"Good words are worth much and cost little."—Herbert.

GOOD WORDS

FOR 1874

EDITED BY

THE REV. DONALD MACLEOD,

ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHAPLAINS FOR SCOTLAND

And illustrated by

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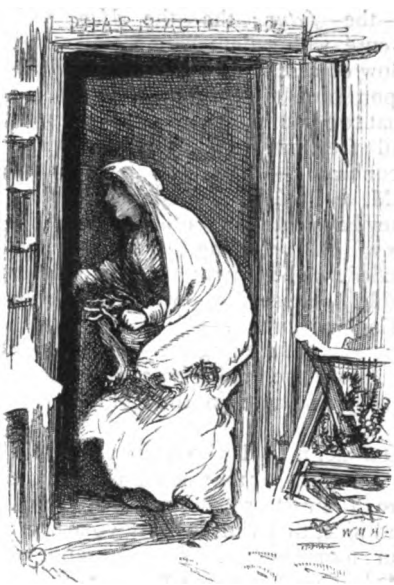
CHRISTMAS, 1874.

THE COUNT'S DAUGHTERS.

PART I.—MARIAGE À LA MODE.



THE village of Saint-Martin des Côtes is an average French village, as villages go, amid all the changes of society and revolutions of various kinds which even the calmest hamlet has not been able to remain entirely unaffected by. It is situated in one of the southern departments of France, a region full of natural wealth; but the village itself lies beyond the reach of trade, and is neither wealthy nor productive. It consists of an irregular street of houses, with a little *place* half-way, and various elbows of road leading into the quiet fields, each of which has half-a-dozen houses scattered at the corner. The church is at one end of the village, and the château at the other. In a quarter of an hour you can walk leisurely through its whole extent, passing the post-office and the few little scattered shops, the cabaret of Jean Bolant, and the hotel of the Lion d'Or. Here and there the cottages are diversified by a big white house, with green shutters, generally closed, to all the windows, standing apart from the road. The one with the great gateway at the side, is the house of M. le Maire, who is also the notary of the place; and another belongs to the doctor. In winter—the season at which I intend to present this village to you—it is benumbed and silent as a place of the dead. The people are all in-doors; even the children, in their sabots, are not clattering about as the children of an English village would be doing. The house-doors are all shut, and the inhabitants invisible. In the whole line of street, which is white with a deep coat of snow, there is not one soul to be met abroad, except, perhaps, M. le Curé, in his black soutane and cape, stalking along under an umbrella; or some solitary woman, in blue cloak and white cap, going upon urgent necessity from one place to another. And I cannot say that it was pleasant out-of-doors on the particular evening of which I speak. The trees were all clothed in white garments, each branch and twig outlined with delicate snowy lacework against the sky; but the wind blew a little fine snow in one's face, blinding one as one walked; and the white

carpet under foot, though beginning to be crisp with frost, was not yet hard enough to be dry. As the wintry evening closed in, the stray passenger felt himself like a ghost, moving noiselessly along the muffled way, past all those closed doors and curtained windows from which nobody ever looked forth. There was not even a glimmer of firelight here and there to enliven the scene. The close little stove which was used at Saint-Martin by all who could afford it, sent no kindly gleam of light abroad; nor were the red wood-embers on the hearth, where they existed, very much help to the vision; and consequently here were none of those charming revelations of cottage interiors, pleasant glimpses of a privacy which is not afraid to be seen, which would make such a walk cheerful in England. Everything was still, except here and there the sound of the saw, with which two people—generally a man and woman—were sawing their wood outside their cottage door. Even at this necessary work they looked benumbed, and made haste to get in again, to shut the door and escape from the dreariness outside. Except these two people sawing, and one or two soldiers on furlough who came out from the cabaret with a slight air of bravado, attended by a dog of doubtful race, who was still more defiant than they, not a soul was to be seen. Icicles hung from the thatched roofs; at some of the closed doors were heaped up faggots of green broom and gorse, which all the world had a right to cut for fuel, but which, all crusted over with the white long films of frost, looked more like ornament than use. There was a scent of wood-fires in the air—fires, let us hope, less smoky and pungent than could be made from the piles of broom. The sky drooped low, and hung heavy and blurred over all, shutting in the village as with a lid. Altogether, it was a dismal night.

