where Donna Vittoria spent the summer.

Dora took up the anonymous letter again and began to examine it. In the disguised writing, the shape and quality of the paper, there was the unmistakable stamp of a man or woman of the world. Who could have any interest in destroying her happiness? It was a case of revenge, certainly, but whoever was capable of so vile an action would also be capable of slander. Her sister-in-law's name came to her mind, but she said to herself that Donna Pia would never betray her brother. She knew that her husband called on the Princess Marina, but she was not aware that he went to see her every day. She had believed that he went to his club after his drive. He had always given her to understand this, but lying is very easy to the Latin race. Lelo unfaithful! And he was there, not far away from her, and sleeping peacefully. She had a wild desire to go and wake him up, and

to shake him, and show him this letter. He would prove to her, conclusively, that he was innocent, but she would not believe him. No, she must be convinced by her own senses. She would call on the Princess between half-past six and half-past seven, as she had been advised. She had an excellent pretext, as the day before a servant had come to her with a reference written by Donna Vittoria. She would go and ask for further details, and she should see what effect her appearance on the scene would have. The Princess would not be at home to her, perhaps, but she would wait in her carriage some little distance away, and if she saw her husband leave the house she would know—well, she would know, at any rate, that this infamous letter had not lied! She got up brusquely and rang for her maid. All the time she was dressing and adorning herself she was suffering tortures. It seemed as though a nest of vipers had opened in her brain. She suddenly thought of Jack Ascott. Was there such a thing as retribution in this world, and was she going to be punished for her fickleness to him? She felt remorseful at the thought that she had caused him such pain as she was now experiencing.

“I did not know it was so cruel,” she said, to herself; then shrugging her shoulders she added, with that childlike ignorance which most women have of the masculine heart, “Men do not feel as deeply as we do, though.” At heart,

Dora nevertheless had the conviction that her husband loved her, and this conviction did not fail to reassure her. In similar circumstances we all of us have, more or less, the infallible instinct of what is or is not, and it is to this alone that we should listen.

The Countess dressed in feverish haste. She wanted to go out, to get outside the house. She must regain her composure before seeing Lelo again, otherwise she would be incapable of containing herself. She went first to the Quirinal Hotel, stayed some time with her mother, and then went to the Corso.

At that early hour it is frequented by very young men on the look-out for adventures, and by a few old beaux—always the same ones. Society women, among them plenty of Americans, in tailor costumes, take their constitutional there; they meet their friends and admirers, shake hands or exchange bows, start the gossip of the day, accept the escort of one or other of their various acquaintances, and return home with their appetite sharpened as well as their coquetry.

The Marquis Peretti, one of society's entertainers, came up to the Countess. He walked along with her, as he often did.

She was generally most brilliant in her repartee, but this morning Roman wit was lost upon her, and she was teased mercilessly about her absent-minded, preoccupied air.

The walk did Dora good. She went back home feeling calmer, her lips pressed tightly together with the tension of her strong will, for she was determined not to betray her secret, and not to suffer even, before she really knew. She went straight to her boudoir to write a letter, and a few minutes later Lelo joined her there. She looked at him with a quick glance, and he appeared to her almost insolent—so handsome, free from care, and good-tempered was he.

He came up to her and patted her shoulder affectionately.

"*Come va, mia cara?*" ("How are you, my darling?") he asked, with a tender inflexion in his voice.

"All right, thanks!" answered the young wife, quite taken up, apparently, in sealing her letters.

Just at this moment luncheon was announced, and they both moved towards the dining-room.

"*Per Bacco!*" exclaimed the Count, sitting down to table, "I quite forgot to invite any one last night."

"For once, you might manage to put up with a meal by ourselves. It won't kill you," said Dora, in a tone which grated on Sant' Anna's ears.

"I don't regret being by ourselves," he answered, smiling, "but I don't like seeing so many empty places at table."

"If I had known, I would have brought

Peretti back with me. I met him this morning."

"Did he tell you anything interesting?"

"Nothing whatever."

"He would be finely surprised if he heard you say that. Were there many people at the Corso?"

"Half a dozen young idiots."

"Oh, well, you are very kind to-day, certainly! Does the barometer indicate storm?"

"For me, perhaps so," answered the Countess, with a disagreeable little laugh.

Sant' Anna glanced at his wife in surprise. It was the first time she had shown such signs of bad temper and nerves. It was almost impossible for Dora to dissimulate, and she had given way to her anger.

On seeing that she had roused her husband's curiosity, and fearing that he might question her, she made a great effort to control herself.

"Have you seen the horses?" she asked, in a most natural way.

"Yes, they are in splendid condition. Caselli, it appears, has discovered a pair of wonderful bays. I am to see them to-morrow."

When once he was started on this subject, Lelo soon forgot his wife's bad temper and talked gaily.

She contented herself with putting in a monosyllable here and there, and not always even in the right place. That anguish peculiar to jeal-

ousy seemed to be choking her, and she could not eat. All the time she kept half closing her eyes, so that her long lashes nearly met, in order to gaze more intently at her husband. Seeing him so young and so handsome, she said to herself that he could not be in love with a woman of forty-five. She suddenly remembered, with infinite delight, that Roman proverb which had formerly roused her indignation: "At forty a woman should be thrown in the river with her clothes on."

"Ah, they are quite right," she thought; "let them throw her in! Oh, yes, let them throw her in, by all means!"

After luncheon the husband and wife went to the smaller salon, and their coffee was brought to them there.

"Lelo, mamma would like to know whether or not we are deciding to go with her to America," said Dora, watching her husband's face. "If you think it too great a nuisance, I might go with her, anyhow," she added, in the most natural way.

Sant' Anna, who was just lifting his cup of coffee to his lips, was so amazed at this suggestion that he put it down again on the saucer.

"What! what!" he said, "you could leave me as gaily as all that? A fine sort of love, yours! —it's American, is n't it?"

Oh, the balm and joy these words were for Dora's heart!

"There is nothing to prevent your coming with me."

"No, but it might not suit me this year. We Italians could never resign ourselves to living away from our wives as your compatriots do. Whatever you may say about it, we love our wives more than they do."

"And when you are tired of them, you deceive them more, too."

The sarcastic tone in which these words were uttered made Lelo prick up his ears.

"Why, of course," he answered good-temperedly. They changing his tone, he asked: "Have you really such a great wish to go to America?"

"Yes, I really think I am a bit homesick. There are lots of people and things I want to see again."

"Not Mr. Ascott, I hope," said Sant' Anna, his eyes flashing with jealousy.

"Oh, no; I played too wretched a part in his life to wish ever to meet him again."

"Oh, who knows! Women are so perverse, so infernally cruel."

"Thanks—but let us come back to America. It seems to me that we can scarcely let mamma go alone. Besides, she wants you to see her famous estate, Orienta, so that she can decide whether to sell or let it."

"Then we should leave Guido with my mother?"

"Oh, no, certainly not! Baby does not leave me."

"You are not afraid of such a long voyage for him?"

"With his nurse, he could go round the world."

"Peppa will never go to America."

"Peppa! why, she was just going to emigrate with all her tribe when we engaged her. I will undertake to persuade her."

"Well, we'll see about it, then. As a matter of fact, I do not know of any serious hindrance," said Sant' Anna, as though he were trying to discover one.

"Sea-sickness, perhaps?"

This was said in a mocking tone which was singularly disagreeable. Such a haughty expression came into the Count's eyes that Dora was taken aback.

"I don't know what you have been doing this morning," he said coldly, "but you are evidently in a very bad temper, and as I don't want to annoy you I'll go. *Au revoir!*"

"Lelo!"

Sant' Anna, who was just at the door, turned round.

"What is it?" he asked.

Longing as she was to be freed from her anguish, Dora was just about to tell her husband all, but with her strong will she managed to control herself.

"Nothing—nothing!" she answered hastily.

CHAPTER XXXV

SEEKING PROOF

DORA never remembered what she did or said during the rest of the afternoon. A little after half-past six her brougham drew up in front of the villa in the Piazza del Indipendenza. She did not give the footman time to open the carriage door, and, in defiance of all the laws of etiquette, it was she herself who rang and asked if the Princess were at home.

"Yes," answered the serving-man, "but——"

"It will be all right; announce me," she said, in an imperious tone.

Old Luigi looked slightly scared and embarrassed as he turned and led the way for the visitor. On entering the large salon the piano could be heard, and Donna Vittoria's voice. With that instinctive respect for music which every Italian has, the footman went along more slowly, and with muffled tread. He turned round, even, as though to ask whether he must interrupt his mistress. Dora stopped, and made a sign to him to wait. The sight of the wide-open door, with the hangings drawn back, had instantly calmed and almost reassured her. She was not sorry to have a few minutes to regain

her composure. With her heart beating fast, she listened to the exquisite melody Donna Vittoria was singing, and which was no other than *The Past*, by Gordigiani. She did not catch the words, fortunately, as this regret for the past, expressed with such intense melancholy, would not have failed to appear suspicious to her after the insinuation of the anonymous letter.