"Good evening, M. le Curé," said a small lady in an English waterproof, who was going towards the château, the one solitary figure going that way, as she paused to address the other solitary figure in its black robes—tall, stout, and ruddy, under a big umbrella—who was going the other way. "You are late this evening; some charitable errand, no doubt?"

"Good evening, Madame Charles. Yes; I have been at Beaulieu, where poor old Annette Dupin is dying. It is two leagues from here, and one slips a good deal upon the snow; but it is one's duty. M. le Vicaire has made a much longer *course* on the other side of the parish; that is his district; probably he has done six leagues to-day. One must do one's duty, dear madam, even though it snows."

"Certainly," said the little lady. "It is disagreeable, but one gets accustomed to it. M. le Vicaire was out in the war, and I suppose he does not mind."

The curé made a little scrape with his foot, and a bow, and gave her an uneasy smile. He was perfectly willing to trudge two leagues at any time for old Annette Dupin, or any other of his parishioners, but he did not like it to be thought that he did not mind.

"It is our duty," he said; and then, finding no sympathy in his interlocutor, he added, "M. le Vicomte passed through Beaulieu in the great berlin while I was there. It was said that he went to the railway to meet some one from Paris. I would not be indiscreet for worlds; but it is perhaps the gentleman—the fiancé of Mademoiselle Hélène?"

"Not exactly the fiancé—that is going too far."

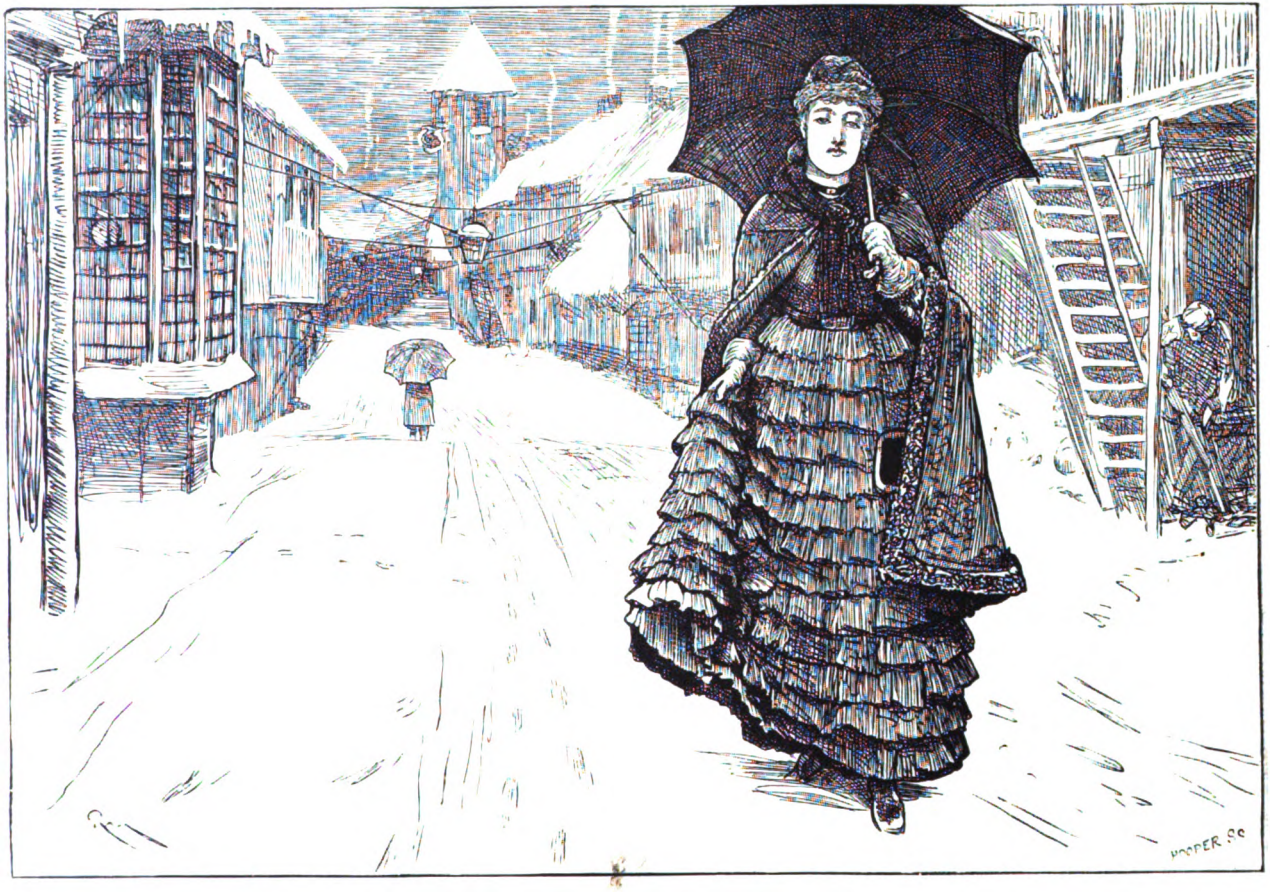
"The—the—*futur*; the—the *Monsieur*," said the curé, with a deprecating smile, and a little bow of assent to the restriction imposed upon him. "One understands, of course, that two young persons of their condition, until they have met, cannot perhaps entirely conclude——"