As the last notes sounded, Luigi went on towards the boudoir, and Dora, who was following him, glanced round the room as she reached the threshold, and felt a sudden thrill of joy. The Princess was at the piano, Verga quite close to her, and by the fireplace she saw her husband lounging lazily in a deep arm-chair, his hands at the back of his head, and his legs stretched out. He was there, certainly, but not alone with the Princess, and never had the sight of the Marquis caused her so much pleasure.

The Countess Sant' Anna's name, suddenly pronounced in the midst of this little scene, was a surprise to the occupants of the room, and seemed to ring out discordantly. Donna Vittoria and the two men rose.

"You, Dora!" exclaimed Lelo, the expression of his face showing his astonishment.

"In person," answered his wife, in an off-hand way; and then, after shaking hands with the Princess and the Marquis, she added: "My visit is rather ill-timed, I know."

"Not at all," Donna Vittoria immediately re-

plied; "I am always delighted to see you. Do sit down, pray!"

"I know it is the hour reserved for intimate friends, but I wanted to ask you for some information, and, as I was passing, I ventured to call. If I had known my husband intended coming to-day, I would have sent a message by him."

Dora, to her great horror, heard these untruths fall from her own lips in the most natural way.

"Pray do not make any excuse. When I receive my friends, I am glad to see their friends, and," added the Princess, with an enigmatic smile, "particularly their wives."

"That is just what I ventured to hope," replied Dora. "I interrupted you, though. Will you not sing something else?"

"Willingly."

"Let us have that song of Gordigiani's again!" begged Ielo, with all the superb uncsciousness of a man.

A pained expression flitted over the face of the Princess.

"Things should never be repeated," she said, with nervous brusqueness. "I will sing you a Moravian song by Monti, a young Italian composer, who has written some charming romances."

And Donna Vittoria's slender fingers and her exquisite voice filled the atmosphere of the little

salon with notes of the sweetest melody, and with words breathing of fresh young love. As Dora looked at the beautiful creature whom she had qualified as an old woman she could not help feeling envious. The Princess was certainly very fascinating still, with her delicate Latin profile, her abundant hair tinged with henna, and coiled low down on her neck, and the harmonious lines of her graceful figure. Involuntarily, Dora glanced at Lelo. He had sunk back into his favourite attitude, and was listening to the music with his eyes closed, as he always did. The young wife was conscious of the bond of race which existed between her husband and this Roman patrician.

"Certainly, they have the same blood in their veins," she said to herself, in a sort of jealous anger.

When the Princess finished the Moravian song, the two men applauded warmly.

"How well you render the simple feeling that there is in that little musical poem," said the Marquis Verga.

"I do not know any one who sings as you do," added the Countess. "Do you know, ever since I have been in Italy I have felt rather ashamed of my banjo. It seems to me so primitive."

"You are wrong, for it is very original," answered Donna Vittoria graciously; "and you play it wonderfully well."

"Oh, it suits my character. I cannot imagine myself with a guitar all tied with ribbons, singing sentimental things. One is obliged to put up with being as one is born. And now," she continued, "will you be good enough to tell me what you can about a certain Battista Varano who was in service with you?"

"I will leave you to talk domestic affairs," said Sant' Anna, rising. "Are you coming, Verga?" he added.

"Are you not going to wait for me?" exclaimed Dora, looking displeased.

"No, I want a walk—I don't care to drive."

"As you like."

Lelo had seen through the little comedy at once. He did not care to be taken away by his wife, like a little boy; and as he could not decently stay after her, he preferred going at once.

"I am glad that I have nothing to say against Battista," began the Princess, as soon as the two men had left the room. "He was with me three months, while one of my footmen was away, and he is an excellent servant."

"Ah, so much the better, for I was pleased with him."

"Do you like Italian servants?"

"Yes, they are refined and intelligent, and seem to get attached to those who employ them."

"They do, certainly."

"I prefer the Neapolitans. They seem to me quicker."

Dora would never have owned, even to herself, that her predilection was due to the fact that, according to the custom of their country, they always gave her the fine title of "*Eccellenza*," which was sweet to her ear and her vanity.

"After all, though, I cannot complain of my servants. They stand rather in awe of their American mistress, and my Saxon hardness softens down before—well, I don't know what, the charm of the race, perhaps. I am weak enough to choose my servants always as handsome as possible, and then I am disarmed all the more easily."

This was said with a simplicity which did not allow of any wrong interpretation.

"You are an admirer of beauty?"

"Yes, and I have proved that I am," said Dora, with a little triumphant laugh.

This allusion to her husband's good looks was bad form, but the young wife had a vague craving for vengeance, and with this speech she had certainly wounded her rival. Donna Vittoria's eyelids quivered.

"You have certainly proved it, as you say," she answered, and her lips took a disdainful, ironical expression. "As a matter of fact, Sant' Anna has always had great success with your countrywomen."

"I am not at all surprised," remarked the Countess gaily, and getting up, she added: "You will excuse me, won't you, for calling so late; I had promised to give this Battista a reply at once. I shall engage him now on your recommendation. Shall you be at Mrs. Swift's 'At-Home' to-morrow?"

"Yes. I enjoy these little cosmopolitan affairs—they are quite interesting," said the Princess, in a patronising way. "They enable me to make the acquaintance of American society without stirring from my own part of the world. I am more and more astonished at the difference between us in character and temperament. One would really think we did not belong to the same planet."

It was the young wife's turn now to wince, for she did not like to be reminded how far she was from her husband.

"That is so—we are different. I am quite aware of it," she replied, with a hard intonation. "You see life as it used to be, and we see it as it is now; but in spite of that, the Old World and the New World get on very well together in Rome. They do not understand each other thoroughly, but they agree very well, and that is the essential thing. It must be that there are a great many things for them to teach each other since they have been put into such close contact."

"That may be."

"Well, then, I shall see you to-morrow at the Grand Hotel, under the Stars and Stripes—do not be too severe in your criticisms. There is some good in us, believe me—or rather, ask your friend Lelo," said Dora. And with this parting shaft she took leave of the Princess.

Donna Vittoria watched her visitor for a few seconds, and then shrugged her shoulders with a graceful movement.

"*Gelosa!*" (jealous), she said aloud, with an ironical smile.

When Dora was in her carriage she drew a long breath; her heart was greatly relieved, although the soreness was still there. She was sure now that her husband was not guilty. "Thank heaven!" she murmured to herself; and then taking out of her little gold chain purse the cruel letter she had put there, she began to read it again.

"Oh, the horrid people, the horrid people!" she muttered between her clenched teeth.

But what a lecture she would have from Lelo! He had seen through things, and it was to show her he was annoyed that he had gone away before her. It could not be helped, and it was just as well, perhaps, for him to know of what she was capable. Had he really loved Donna Vittoria? She could not help being uneasy about those words: "One always returns to one's first love."

Doubt marks the heart just as the diamond

marks glass, and leaves an indelible trace on it. Dora's heart would now bear this trace for ever.

Sant' Anna reached home just after his wife. She was waiting for him in her boudoir, and when he entered he was frowning ominously.

"Can you tell me what took you to the Princess Marina's at such an extraordinary hour?" he asked. "Those references were nothing but a pretext."

Dora, irritated at this domineering tone, revolted at once.

"Quite so; it was with the sole hope of meeting you there that I went."

"I guessed as much. Well, then, let me tell you that this way of looking up one's husband is abominably vulgar. Such things are not done in the society to which I am accustomed."

"No, perhaps not, but much worse things are, though. Judge for yourself," and, with a malicious little laugh of triumph, the Countess handed Lelo the unfortunate anonymous letter.

Somewhat startled, he took it and glanced hurriedly at its contents, turning pale with anger as he read. He then examined the blue-tinted paper closely, and even smelt it. His face suddenly brightened, and he burst out laughing.

"Another consequence of your white dinner, confound it!" he said.

"You think it is?"

"I think so? There is no doubt whatever about it. The thing is mean and infamous, but it will teach you to be more prudent, and not to offend people whose character you do not understand, and whose power you little imagine. All is fair here, you know, in politics and religion."

The Count read the letter again, and put it in his pocket.

"I shall find out the writer before I have finished. It is just as well to know one's enemies. And so," he continued, with a smile, "you hoped to surprise me in *criminal conversation*, as you say in English,—a delicious expression, by the bye,—and you found me listening very innocently to a song. You were disappointed, were n't you?"

"Oh, Lelo, don't joke on such a subject! You do not know how I have suffered. I would not live this day over again for anything in the world."

"I joke about it, instead of being angry."

"Instead of your being angry!" exclaimed Dora, her breath literally taken away. "Am I again in the wrong?"

"Absolutely!" answered Sant' Anna, displaying the Italian tactics in all their beauty. "You should have shown me the letter, and asked me the truth of the matter."

"Just as though you would have told me! I preferred finding it out for myself."

"Your distrust is neither flattering for you nor for me, and I do not merit it," said the Count coldly. "If you had arrived at Donna Vittoria's a few minutes earlier, you would have found Peretti there. He would soon have guessed the object of your visit, and to-morrow all Rome would have known that you were jealous of the Princess, and that you kept watch over me. Pleasant for both of us, that—don't you think so?"

Dora did not answer. She was inwardly furious that her husband should once more be able to prove himself in the right.

"You must accept the manners and customs of the society into which you have come," continued Lelo. "You cannot expect that we shall all conform to your American ideas."

"I have no hope of that—certainly not!"

"That is a good thing! Well, then, until you are better acquainted with us, you ought to be guided by me. Now, for instance, by suddenly appearing at the wrong time in the drawing-room of a lady with whom you are not on intimate terms, as you did this afternoon, you were guilty of a breach of etiquette. Donna Vittoria would never have taken such a liberty with you."

"No; she would probably have found a less straightforward way of getting her information."

"Well, for a person who prides herself on her respect for the truth, you certainly treated it lightly enough this afternoon," observed Sant'

Anna, smiling. "Upon my word, I could not believe my ears!"

This time Dora really felt guilty and she could not help blushing.

"That is quite true," she confessed, "and all those lies came to me without my having prepared them. It is frightful what one can do and say when actuated by—by——"

"By jealousy! Go on—be frank about it."

"By jealousy, then—yes"; and the perfidious words of the letter coming once more to her mind, she added: "After all, there was some truth in it—I did find you at the Princess Marina's, and perhaps you do go there every day."

"I own that I have gone often lately. I have been worried and bothered, and so I wanted to hear some music. That always does my nerves more good than anything."

"Nerves—nerves!" repeated Dora impatiently. "A man ought to have muscles."

"Really? You ought to have married an acrobat, then, if you wanted muscles!"

"Oh, I don't go as far as that!" answered the Countess, laughing; "but I do wish you were rather less nervous, and that you did not have such strange fancies."

"It is impossible for me to change my temperament, even to please you. You cannot make a Perche horse of an Arab steed. And then, too, believe me, although muscles may be needed

for accomplishing many very fine things, nerves are necessary for plenty of the beautiful things in life, and nerves are essential for feeling the beauty of things."

The Count went up to his wife, and putting his arm round her neck, drew her head towards him.

"Come now, *mia cara*," he said, "don't alarm yourself about my fancies; they are very innocent, I swear it. We have been married nearly two years, and I have never once been faithless to you, even in thought. We can be very happy together, if only you will not spoil everything with petty exactions and foolish jealousy. When I was a child, if only people trusted my word and had faith in me, I never deceived them. Have confidence in me."

Dora Sant' Anna, and not Dora Carroll, turned her lips towards the hand which was caressing her, and kissed it hurriedly; and then, disengaging herself from her husband's embrace, she looked into his eyes.

"Is it true that the Princess Marina was your first love?" she asked, incapable of keeping back the burning question.

"She was the first woman I ever admired," answered the Count, cleverly employing the American euphemism. "And now, try to forget this abominable letter. By allowing it to worry you, you would be giving too much satisfaction to the person who owes you a grudge."

As he said this, Sant' Anna glanced at the clock. "*Per Bacco!* it is half-past seven; we must go and dress."

Dora had become too feminine since she had been in Europe not to seize this unique moment for obtaining what she wanted.

"By the bye, Lelo, you have not answered me about our trip to America; I fancy if you were to tell mamma this evening we are going to accompany her it would give her great pleasure."

"And you, too?"

"And me, too."

"You are sure that baby would stand the crossing?"

"Perfectly well."

"For heaven's sake, don't kill him for me in your anxiety to give him muscle."

"Don't be afraid; I will take the responsibility of that."

"Well, then, we will start whenever you like."

"That's a promise?"

"An oath."

As soon as he was in his own room, and before ringing for his valet, the Count again examined the anonymous letter. It was as though he had guessed the author of it, for a faint colour came into his face, and he bit his lip.

"*Che streghe queste donne!*" ("What malevolent creatures women are!") he exclaimed, as he tossed the blue-tinted sheet of paper into one of the drawers in his *secrétaire*.

The Italian with an American wife invariably experiences, in the early days of his married life, a certain moral fatigue. His natural indolence is exasperated by Saxon activity; his erratic mind, constantly being brought back to the straight line and to literalness by the positive spirit of his wife, revolts against the new yoke. The continual use of the curb on account of difference of race and education irritates his nervous sensibility, especially when the reins are held by a rather hard hand. The monotonous voice of the foreigner jars on his musical ear. He gets used to all this in the end, or rather, he gets away from it. He only hears what he wishes to, does not interfere, and in this way is perfectly happy. It was the unconscious craving for repose and harmony which attracted Lelo to Donna Vittoria, that beautiful patrician woman, with whom he had such strong affinities. Her well modulated voice, her supple movements, her aristocratic grace, soothed him without his being aware of it. She knew when to speak or be silent, and she guessed what song or melody would suit the humour he was in. When he had met her again at society gatherings after his marriage, it had been an immense relief to him to find her cordial and perfectly natural. He had never even suspected her heroism. When a man no longer loves, he does not understand that a woman can continue loving, and that she suffers. Reassured by Donna Vittoria's attitude

towards him, Sant' Anna had called on her at her usual reception hour. He had gone the first time with one of his friends, and then he had returned over and over again, with ever-increasing pleasure. He liked being there better than at the club. Strictly speaking, he had nothing with which to reproach himself, as he looked upon the Princess now merely as an old friend. It was Dora, with her youth and gaiety, whom he loved. His home, such as she had made it, luxurious and modern, seemed to him extremely pleasant and comfortable, and he was quite satisfied with his lot in life. This anonymous letter disturbed his equanimity. It was quite true that he had been very often lately to Donna Vittoria's, but not every day. The words of Gordigiani's song, which she had sung to him only that evening, came to his mind, and involuntarily his lips repeated them:

“Tempo passato

Perché non torni più?”

(“O bygone days, why will you not return?”)

“*Diavolo! diavolo!*” he exclaimed, as though seized with sudden alarm, “we'll go to America!”

CHAPTER XXXVI

CHUMS OF OLD

“**P**EACE be with you, now and always.” The Brahmin’s words had not been vain ones, for peace had remained with Mrs. Ronald. The thought of Sant’ Anna was still there in her mind, but less vivid—powerless to accelerate the beating of her heart or to cause her any regret. Thanks to the Hindoo, she had received a still more divine gift. According to his promise, he had inspired her with the understanding of human fraternity, and had put her into closer communion with the poor, with inferior beings, and with Nature. Her comprehension had developed, her charity had acquired more tenderness and warmth, and unlooked-for events had taken place which were destined to purify her soul of the dross which unhappy love had left there.

On returning to America, Helen had found the country in the first throes of the war-fever. The majority of women of the higher class were preaching and hoping for peace. Many of them had travelled in Spain, and had felt, in a more or less degree, its charm, its poetry, and the

splendour of its great past. All of them had a certain sympathy of sex, a sincere admiration for the Queen Regent, and tender pity for the child-king. Moved by these sentiments, they had declared this war unworthy of a nation as civilised as theirs, and had denounced unsparingly the self-interest and petty ambitions which were hidden under the humanitarian banner—that banner which is so often used as a cover for the worst things. When once war was proclaimed, they were all seized with patriotic affection for their country, and hatred of the Spanish. Many of them gave proofs of the noblest generosity and self-sacrifice. Their generation experienced for the first time the horror of war, and all the anguish of a homicidal struggle. They trembled and prayed for their husbands, brothers, and fathers; they rejoiced to hear the cannon which announced victory, and were thrilled by the stories of heroic deeds. And all these waves of emotion, these intensely human sentiments, put fresh life into many a woman's heart, and affected none, perhaps, more deeply than Helen. Henry Ronald, Charley Beauchamp, and Jack Ascott were among the first to enlist, and all three joined the same regiment.