"No, M. le Curé," said Madame Charles; "until they have seen each other, my brother and sister will allow nothing to be considered as concluded. They might find each other disagreeable. Those ideas which come to us from England forbid——"

"Ah, the ideas of the English—how strange they are!" said the curé, with a soft laugh; "but I keep madame in the cold, in the snow——"

"Pardon me, it is I who keep you," said Madame Charles; "and when I passed the presbytère I smelt something very good, warm, and nice, that will comfort your heart after your four leagues. *Bon soir* and *au revoir*, M. le Curé; you are to dine at the château to-morrow."

"Nothing makes me so happy," said the curé, with another bow; and then the two dark figures separated, and kept on their several paths clearly outlined against the white. Perhaps the good smell which had made itself apparent to the nostrils of Madame Charles had crept by anticipation into those of the tired and chilled priest as he trudged on his homeward way with renewed energy; but Madame Charles had



"THE COUNT'S DAUGHTERS."

other things to think of. "Figure to yourself," she said within her own mind, as she went on, "that the caprice of a young girl may yet put a stop to so excellent an arrangement;" and she breathed hard and quick at the very thought of such a possibility. "But Hélène has few caprices, thank Heaven," she added to herself, shaking off from her cloak a few large tremulous flakes of the newly-fallen snow. She had turned down a kind of avenue, at the end of which the great tower of the château stood glimmering between two lines of trees. There were neither gates nor lodge to this avenue. It stood free and open as any lane, one broad line of snow with trees on each side all outlined and tricked out in snow garments; though in that light it was impossible to see the jewels of frost with which they gleamed. The snow was strewn with little leaflets, which continued to sail down one by one among the snowflakes as the wind detached them—two little leaves together and the ghost of a berry—the sheddings of lime-trees upon the path. On one side was the wall of the garden, on the other the park stretched away into the heavy sky and white distance, full of big ghosts in white, or russet towers of dead foliage stiff and dry, oaks and beeches which had died afoot, as it were, without even strength to throw their dead robes from them. Madame Charles went rapidly down this snowy road, cheered by the fire which glimmered from the window of her own room, and hastened her steps. The great tower was attached to the dark mass of the château only by one angle. It was not like the round tourelles of the garden front, but was square and roofed with red tiles, and stood out boldly into the moat with an aggressive rather than defensive air. The room in it, from which the firelight glimmered, was one of the best in the château; and at this moment it was the only one which showed any light. But for this point of cheerful suggestion the landscape would have been sufficiently melancholy. The great old house occupied three, or rather two and a half, sides of a square. The half-side attached to the great tower, and in which was the old gateway which faced you as you approached, acted the part of a screen, and veiled the rest of the mansion from you; and this great shadowy pile, all dark and silent, planted so firmly in the white waste of snow, with the solid line of frozen moat marking out its outline, and neither light nor life about to relieve the gloom, was more discouraging than attractive to the imagination. When Madame Charles passed through the gateway and across the square of desolate flower-garden to the great door in the principal front of the château, and disappeared there, shaking the snow from her, and pushing off from her feet the handsome little sabots which, half out of deference to country customs, and half for comfort, she wore at Saint-Martin, all life and movement died out of the *morne* and melancholy scene.