At the battle of San Juan, on the 1st of July, while storming the hill which covers Santiago, Jack met with the death he had so ardently desired. Charley Beauchamp was spared, but Mr. Ronald received two serious wounds in the

leg. Helen had followed the regiment as far as Florida, where, with several of her friends, she had established an ambulance. She managed to get to her husband, and this was the first time she had ever had an opportunity of doing anything for him, as hitherto it was she who had received and exacted everything from him. He lay there now, dependent on her, as weak as a child, and wounded like a hero. She watched over him day and night, and an ever-increasing love and tenderness made her fingers wonderfully skilful and light. Thanks to her untiring care and patient nursing, she saved his leg from the surgeon's knife, and found in this most womanly work the sweetest happiness and joy she had ever known. Her very anguish and devotion caused such love for her husband to spring up within her as he had hitherto been powerless to inspire. It was not until September that she could take him away to Massachusetts, to Sant Hubert, the lovely estate which she had inherited from her father. He soon regained his strength there, and this period of convalescence was to both of them like a second honeymoon, but an infinitely happier one than the first had been.

Towards the middle of October they returned to New York. Mr. Ronald was just preparing to make known to the world the new force he had discovered—a force which was considerably to increase a man's power. Helen had entirely

transformed her famous dressing-room. The walls were no longer hung with shot brocade, there were no more salamanders and butterflies on the panels. The doorways were hung with antique Persian draperies now, and the wood-work was all white and soft-looking; the water-colours by Leloir and Corelli were still there, and one oil-painting, *Titania's Folly*, by Willie Grey. Seated in front of her mirror, Helen was polishing her nails in an absent-minded way. She was wearing a mauve-grey dress of a soft, clinging material, and was gazing at herself in the glass without seeing anything. Her mirror, which was the same one, reflected a very different face now, with an expression so much nobler and more gentle. Between her eyebrows there was a wrinkle which betokened thought. In order to paint her, another palette would have been necessary, for her beauty had taken a richer and warmer tone. Her hair was somewhat darker, her complexion softer and under her large brown eyes her unhappy love had left its marks in light but indelible circles.

On the dressing-table was an open letter, and from some distance away it was easy to recognise Dora's extravagant handwriting.

The war had delayed the Sant' Annas' departure, so that they had not arrived in America until the end of August, and had gone direct to Maine, where they had stayed in the country during September and October. The young

Countess had arrived in New York only that very day, and was staying at the Waldorf Hotel. She had written, saying that she should call on Mrs. Ronald in the afternoon, and Helen was now expecting her with some emotion and great curiosity. Just as the clock struck four, a sharp knock, which would have been recognised among a thousand, was heard at the door, and as of old, Dora immediately rushed into the room.

"Here I am!" she exclaimed, as she entered.

"Dody!"

The old pet name came quite naturally to Helen's lips. The two women kissed each other impulsively, and then, slightly affected by the meeting, they gazed into each other's eyes without speaking for a few seconds.

"I am so glad to see you again!" said the Countess.

"Then all your grandeur has not made you forget your friends?"

Dora shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, no!" she answered, smiling. "My vanity is immense, but it has no depth, and it never reaches down to the heart."

"So much the better. Your note was an agreeable surprise to me, as I did not expect you until next week."

"The weather was too bad for us to stay any longer in the country. Lelo had accepted another invitation to a shooting party, so I came

on first with mamma. You will see her presently; she is to bring baby. I was in such a hurry to show him to you. He is so beautiful that he would make a queen envious."

"The voyage and the change of climate have not affected him?"

"Oh, no, thank heaven! He has no idea how grateful I am to him for keeping so well. If anything had happened to him, the Sant' Annas would never have forgiven me."

"Let us go to the little drawing-room."

"Oh, do let us stay here a few minutes! We can talk better here"; and then, looking round, the Countess added: "Why, you've changed everything!"

"When one is getting old, it is better to have more sober surroundings."

"You—getting old! Why, you are more beautiful than ever!" And, suddenly noticing Willie Grey's picture, she continued: "Ah! there's *Titania's Folly*. To have a subject like that in one's house, a woman needs to have a very superior husband like yours. In many houses it would be a regular satire."

"Yes, that's true," assented Helen, smiling.

Dora took off her jacket and gloves, and throwing them on the sofa, sat down in Mr. Ronald's rocking-chair.

"The dear old chair!" she said, stroking the arms of it with her dainty little hands. "I have never found one as comfortable as this."

Helen had taken her seat again in front of her dressing-table.

"Tell me about Henry," said the Countess.
"How is his leg?"

"He can walk now. I was so afraid that he would lose it."

"And I can assure you that I shared your anxiety. I kept fancying all it would mean to such an active man as he is to lose a limb. I fancied him lame, walking with crutches, and it was a regular nightmare to me. I can tell you I gave a sigh of relief the day you wired to say that all fear of amputation was over."

"And think of me! I went through a terrible time of anxiety; I am only surprised that my hair did not turn grey."

Dora began to rock herself in a quick, jerky way, which was a sign of some sudden nervous agitation. She looked at Helen, half-closing her eyes as she did so, and attempted twice to speak, without uttering a word.

"And so," she said, at last, in a hoarse voice — "Jack was killed!"

"Yes, on the 1st of July, at the battle of San Juan; and it was really a great mercy for him. After giving up business, he had taken to drinking and gambling in the most awful way. He had bought a ranch out West, and from time to time he would go off there, as though he were trying to stop himself on his downward path, and then he would come back and begin again

—getting lower and lower. It was perfectly heart-rending! He enlisted at the time that Henry and Charley did. Both of them told me that during the campaign, and especially at El Caney, his cool daring was most admirable. Under the enemy's fire he rushed forward to give the orders he had received, and he picked up the wounded men and carried them to the banks of the river. There was every chance of being killed in that affair on the 1st of July, in which so many lives were sacrificed. Seven thousand men had been sent into the valley opposite the San Juan hill, which covered Santiago, and which was spitting fire like some volcano in eruption. It was impossible to draw back; they had either to take it or be killed to the last man. They made themselves masters of the situation, but with enormous loss of life. Charley, Henry, and Jack were in the first line which ascended to storm the hill, a thin line spread out like a bow. They all climbed up slowly under the thunder of the batteries, while at every step the danger increased, and the firing of the enemy was more and more murderous. At the last volley of the Spaniards, Henry and Jack were wounded, and Henry fell down as the ball entered his leg. Jack was struck in the chest, but, in spite of his wound, with his eyes starting out of their sockets, he went on up the hill. Instead of any weapon, he was carrying a flag, and, by a miracle of heroism and

force of will, he reached the summit of the deserted entrenchment, planted the starry banner in the soft ground, and then fell down on his face. Charley helped him up, but he lived only a few minutes. Dying as he was, he must have heard the hurrahs of victory, for he passed away with a smile on his lips."

While listening to all this, Dora had unconsciously rocked her chair with a slower movement, and finally brought it to a standstill. Moved by deep emotion, her eyes had become misty as she opened them wider and wider, and then they had filled with tears.

"I have not told you this to cause you pain," said Mrs. Ronald, "but to honour poor Jack's memory, and so that you should really know his worth."

"I do know it," answered the Countess promptly, as she wiped her cheeks. "I do not feel any remorse, because I fancy that our destinies are not in our own hands; but I wish that some one else could have been chosen to have sent Jack to that glorious end. I did not love him enough to have been able to make him happy, and with me his life would have been a torment to him. That thought will always be a consolation."

Just at this moment the housemaid came in to announce that tea was ready, and Mrs. Ronald held out her arm to Dora, and took her into a charming little salon all pale green,

with panels of grey and gold. The two women were silent for a few minutes, both of them deeply moved.

"What does your husband think of America?" asked Helen, by way of starting the conversation again.

"He likes it better than I had dared to hope. I was so afraid that he would feel bored here, and when he is bored it's as bad as an attack of influenza; he is miserable, and does not speak a word. It is most irritating! It was most fortunate that the d'Anguillhons and the De Kéradiens were over this year. I invited them to Orienta, so that we had a very good time. Lelo was perfectly charming. Certainly he was made a great deal of. I verily believe I shall have more difficulty in looking after him here than in Rome," said the Countess, with a nervous little laugh. "American women have a detestable way of encouraging a man to make love to them."

"And you are the one to complain of this—you, of all people!"

Dora blushed.

"Excuse me, I never flirted with other women's husbands. Besides, I have nothing to fear. Lelo loves me, I am quite sure of that, and more than ever. Then, too, Italian men are very wise and very selfish; they know on which side their bread is buttered. A wife who has children and money is very powerful."

"I had the d'Anguillhons here to dinner last week. Annie looks perfectly happy."

"Oh, she adores her husband! and when one is in love everything is easy. Good heavens, what a force love is!"

This reflection was uttered in such an irresistibly funny tone that Mrs. Ronald could not help smiling.

"The Marquis is charming," added the Countess, "but he would make me uneasy; he has such a complex sort of nature, and one never knows exactly of what Frenchmen are capable. Lelo is much more easy to understand. He has not a vestige of ideality or enthusiasm; he has a big heart, plenty of wit, and—nerves! That's quite sufficient for Dody."

"And so you are satisfied with your lot?"

"More than satisfied."

"And particularly delighted at having a title?"