Could it but have been possible to throw a gleam of actual light, however, as I am about to throw a historical one, upon a certain dark window, one of the long line on the west side, the spectator would have found the prospect brighter. There was nothing outside to distinguish this special window from the dozen others which formed a close line, with dark clusters of ivy interposing between the white sashes. All were equally dark to the outside and lighted nothing better than a long and narrow corridor. The window of which I speak was the only one in the line which was not filled up with something. Huge cupboards, chiefly used for wood, were fixed into all the other recesses, but this one had been left open, with a wooden seat round it; and as it commanded the immediate approach to the château and a long stretch of the park, it was a popular haunt in pleasant weather. Why it should have been crowded on this very dark, very cold night, the reader will perhaps have imagination enough to divine after the brief gossip which he has listened to in the village. A great domestic event was about to take place. A perfectly eligible young man, of good family, good character, and sufficient means, whom her parents and friends, after much thought and many anxious inquiries, had selected as worthy of the hand of Mademoiselle Hélène, was expected to arrive every moment. She had never before seen him, it is true, but that only added to the excitement. The reader may perhaps suppose that among the trio in the deep recess of the window there was one heart—that of the heroine of the occasion—which was torn by tragical emotion, and that the timid look out into the night of the gentle Hélène was, in her own consciousness, and perhaps in those of her companions, an emblematic gaze into the darkness of the life which lay before her, and which she was doomed to spend with a partner, possibly uncongenial, and certainly a stranger to her thoughts and habits. But truth compels me to avow that Hélène was not at all tragical. She was extremely quiet, seated at the side from which she could see least, shrinking back from the window, and showing, one would

have said, the least curiosity of the three; but the flutter in her heart and a certain quickness of breathing which would have betrayed her to any keen observer as the principal person concerned, were signs of no painful emotion. While the others talked over her head, Hélène was silent; she allowed Clotilde and Mélanie to push in before her without a word.

But there was neither misery nor terror in the intense quiet of her excitement. She felt the importance of the occasion; that was all. Hush! was that the far-off sound of the horses' hoofs?—the rattle and jingle of the great berlin as it jolted over the snow? "I hear them!" cried Clotilde. "Listen! they are coming through the village. I know the crack of Urban's whip as he passes the Lion d'Or; and now the dogs! Mélanie, come closer; I tremble; I shall be the first to see them—I always am—it is my destiny; they are coming down the avenue! Now! Now!"

"Clotilde, let Hélène see," cried Mélanie, drawing back her irrepressible cousin, who had pushed forward. "What is it to us in comparison?" and then Mélanie too forgot herself in the excitement of the moment. Clotilde pressed forward. Mélanie leant over Hélène's head. Half-stifled between them, the expectant one, the heroine of the moment, was aware of nothing but a flash of sudden light, and the sound of the horses pulling up, and the door of the carriage opening. "Which is he?" cried Mélanie over her head. "Le grand?" "No; le petit—he who is standing with his hat off. Oh, how cold he looks! They enter—they are coming up-stairs. Mon Dieu! Mélanie, we are safe, are we not?—no one will come here?"

"Hélène has seen nothing," said Mélanie, taking the offensive by way of vindicating herself for her own share in the eclipse of her sister. "And as I said it was she who ought to have been first. Dear child, how she trembles! It is perhaps the cold. She must not have an attack of the nerves to-night. Quick, quick, let us go to Hélène's room; and Clotilde, tell them to make haste with the chocolate. After all, how cold!—how dreadfully cold it is here!"