"Yes, certainly; I make no secret of that. When I was a child, I used to make my little friends into aristocrats for the mere pleasure of playing with princes and dukes. It was a presentiment, no doubt."

"And what do you think of Roman society?"

"Oh, I have come to the conclusion that the society of every country, whether French, English, or Transatlantic, is nothing but a façade, each, of course, with a different style of architecture. We cannot expect deep feeling or elevated

ideas among worldly people. Roman society, too, is nothing but a façade. It has beautiful lines, noble and simple like those of its palaces, but they can scarcely be distinguished, they are so black and dirty with the dust of centuries, or, in other words, with prejudices and antediluvian ideas and sentiments. Here and there one comes across a few clean, new-looking patches—the Italo-American clan, for instance. I am quite aware that these patches are ugly, but the question is, will they get black, too, to match the rest, or will the rest get clean? *Chi lo sa?* ”

Helen looked at the young wife in surprise.

“I see you have not lost your talent for making picturesque comparisons,” she said smiling. “This one shows that you have observed and thought about things. I fancy you have hit the mark, too, and I congratulate you.”

“Oh! one ages quickly in Europe—morally, I mean. But do you know what astonishes me most? It is the place that love holds in the lives of all these Italians. It is the invariable theme of their conversations, and it is to it that they owe their animated expressions, their mellow voices, the light in their eyes, and their electricity—for they are like cats for electricity. When two persons meet they talk of their private love affairs; when several people are together they talk of the love affairs of other people; and right through the whole society

there is a regular current of intrigues, flirtations, and of private understandings. With us, love is merely a side dish, but in Rome it is the principal one."

"O Dody!" exclaimed Mrs. Ronald, laughing heartily.

"It is the truth, and it exasperates me. Good heavens! why, there are so many things in life that are more interesting. The Count Ripalta, who is of French descent, is making the most praiseworthy efforts to tear society away from its love affairs, and its gossip, and to turn its mind towards subjects more worthy of it. He is trying by means of lectures and matinées to stir people up, but he has his work before him."

"It is surprising, though, to see how our compatriots love Roman society."

"No; for there is a great charm about it, although I could not tell what the charm is. As for me, I like it more and more. I have learnt to weigh my words, and not to say all that comes into my head—and that has been hard enough to learn. When I set foot once more in America, I could not help saying: 'Ah, now I shall be able to talk again!' Lelo laughed at that for a week."

"Do you think of staying some time in New York?"

"A month or six weeks, perhaps. I have been lucky enough to get that pretty Empire suite of rooms at the Waldorf, overlooking Fifth Avenue.

I only hope it will please my dear husband. I have come to invite you, now, for to-morrow. The d'Anguilhons and the De Kéradiens are leaving in three days, and I want to give them a farewell dinner. I have asked Willie Grey, your brother, Mrs. Newton, Mrs. Loftus, Lily Munroe, and Margaret Daner, the very women who were the most jealous and mad about my marriage. It will just be a little unceremonious affair. Lelo will not get back till late, so that he cannot come to call on you first; but you will excuse him, won't you?"

Helen looked slightly embarrassed.

"But it just happens that we have an engagement for to-morrow."

"You must get out of it somehow."

"And then—I don't know whether Henry——"

"Whether Henry will accept an invitation from the Count and the Countess Sant' Anna?" interrupted the young wife laughing. "I will undertake to persuade him."

As she said this, Mr. Ronald appeared between the draperies of the door. He was paler and thinner, and the traces of physical suffering were still very visible on his face. With her nimble grace, Dora bounded towards him and threw her arms round his neck.

"O Uncle, what happiness to find you safe and sound again!" she exclaimed, hugging him as in the olden days.

The savant drew himself up under his niece's

caress. He pressed his thin lips together, and tried to disengage himself from her affectionate embrace, but she clasped her hands tighter together.

"Well, is this how you receive me, after having caused me such horrible anxiety! Is your displeasure going to last all our life? 'The heart of the good man is an abyss of hidden perversity'—I am sure I read those words once in Proverbs," continued Dora audaciously. "They seemed to me rather strong, but you make me believe they are true."

This time Mr. Ronald could not hold out, and something like a smile flitted across his face. His niece saw it, and was emboldened by her success.

"Come and sit down here," she said, leading her uncle towards an arm-chair. "We will give you a cup of tea, and that will help you to get up the proper sort of feelings again towards me."

After waiting on him very attentively, the irrepressible Dora perched herself on the arm of his chair. While taking his tea, Mr. Ronald looked at her in a way which betrayed a shade of astonishment.

"Do you think I am prettier?"

"I cannot say you are not."

"Well, say that I am—it would give me pleasure. Even my best enemies agree that I am. It does not surprise me, for if it is as you used to declare in those sermons which I shall never

forget, that self-sacrifice and abnegation beautify a woman, I ought to be a perfect beauty by now."

"You practise those virtues, then, now, do you?" asked Helen, laughing.

"I should think I do! But I am not complaining," the Countess hastened to add.

"Your husband does not complain either, I should think," observed Mr. Ronald.

"Oh, as for him—that is just what is so provoking! He considers that my conduct is perfectly natural. He little thinks what Dora Carroll was like. These Europeans are extraordinary; they are veritable pachas!"

"And how do you get on with your uncle—his Eminence?"

"We get on very well together. In fact, he is the only one of the family with whom I do get on well. That reminds me, Helen, as you are now a Catholic, if ever you want the Pope's blessing or any special permission about anything, apply to me, and I will undertake to get it for you."

"Thanks; I will remember."

"Just to think that you should have become the niece of Cardinal Salvoni!" remarked Mr. Ronald. "It is extraordinary, though. Do you call him 'Your Eminence'?"

"No; I just call him '*Zio*,' the Italian for uncle; but the word is not as familiar as it is in English and French. It always seems to aston-

ish him, though, when I just shake hands with him instead of kissing his hand."

"Oh, he must often be astonished at you!"

"The fact is, I am a revelation to him. Just fancy, until he knew me, I believe he had never met with any one of an independent spirit and a modern mind! We often have talks together, and I suggest a lot of things to him,—American ideas, you know,—hoping that he will think of them again if ever he should be Pope."

The thought of a pope being inspired by Dora's ideas appeared such an enormity to Helen and to her husband that both of them burst out laughing.

"Oh, you may laugh if you like! but the Cardinal is always asking me about America. It is as though he were feeling its pulse through me."

"It is a pity that he cannot have the pulse of a more sensible woman under his fingers!" said Mr. Ronald.

"Zio, Zio, you are not respectful enough!" observed Dora, with her imperturbable good-humour. "Joking apart, though, the Cardinal and I have the most interesting conversations; and—do you know—I believe I actually understand now the organisation of the Catholic Church."

"Really!" exclaimed Helen. "Ah, that interests me."

"Well, it is just simply a formidable spiritual army, of which the Pope is the general; the

higher dignitaries of the Church are the officers who work for its temporal power, and for their own respective ambitions. The priests are the common soldiers; they think they are working for God and to win heaven, and they accomplish superhuman things; but in reality all this work only serves to increase the glory of the Church."

"I fancy you are mistaken," said Helen rather drily.

"Not at all. I have an illustration of the system under my very eyes in the Salvoni Palace, in the person of the Cardinal, whose dream is to become Pope and to increase the power of the Vatican, and then in the person of Don Agostino, a poor priest, who is hypnotised by a vision of Paradise, and who lives only to save souls. It is quite certain that the watchword of the higher clergy is: '*Everything for the Church!*' and that of the priests is: '*Everything for God!*' This does not horrify me in the least; quite the contrary! I consider such an organisation admirable and quite necessary, and I have much more respect for the Roman Church than formerly. It is really very great."

"Has the Cardinal tried to convert you?" asked Mr. Ronald smiling.

"No, never! But do you know what he has persuaded me into?—that fast day shall be observed in my house every Friday, and also the days before certain Church festivals; he has given me the list of them. It is for the sake

of the good religious example, he said; but in reality it is so that it shall be known in Rome that in the House of Sant' Anna the commandments of the Church are observed. I gave in, because he seemed to want it so very much; but I let him see that I quite understood the motive which had actuated his wish."

"He has a very fine face. *Scribner's Magazine* gave his portrait a little time ago."

"Yes, and he has a very imposing presence. He would make a splendid pope."

"You see him often, no doubt?" said Helen.

"For the last six months we have dined with him always on Sunday. He lives in the Salvoni Palace—a palace which is full of beautiful things, but glacial, as though neither a ray of sunshine nor a woman had ever entered. And in those magnificent suites of rooms there is a curious mingled odour of church, incense, old books, old bachelor, and tobacco—an odour of former ages. I should not be surprised if there are some microbes still there from the Middle Ages. My nose has been worried and puzzled by it for a long time, but it has at last grown accustomed to it, and even likes it!"