They had been too much excited to perceive it before. Happily, Hélène's room, with its glowing stove and double doors, was close at hand. Enveloping her in a cloud of chatter and comment, they rushed into this refuge with the silent heroine between them, and placed her in the warmest corner, with her feet close to the stove, and a cup of steaming chocolate in her hand. An attack of the nerves on this night, of all others, when she was to see him for the first time! "Mon Dieu!" cried the energetic Clotilde, "not for the world. I will run to my aunt's room for her famous orange-flower water; and Mélanie, you must rub her hands and her feet——"

"I am quite well," said Hélène. "I have no attack of the nerves. I am only cold; it is you who will have an attack of the nerves, Clotilde, if you do not sit down and get warm."

"She saw nothing, this poor dear Hélène," said Mélanie. "Here are some of the little cakes you like—eat, chérie; they will do you good. But he is handsome, he is spirituel, he is charming. How delightful it will be to say mon beau-frère! But you, Hélène! ma très-chère, ma toute belle, you saw nothing at all?"

"I shall see afterwards," said Hélène. "How droll it all is—how strange! Mélanie," she whispered, "let us talk of something else. You can turn the conversation—I am not clever enough. But to think he is here—in the house; *tenez!* I cannot talk. Let us think of something else."

Clotilde had gone to the other end of the large room to bring a favourite Sèvres cup from the shelf on which it stood. When she had poured out her chocolate she seated herself, with a very serious face, on a low chair by Hélène's side. Mélanie had placed herself on the arm of Hélène's chair. The two sisters were like each other. They had brown eyes, and dark-brown hair coiled and twisted with elaborate neatness. They were very plainly dressed in dresses of dark grey trimmed with fur; and they were pleasant to look upon, in their freshness and roundness of youth; but they were not beautiful. Hélène had a sweet expression, which captivated all older people and children, but which was scarcely striking enough to impress the mass of her contemporaries. Mélanie was prettier, but more cloudy and dreamy and variable than became a French girl perfectly well brought up, and with a tendency to romance which struck despair to her mother's heart. For the moment they had changed positions, however, Hélène having become serious by reason of the crisis, while Mélanie was full of the gaiety of an excitement which affected her only in the second degree.

Clotilde was the cousin of the two young ladies by their mother's side. She was large and full and fair, as she had a right to be, being a Flemish maiden from those low

rich countries which border Belgium towards the sea. She was an only child, an orphan, and an heiress; and the question of her marriage was a much more difficult one than had been this of Hélène.

"You are going to like him," she said (I am aware that this is a very clumsy English phrase to represent the *Tu vas l'aimer*, which was what Clotilde really said; and I regret much not to be able to use the endearing and delightful "tu," which marks the difference between domestic and loving talk and ordinary conversation in France—and indeed in all countries except our own)—"you are going to like him. Though you have not met him, I can see it in your eyes. Why is it that I cannot be like you? Listen, girls; there is a new Monsieur in Provence who has been spoken of for me. They tried to keep it from me, but I know my uncle Gervaise has gone to inquire about him, his disposition, and his lands, and all that. Ah! it is well for you to smile. If the blessed Virgin and my patroness Sainte Clotilde do not interfere for me, what shall I do? If all is suitable—if he is rich enough and not too wicked—what *shall* I do? I have refused so many already: they say I am capricious—romanesque—I don't know what besides. The blessed Virgin grant that he may be wicked, or deformed, or not sufficiently rich!"

"But, ma Clotilde," said the gentle Hélène, unconsciously asserting herself with a certain dignity, as if she were already a matron, "why do you make such evil prayers? Poor gentleman, what has he done to you? And if you reflect," she added, with a slight blush, "you will see that one's parents must know a great deal better what is suitable than one's self. They can make inquiries, they can find out if there is good temper and good principles, and a great deal besides, as well as about the fortune. A young girl cannot make such inquiries, you know. How could I, or you, or even Mélanie, who is clever, have found out——"

Here Hélène stopped, blushing. Perhaps she would have added, "have found out such a paragon as M. le Baron below stairs, who is everything that is noble and admirable." Hélène, heaven be praised! was one of those confiding souls who can take such things on trust.

Neither of the others made any objection to this charming faith. But Mélanie, who was stroking her sister's dark locks thoughtfully with one of her hands, interposed suddenly on her own side. "Notwithstanding," she said, "if it could be done, one would like best to choose for one's self. I trust my mamma and papa for everything; but they are a great deal older than I am. They prefer a different kind of people. They might like some one whom I should not like. If it is true that, among the English, people choose each other without thinking of the *dot* if they meet and love each other—and then are faithful ever after, whatever people may say I think that way must be the best."

"Mélanie, chérie, you must not be romantic," said Hélène. The English stories are very pretty. To read of the two lovers is pleasant, I allow; but then if you think of that terrible 'hoont for housbant' that people talk of——" She said these three words in English; for the young ladies at the château of Saint-Martin were very well brought up, and read English, and had quite a little collection of the Tauchnitz volumes. And Clotilde shrugged her handsome shoulders with an answering sentiment: Mélanie was more doubtful.

"People say a great many things about other countries which are not true at all," she said. "Perhaps the *chasse aux maris* is a misunderstanding, just as it is a misunderstanding when the English say so many unkind things of us without knowing. But I agree with Clotilde. It is very well for my beau-frère; but for my——. No; I should not like mamma to choose for me."

"You are unkind, Mélanie," said Hélène, with a pout of momentary offence.

"Ma toute-bonne! Ma Hélène chérie! You are better than I am—so much better—and different. We are not made all alike. I should not love you half so well if we were the same, the two of us. I adore my little sister because she is so different from me."

The good Hélène was very peaceable. She shook her head, but she accepted the explanation; which, however, Clotilde interrupted summarily, in her impetuous way.

"Do not say that you agree with me, Mélanie, petite folle. That is not my way of thinking at all. I am not romanesque; I tell you so every day of my life, and you can see it easily when you look at me. I—romanesque! Listen. I hate the thought of being married; I shall never marry; otherwise I am like Hélène. Assuredly the parents must know best. How can you tell when you see a monsieur whether he is a proper person or not? You can see if he is handsome or ugly, but that is all. You cannot go and ask, 'Has he a good temper? Is

his mother pious? Has there been anything unpleasant about his family? Is he sure to *rangé* himself and be a good husband?' Figure to yourself how you could go—you, a young girl—to ask such questions! But your papa and your mamma are not ashamed: it is their duty. If that were but all—" said Clotilde, sighing heavily. "But what I detest is to be married at all."

"Ma cousine," cried Hélène, "you rave. I understand you still less than Mélanie. You hate the thought of being married! but what will you do then? Is it to be an old maid *à l'Anglaise* that you prefer?—to have no one belonging to you? to live alone till all your relations are gone? and to have no children—no one to love you?"

"There are other ways," said Clotilde, oracularly; and she rose from her low seat and disappeared into the little dressing-room, where she rinsed the Sèvres cup, and, wiping it lovingly, put it back upon the étagère.

"I do not think Clotilde would care for her chocolate if she had not her Sèvres cup," said Hélène; "but what, then, does she mean about other ways?"

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the Comtesse, the mother of the two girls and aunt of Clotilde. She came bustling in through a door in the wainstcot which led from this room into her own; her daughters had never all their lives been further off from the maternal wing. She came in brisk and full of a new subject—overflowing with M. le Baron. The mistress of this house was so busy a woman, and so energetic, that to secure her there for half an hour by their fire was a great matter for the girls. They drew another great chair to the stove for her close to Hélène's, and clustered close about the little centre of warmth. "Ecoutez, mes enfants, he is charming," she began at once; and all their philosophies, all their speculations, fled before this more immediate interest. The Comtesse, like most of her countrywomen, was an admirable narrator. She began at his entrance, and gave them a full and animated sketch of all Hélène's suitor had said and done, suppressing every unnecessary detail, and bringing out every point with an art beyond art—a gift of which she was scarcely conscious. What emotions passed through Hélène's gentle soul as she listened, what exclamations burst from the lips of Mélanie and Clotilde, we may leave to the imagination of the reader. But the eager murmur of question and answer, the tale interrupted by perpetual remarks, the soft laughter, the little outcries of curiosity and approval and interest, were not at all like what would be supposed likely in an English version of the circumstances. The party was as happy as if M. le Baron had been the most romantic of lovers. There was not the shadow of a tragedy visible anywhere.