"O Dody, Dody, you have not changed!" exclaimed Helen.

"I should hope not. Well, anyhow, I am now quite used to all this Italian style and colouring, and to everything. After dinner we have some fine games of *béziq*ue or billiards. His

Eminence quite appreciates my little social accomplishments, I assure you. Joking apart, though, I believe that he really likes me. This last spring I did something very wrong——”

“That does not surprise me,” remarked Mr. Ronald.

“Well, never mind; I will tell you all about it some day if you are good. The Cardinal thought Lelo was in league with me, and he was very cool to him. Then I confessed everything, and he never even lectured me. He just said, as he tapped me on the shoulder, ‘*Figlia mia*, you have a very wicked head, but a good heart.’ I’m sure he misses me now. Before leaving I took baby to see him, and he gave him his blessing, and then made the sign of the cross on my forehead, and held his ring to my lips—a lovely ruby ring—and I kissed it. It was so funny, I really could not help it—he had hypnotised me; he did n’t seem at all like my billiard and bézique player, but was his Eminence, the Cardinal Salvoni, a prince of the Church every inch of him. If he should become Pope I am quite capable of going and kneeling to him. There, that’s enough of this subject!” said Dora, breaking off in the midst of her eloquence. “I have told you all this, so that you shall be as nice to Lelo as his uncle is to me. Since a Cardinal has resigned himself to having a niece who is an American and a Protestant, you can very well resign yourself to having an Italian and

a Catholic for your nephew. It would be queer if an American and a democrat had narrower ideas than a Roman prelate. At the time of my marriage you were not nice at all. You were like some guardian in a play who was in love with his niece, and was obliged to give her to a handsome young man. Lelo was very much hurt, and I should not be surprised if he still has a spite against you. He has all the Latin susceptibility, and is horribly proud. If you are cool with him he will go off, and will never set foot in your house again. That would make me very wretched, and spoil all the pleasure of my trip. We must sign the peace this very evening, and you must promise to be very nice to Lelo, and to be my best friend again, as in the old days."

"What need have you of a friend—you who never do anything except what pleases your own fancy?" said Mr. Ronald, who was softened in spite of himself, and yet did not want to give in.

"Yes, and because just once in my life I obeyed my own heart, you are going to be angry with me till my dying day. Is it logical?"

"No," put in Helen at last, "and it is unjust on the part of a man who does not believe in free will, and who declares that love is a magnetic wave, a fluid—and who is even trying to invent the necessary instruments for registering or photographing it."

The young wife sprang to her feet. Her wide-open eyes showed how rapidly her brain was working. A sort of awe was depicted on her face.

"Love a fluid!" she exclaimed. "Why, that's it—that's just it! Lelo attracted me irresistibly. When he was with me everything seemed more beautiful—the very air was different. I can feel his presence even now. O Uncle! I believe you are really a great man!"

As Dora uttered these words, Mrs. Carroll entered the room, accompanied by a fine-looking Roman nurse, carrying the little Guido. Mr. Ronald advanced to meet his sister, whom he greeted affectionately.

Dora took off the baby's large hat, all trimmed with feathers, passed her fingers lightly through his thick curls of golden brown hair, after which she introduced him to Helen.

"The lovely little creature!" exclaimed the latter, not in the least affected now at the sight of Sant' Anna's child.

"Isn't he? And isn't he just like his father?" said Dora.

"Yes, indeed."

Dora then went up to Mr. Ronald.

"Uncle," she said gravely, "come now, he *was* to be born, you know!"

The savant's face was suddenly softened by some sudden, deep emotion. He looked at little Guido an instant, and then, putting his arms

round the mother and child, he kissed them both.

"You are right," he said, "he *was* to be born, no doubt"; and then, in a lower tone, he added, "and some one else was to—die!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

TITANIA CURED

THE Hotel Waldorf, in which Dora had taken up her abode, belongs to Mr. Astor, the American millionaire, who lives in England. We have nothing yet to equal it in Europe. There are suites of rooms furnished in all the different styles: Renaissance, Louis XIV., Louis XV., Louis XVI., and Empire. One can dine by candle or electric light, with table-cloths of Flemish linen or of silk, and with Sèvres or Dresden china, or old Viennese or Chinese ware. There are always the choicest wines to be had, and one drinks them in the most beautiful cut Bohemian or Baccarat glasses. The chefs are noted for their skill and their wonderful recipes. Before long the famous "Waldorf Salad" will be introduced on our European menus. Most of the royalties and grantees who have visited New York have stayed at this hotel on Fifth Avenue, thereby giving it the proper prestige.

Dora, who had learnt to take into account the tastes of her lord and master, had chosen a suite of rooms in Empire style, the sobriety and se-

verity of which was agreeable by contrast with the fantastic splendour of the rest of the house. This farewell dinner which she had decided to give in honour of the De Kéradiens and the d'Anguillhons was merely a pretext for exhibiting her husband and her title, and for showing herself off in all the glory of her new social position. She had invited the four prettiest society women of New York; and although she considered them, rightly or wrongly, her enemies, she felt sure that they, flattered by the preference shown to them, would talk enthusiastically about the Count and the Countess Sant' Anna, thus exciting every one's curiosity, and in this way preparing for her the success which she had always meant to have on the occasion of her return. The American woman is most able in choosing the necessary instruments for the end she has in view.

After the reconciliation between uncle and niece, a reconciliation which had made them both happy, Mr. and Mrs. Ronald had promised to get themselves released from their other engagement, and had accepted Dora's invitation.

During the whole of the day previous to the dinner Helen had suffered deeply. It was all in vain to keep assuring herself that she was now perfectly indifferent to Sant' Anna. The thought of meeting him again caused her great uneasiness. Suppose he were to fascinate her again with his luminous eyes and his musical

voice! She was afraid now of those unknown forces of which the human being is the plaything. She evoked the majestic figure of the Brahmin, and it was as though she felt afresh his mysterious power, for her confidence came back to her.

Mrs. Ronald was no heroine of romance. She was not destined to reach those heights where the desire to please and to be admired ceases. Ever she was, and Ever she would always remain. She used all her art and all her coquetry in the adornment of her person. She wanted to appear as beautiful as possible, as she would not for anything in the world have had Leo think she looked older, or that she was not so pretty as formerly. Her triumph must be complete.

According to her promise, she arrived at the Waldorf early, and leaving her husband in the salon, went to find Dora in her dressing-room. After a few friendly words of greeting she sat down, and, throwing back her long cloak lined with ermine, appeared in all her beauty, arrayed in an exquisite dress of black silk muslin, over white, all rustling with spangles.

"Oh, the lovely frock!" exclaimed the young wife.

"It came only last week, and this is the first time I have worn it."

"How sweet of you; and it suits you to perfection."

"So much the better."

At this moment the door was opened brusquely, and the Count entered.

"Ready?" he asked; and then, on perceiving the visitor, he added: "Mrs. Ronald! How delightful it is to see you again!"

Helen had risen to her feet spontaneously at the sight of Sant' Anna, and offered to him her hand, in a mechanical way. He held it to his lips, and their eyes met. There was between them, more rapid even than a flash of lightning, a transmission of thoughts, sentiments, and impressions, one of those psychological instants which make human destinies. Mrs. Ronald's eyelids never quivered, and she felt no tremor even. It seemed to her as though the man there before her were some one else, and not the same whom she had loved. She did not realise that it was she herself who had changed.

"I am delighted to be able to welcome you to America," she said, in the most perfectly natural tone.

An expression of astonishment, mingled with curiosity, flitted over the Italian's face.

"And I am so sorry not to have come in early enough to have called on you," he replied politely.

"Never mind. By way of compensation, I had a visit from your son, and we are great friends. He held out his arms to me at once."

"Ah, he is a true Sant' Anna, you see. As

a race, it is impossible for us to see a pretty woman without holding out our arms to her."

"Lelo," exclaimed Dora, "how dare you!"

"But, *mia cara*, it is instinctive with every man of taste and feeling; and then it does not follow that our advances are always well received," said the Count, with a touch of irony.

"Your little Guido's were, I can assure you," answered Helen gaily.

"Lucky little beggar!"

"Instead of exchanging madrigals, look at me," put in the Countess, stepping back in order to show off to advantage her dinner dress, a long tunic of Venetian point, over a skirt of hydrangea-coloured silk muslin, lined with rustling silk.

The soft material showed up to perfection the outlines of her slim, graceful figure. On the transparent lace bodice a cascade of magnificent diamonds was sparkling. The general effect was exquisite, and in the most admirable taste.

"You are charming!" exclaimed Helen.

"Perfect!" added Lelo. "Oh, she knows how to dress, this young person does!"