II.

The family of Champfleuri had been for a long time established at Saint-Martin. It is true that they were but a branch of the old great house, originally one of the first in Artois, where the parent stem still lingered, though in an impoverished condition; but it was always a great thing to have survived the Revolution, and to have come back permanently to the old home, even though its importance in the country was infinitely lessened. M. le Comte was sometimes addressed as Champfleuri de Saint-Martin, but he discouraged the double appellative, rightly feeling that de Saint-Martin might be anybody's name, but that "qui dit Champfleuri dit tout." He was not himself a remarkable personage, but—everybody said, as a rider to this assertion—Madame la Comtesse was, which came to very much the same thing. He was a well-shaven man, somewhat short in stature, and very bland and delightful in manner, kind as all French fathers are, and setting great storè by his wife's opinion. She in her turn made a very great stand upon the dignity and importance of mon mari. They were fond of each other still, odd as it may appear, though the young Vicomte, their son, was a married man, and youth and its illusions were long over. Madame de Champfleuri, however, was not old, nor did she intend to become so. She was a handsome woman still, handsomer than either of her daughters would ever be, all the world said. For notwithstanding the natural desire of mankind to worship the rising rather than the setting sun, it is curious how faithful the world is to an old love in respect to this matter of beauty. "She will never be what her mother was!"—how often do we hear such words! There was some excuse for them in the person of Madame de Champfleuri. She was not quite fifty, of a fine commanding figure, straight and alert as ever. Her hair had not lost any of its brownness or gloss. Her eye was as bright as at sixteen, and she had social qualities enough to make up for her want of youth. She talked very well. She knew how to *tenir salon*, that incommunicable art, and she knew besides how to manage her

house down to the smallest particulars, and all those arts of economy in which French housekeepers are so famous. She had brought a very good *dot* to the house, which made her still more and more an acquisition to the family. Clotilde, her niece, many people thought, could have done no better than to follow in her steps, and add her fat acres in French Flanders to prop up the family of Champfleuri; but Clotilde, as has been seen, did not read her fate in that way, and the heir of the house had married elsewhere, well, but not too wisely. The *dot* of Frederic's young wife was enough to cover the additional expenses imposed upon the race by her accession to it, but did not leave any surplus over to enrich the house. And, accordingly, it was very important to see Hélène and Mélanie comfortably settled. The Comtesse had thought of little else since her eldest daughter made her first communion. She was not ashamed of this "preoccupation," nor would she have disowned it at any time. What was the use of a mother but to provide for the settlement of her children, and so arrange life for them that it should be happy, and easy, and free from care? It may be said that she had never received an unmarried man, young or old, since the date we have already specified, or had one presented to her in society, without immediately weighing him in a very fine, very exquisite, invisible balance, in which not only his wealth, and family, and consequence were weighed, but other matters less often taken into consideration. It is needless to add that all the sons of all her friends, from the age of sixteen upwards, had been placed, one by one, in these invisible scales. The results, could they have been published, would have formed a very fine and instructive record of the young men of good means and position within certain well-defined limits; there was enough to furnish a blue-book, had blue-books been the order of the day. She had even classified them, as if they had been conscripts—so many of them eligible for immediate service, so many held in the reserve. It was an object of study which had cost her a great deal of mental and other exertion; and, we repeat, if you suppose she was ashamed of it, or thought it an ignoble occupation, you are very much mistaken in Madame de Champfleuri. "I have two daughters to marry," she would say, with a composure which would have put a British matron to the blush; but then her mode of operation was very different from the British matron's. She did not take Hélène and Mélanie about to all manner of balls and dissipations; she did not throw them wildly into society, trusting to their own exertions to provide the necessary establishment for them; nor was she required by her social creed to speak and look as if that establishment was the last thing in her thoughts. On the contrary, it was avowedly the first thing in her thoughts; and the only two persons in the world whom she never consulted on the matter—who were left in total ignorance of all her statistics and all her diplomacy—were precisely Hélène and Mélanie themselves. The two girls were aware that they would have to marry some time, but there their information terminated. It was a matter of course. They had their dreams, no doubt, like other girls; but they were so far free to indulge them that no suggestion of any power on their own part to influence the matter had ever breathed across their virginal souls. Their hearts were left open for the reception of a possible romance.