"It's fortunate that she does," remarked Dora, very delighted to meet with her husband's approval. Then picking up her fan and gloves, she added, rather nervously: "On the stage now. I make my *début* to-night in New York in the rôle of the Countess Sant' Anna. I hope

every one will be kindly disposed, and that we shall have a pleasant evening."

A quarter of an hour later, the room known in the Waldorf as the Astor dining-room presented a pretty picture of a modern feast. The room itself was spacious, with mahogany wainscoting and painted panels. The large round table glittered with silver and glass. In the centre was an artistic basket, filled with the choicest fruits, and on the table were strewn roses and rare orchids, while the guests themselves were well-chosen, the beauty and exquisite toilettes of the ladies being a pleasure to the eyes. Among these American women, it was easy to recognise at a glance those who lived in Europe. With Madame de Kéradiou and the Marquise d'Anguillon the transformation had been remarkable. It was as though the great ancestress had transmitted to them a little of her gentleness, her calmness, and indulgence. Their expression was less hard, their tone less peremptory, their voice more modulated. The change in Dora, which astonished every one, was specially due to the influence of love. It had modified her expression, her features, and even her manners. It had put soul into her mocking eyes, and had given a gentle expression to her lips, which were not so thin now. In a word, it had feminised her.

Monsieur de Kéradiou, the Marquis d'Anguillon, and the Count Sant' Anna seemed to stand

out in relief in the most curious way amongst their American surroundings. It was easy to see that they belonged to a different race from these other men of thought and action, with their cold-looking eyes and energetic features. Their faces of ancient type gave an expression of fragility and weakness, but there was more light and warmth in them, while their bold-looking moustaches, which Miss Carroll, of happy memory, had qualified as anachronisms, gave to the whole face a certain audacious and chivalrous expression.

In America, since the late war, society conversation had taken a special character. In spite of the efforts of a hostess to keep it on indifferent topics, it was always being brought back to the burning questions, and degenerated frequently into discussions which were more or less courteous. In this conflict of various opinions, it was rare if some one's susceptibilities were not wounded, or some conviction offended. On the evening in question, it was Jacques d'Anguillon who unconsciously opened fire.

"I am delighted, ladies," he said, looking round the table, "to see that you have not boycotted Paris. Your dresses are the proof."

"The fact is, we had n't the courage to punish ourselves," answered Lily Munroe, a beautiful brunette with violet eyes, who was seated to the right of Lelo. "We are blamed for it by some people. It is true that Paris deserves to

be boycotted, for it has not been nice to America."

"Not nice because it sided with its own race, and with a weak, dispossessed country, which was incapable of struggling against a rich, young, and well-armed enemy! What should you think of Paris if its sympathies could be bought like its fineries? By expressing its disapproval in the frank way it has done, it has been impolitic perhaps, but this burst of feeling, which might have driven away its best customers, was a proof of its disinterestedness and ready sympathy, and I am sure you will all appreciate that."

"Oh!" said Charley Beauchamp, "the prohibition against France was declared in the first effervescence of jingoism, and jingoism is answerable for more dangerous folly than heroic deeds. Nothing is further removed from true patriotism than this precious jingoism."

"It was an American woman who gave me the key-note of true patriotism," said Jacques d'Anguillon. "My modesty does not allow me to mention her name," he added, glancing at his wife. "After reading the Declaration of War, she exclaimed: 'I only hope that America will behave properly in this affair. If my country should act meanly or unworthily I should sink into the ground!'"

"Yes, that's just it!" put in Henry Ronald, his usually severe face lighting up as he spoke. "Jingoism is merely the exalted idea we have of the worth of our own country; true patriotism

is an exalted desire to see it superior to all others."

"And superior by justice and humanity," added Mr. Beauchamp, "which are the main-springs of all strength and true greatness."

"I always thought that jingoism was an effervescence peculiar to the Latin soul, which is always like an overheated machine. I see, though, that it rages in the United States quite as much as in France," remarked Henri de Kéradiou.

"Yes, but with us," answered Willie Grey, "only on great occasions; while with you, it is a chronic state of mind, and it makes you intolerant."

"Intolerant! You consider us intolerant?"

"That you certainly are!" exclaimed the Marquise d'Anguillon; "and a foreigner, when in France, is expected to think as the French do."

"Annie, Annie!" expostulated Jacques.

"Madame d'Anguillon is quite right," said Willie Grey. "During my first few months in the studio of Jean Paul Laurens, I used a certain *Guide to Paris* as a weapon for defending myself. I had come across a perfect gem of a phrase in it, and this gem was: 'If you are unfortunate enough to be a foreigner.' I used to keep my little green book in my pocket, and if one of my comrades became too aggressive, I would draw it out, and read it out very gravely: 'If you are unfortunate enough to be a foreigner.'

My little book become the *bête noire* of the studio, and it was always enough for me to put my hand in my pocket for my comrades to change their tone. Finally, they burnt it for me, and after that I must say that, until our war with Spain, they never again made me feel 'the misfortune of being a foreigner.' "

"This exaggerated jingoism is the worst thing for your country," added Charley Beauchamp; "it hinders all progress and stifles the liberal spirit. The adversaries of the present order of things make use of it as an instrument of hatred and division. Take, for instance, anti-Semitism, which, with you, is nothing more or less than the watchword of a political party."

Henri de Kéradiou and Jacques d'Anguilhon looked at each other in surprise.

"Anti-Semitism the watchword of a political party!" repeated the Marquis. "Do you really think so?"

"Precisely—and we hope it is so, anyhow. France! Why, the very name of France is suggestive of all that is bright, brilliant, and generous. One cannot associate it with a manifestation as barbarous and less excusable even than the anti-Christianity of the Turks."

"I agree with you there," said Jacques, "but at bottom there is this terrible antagonism of race. The Jews are Orientals, and we are Westerners."

"Well, but you have only to utilise their

Oriental qualities, which are so many forces, and by no means despicable ones either," replied Mr. Ronald. "England, which knows how to look after its own interests better than any other country in the world, understood this. It let itself be guided by a Disraeli; it made use of him for its own welfare and glory, and in spite of his ancestors having eaten quails and manna in the wilderness, created him a lord and a peer of the realm. Now that is what I call true patriotism and political wisdom."

"Oh, a nation that is really strong is always liberal!" exclaimed Willie Grey.

"Then, too, what miserable questions these questions of race are!" continued the savant, with an expression of mingled pity and disdain. "Religion teaches an ideal fraternity in which no one has ever believed. Science alone, by proving to man how strong and innumerable are the bonds which exist between all human beings, may lead him on to true fraternity."

"Will you promise not to be offended, Monsieur de Kéradiou, and you, too, Monsieur d'Anguilhon," said Mrs. Newton, who was sitting next to Charley Beauchamp, "if I tell you the impression I always have of Paris, which annoys me, because it prevents my thoroughly loving it?"

"We won't be offended," replied Monsieur de Kéradiou, smiling indulgently. "Tell us what this impression is."

"Well, I think Paris is inhospitable."

"Inhospitable!"

"Yes, and it is a pity—a great pity!" continued Mrs. Newton, softening her hard judgment by the way in which she pronounced it. "If French people were to come to America we should be delighted to welcome them to our homes, and we should consider it our duty to help them to see and know our country. None of you ever think of doing as much for us—no, you certainly have not the bump of hospitality!"

"What a terrible reproach! Do we really deserve it, though?"

"Indeed, you do. I can give you an example. One of my friends has been living in Paris for fifteen years. She has relations there who are in the best society, as her family is of French origin. She has done her utmost to have a Franco-English salon, but she has never succeeded; introductions, dinners, afternoon teas—all her efforts have been thrown away. At her receptions it always annoys her to see the Parisians together in one corner of the room, and the Americans in another."

"The difference of language is no doubt the cause of that," suggested the Marquis d'Anguilhon.

"That has something to do with it, certainly," said Antoinette de Kéradiou, "but I fancy that there is another reason for the exclusiveness of the French. In their home-life they have more

laissez-aller than the English, or even than the Americans; and, as they are afraid of being criticised by outsiders, they prefer keeping to themselves."

"Then, too," added Annie, "they are terribly prejudiced against people who are neither of their religion nor of their race. I am always trying to destroy as many of these prejudices as possible, but in this precious Old World one has to tread very carefully; for by attempting to go too fast one would surely miss the mark altogether."

"Bravo, Madame d'Anguillon!" exclaimed Lelo. "I congratulate you on having grasped that fact. There's an example for you, Dora!"

"All right," answered the young wife.

"Only a Frenchwoman," continued the Marquise, "could ever succeed in bringing about this union with foreigners, and it certainly would be profitable to all the parties concerned."

"Undoubtedly," said Henry Ronald. "I have often noticed that the knowledge of French makes an Englishman or an American more genial, and enlarges his mental horizon, while the knowledge of English renders a Frenchman more serious and correct."

"Oh, well, let us hope, then, that one of these days a Parisian woman will be found capable of breaking the ice for us!" said Lily Munroe, laughing. "We'll put up a statue in her honour!"

"Capable of breaking the ice!" repeated Jacques, smiling. "It isn't very thick. You have more affinity with us than with the English. You are not Saxon, after all."

"No? What are we, then?" asked Margaret Daner, opening her eyes wide in astonishment.

"Americans."

"You are right, Monsieur d'Anguilhon," said Henry Ronald. "Nature is repeating here what she did formerly for you. In order to create the French, she blended the Celts, Latins, and Franks; to create the Americans, she is now amalgamating the English, Irish, Scotch, Dutch, Germans, and Latins; and from her United States laboratory a new race is gradually being turned out."

"A race which probably has a great destiny," said the Marquis.

"I believe it has."

"Speaking of race," said Henri de Kéradieu, "you have probably read a certain article in a review which professes to prove that the French nobility is extinct?"

The eyes of all the ladies sparkled with interest.

"Yes, many of the papers copied it," remarked Mrs. Ronald.

"Of course they would. Well, don't be dismayed about it. The Revolution certainly thinned the ranks of the aristocracy, but it did

not destroy it, any more than the phylloxera destroyed all our celebrated vintages. There are still men of noble lineage in our country, just as there are still wines of rare and exquisite flavour—like this, for instance,” he added, raising his glass, ruddy with old Chambertin. “It would be no easy thing to exterminate the aristocracy. I remember seeing an Arab tribe, near Tunis, which prided itself on its name—the Beni-Franzoun, ‘Sons of Frenchmen.’ It has on its banner the French fleur-de-lis, and the members of the tribe claim descent from the companions of St. Louis. The men were fair, with blue eyes, and drooping moustaches like the Gauls.”

“Oh, that is very curious!” exclaimed Sant’ Anna.

“If, after the revelations of this review, there should still be an American woman willing to marry a French nobleman, which I doubt very much,” added Henri de Kéradiou, in a mocking tone, “I would advise her to make sure of the blue blood. It can be recognised at the first glance, and is the best guaranty of origin. If a man has it, I would say marry him without any fear. He is authentic.”

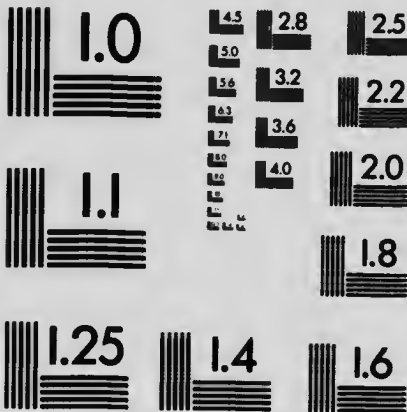
“Yes, yes, marry him!” echoed Annie, laughing merrily.

“It is just as though we had been brought together here at the Waldorf, so that we might have an opportunity of coming to an understanding on certain matters which have caused a slight



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constraint between us—is n't that so?" asked Willie Grey, smiling.

"Yes, indeed," replied Jacques, "and I am sure that when we separate, a few days hence, we shall all understand each other better for this little conversation."

"Why don't you wait for us, Monsieur d'Anguilhon?" asked Dora. "It would be such fun for us all to go home together."

"I must be in Paris for the opening of Parliament. You see Annie persuaded me that it was my duty to take local interests in hand. I allowed myself to be nominated by way of easing my conscience, with the secret hope that I should not be elected—and, after all, I was elected. When one has an American wife, it is no easy matter to remain idle."

"Dora!" exclaimed Lelo, with a comical expression of fright, "I hope you won't ask me to exert myself to make the people happy. I should protest, I warn you."

"Never fear; I will be satisfied if you exert yourself to make me happy."

"Ah, so much the better! I can manage that."

As the conversation continued, it was evident from the looks and words of the guests that there was more and more cordiality and sympathy between them. All through the dinner, although monopolised and interviewed mercilessly by his two neighbours, Sant' Anna observed Mrs. Ronald closely. Without having

any suspicion of the intensity of the love with which he had inspired her, he had felt convinced that she had really cared for him. The remembrance of the look of anguish he had seen on her face on leaving the Italian consulate the day of his marriage had many a time since brought a smile of triumph to his lips. Since he had been in America he had often thought of Helen, and had secretly desired to meet her again. When he met her again, with his keen Italian intuition he had felt that she was perfectly indifferent to him now, that the magnetic power of which he was so proud had no longer any effect on her. This had caused him intense disappointment. "They are all the same," he said to himself, by way of consolation; "there is some one else now, of course!"

Never had Helen seemed to him so desirable as this evening. Her spangled dress reflected its glitter on her complexion, and showed up to perfection the rich colour of her hair and the dazzling whiteness of her shoulders. Her *blondur* fascinated him afresh, so that his eyes were full of admiration as they rested on her. Mrs. Ronald met his gaze fixed on her frequently, and braved it with calm assurance, for it was powerless now to move her in the slightest. She examined the Count stealthily, and her face took an expression of astonishment, mingled with disdain. Under what magic influence had she been to have believed that he was so superior?

He was admirably fitted for his rôle of Roman *grand seigneur*; he was handsome, pleasant, and generous—but that was all. She saw him now as he really was, with his weary soul steeped in the traditions of the past, his incurable indifference, his weakness of character. With culture, he might have become an able politician and diplomatist, but he had not had that culture. His mind was fallow, he was incapable of interesting himself above and beyond the various little events of society life; incapable, above all, of loving deeply or faithfully. How she might have suffered through him! At this thought she shuddered, and glanced instinctively at Mr. Ronald. What intellectual power there was in the shape of his brow; what purity in those eyes, which were those of a searcher, and which never saw base or unworthy things; what beauty there was about that mouth made for truth! It had all been a dream, a nightmare, surely. She had been mad—perfectly mad! And now Sant' Anna might come or go, flirt or fall in love, without any of his acts or sentiments finding an echo within her. The consciousness of this made her as joyous as a child. Several times she drew a long breath for the mere pleasure of feeling how free her heart was. The communication between Lelo and herself had been cut, and her soul was filled with gratitude towards the man to whom she attributed this miracle.

After dinner, Sant' Anna, curious to know whether Helen's indifference were not feigned, went up to her, and managing very cleverly to get her away from the others, led her to one of those *tête-à-tête* seats specially invented for flirtations.

"Well, my dear Aunt," he began, gazing at her with eyes full of admiration, "and what do you think of this last surprise which Fate has been keeping in store for us? I, Lelo, entertaining you in New York at the Waldorf Hotel, Fifth Avenue and Thirty-third Street!"

"Why, I think it a very agreeable surprise. What do you think of it?"

"Delicious, and above all things astounding! How is one not to believe in fatality after this!"

"Oh, don't use that word! It implies the idea of luck, of blind brute force, and Providence is not that. We are God's workers, His unconscious collaborators. He leads us towards far-distant goals, of which we know nothing; but in the end everything is always sure to come right—and for every one, too."

These words made an impression on Lelo. He felt that the woman who had uttered them was out of his power for ever. He ventured, nevertheless, on one last thrust.

"Then, according to you," he said, "from the Rue de Rivoli, where I first met you, right on to the Waldorf, where we now find each other,

all the incidents and events were decreed? All of them?"

Helen met, without flinching, the gaze which accompanied these last words.

"Ali," she replied, braving him superbly. "They were necessary. I am convinced of that."

"If Eve is to be philosophical, it will be terrible!" said Sant' Anna.

"For the tempter, yes," answered Mrs. Ronald, smiling; "but very fortunate for Adam. And now, my dear nephew," she added, in quite a society tone, "we shall all do our utmost to spoil you, and to make your stay in New York so agreeable that you will proclaim us the most charming women in the world. That is one of our ambitions."

During this conversation, Charley Beauchamp, the chivalrous and discreet brother, who had guessed everything, and feared everything, kept his eyes on the two, and went away by himself to a corner of the room in order to watch them. He looked anxious and uneasy at first, but gradually his expression became more serene, and finally he gave a sigh of relief. On leaving Lelo, Mrs. Ronald went across to him.

"Why are you gazing at me so to-night?" she asked, tapping his arm with her fan.

"Because I have never admired you so much," he answered.

A faint blush passed over her face.

"That's right," she said gravely.

A little later, when Helen found herself alone with her husband in the carriage, which was taking them home, she suddenly slipped her hand into his. Without speaking, Henry Ronald pressed it, and held it there firmly. She drew closer to him, and during the rest of the drive was quite silent, feeling profoundly happy, with an exquisite sensation of true love, security, and protection. When she entered her dressing-room, still wrapped in her long cloak, she went straight up to Willie Grey's picture, and with an accent of joy and triumph impossible to describe, she exclaimed:

"Cured, Titania! Cured!"

THE END

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