And it is possible that the young and romantic reader might consider M. le Baron de Mondroit but a poor conclusion to all Madame de Champfleuri's exertions. He was a true little French hero — perfectly *comme il faut*. "*Taille moyenne*" would have been a French official's description of his height; but I fear an English functionary would have called him—with that brutal plainness of which we are generally accused —a little man. Certainly he was not tall—but he was perfectly well made, slight and elegant, with beautiful hands and feet, such a man as a too rough gale might blow away, yet one whose powers would have considerably astonished any opponent, for he was skilful, if he was small. He was very clever and accomplished, spoke English and attempted German, was disposed to support a parliamentary and constitutional government, should such a blessing fall to the fate of France; and though entertaining a friendly feeling towards the Legitimist party, was not one himself, nor indeed disposed to commit himself to any extreme line of policy. He had been in Italy and in England, and had even made a voyage to America, which is an expedition which it is very expedient to make, and which tells very well upon public opinion in France. Besides all this, he had a very tolerable estate, a rich uncle in Normandy, an old hôtel in the Faubourg, and nobody but creditable people belonging to him. His mother, who lived chiefly at Mondroit, was of unimpeachable antecedents,

and everything about him was satisfactory. Perhaps a few inches of additional stature, or a few pounds of weight, might have been a recommendation to some observers; but people in France are less moved by these most petty considerations than we are, and it cannot be said that Hélène felt any twinge go through her, even at the first agitating moment, when she heard her lover described as *le petit*.

The drawing-room at Saint-Martin was a large room, occupying the whole breadth of the house. One window looked upon the park behind, another upon the little square of flower-garden in front. The floor was tiled; but a large soft Aubusson carpet, one great bouquet on a creamy mossy ground, inlaid in a rich border of colour, covered the centre. Two shaded lamps, each with the shade well pressed down to save the eyes of the company (M. le Comte's eyes were weak), made the room partially light. A huge wood-fire blazed on the vast hearth, making an illumination more bright though less certain. The walls were covered with tapestry, with bands of white and gold between; and the way in which the rising glow of the fire would leap and gleam about those old pictured canvases, giving a tremulous fantastic aspect of life to the large figures, and throwing out, now here, now there, a piece of scenery, was pleasant to behold. M. de Champfleuri, who was the first to come down-stairs, stood before this fire, and turned himself slowly round, letting the warmth penetrate him through and through. He was tired and chilled with his long drive, and he had not taken time to array himself very carefully, but appeared in a Frenchman's curious compromise between morning and evening toilette; the worst of which compromise was, that M. le Comte's linen had been worn all day, and was somewhat crumpled about the wristbands, and not so starched and spotless as an Englishman's would have been. Madame Charles was the next to make her appearance. She was the widow of M. le Comte's only brother, and a permanent member of the household; but she had not been one of the party in the girls' room, and consequently had dressed leisurely and came down early. She was an extremely neat small woman in black silk, with dark glossy hair carefully arranged, and a pair of sparkling black vivacious eyes—eyes which observed everything, and were always making observations. Madame Charles came forward to the fire and stood beside her brother-in-law to get warm, which at this season was the first necessity at Saint-Martin. She had come through about half a mile of stony corridor and staircase, enough to chill the very soul out of a small woman in an ordinary black silk gown. There was but one subject that could be talked of on such an evening. "Eh bien, mon frère," said the little lady. "At last you are quite satisfied; he has got your own ways of thinking—your revolutionary notions and all."

"He is a young man of enlightened views," said the Comte, rubbing his hands gently. "Yes, I believe I may say I am satisfied; and Marie is perfectly satisfied; we are in accord now as always. He has excellent principles, and has improved his lands greatly since he got possession of them. What more could we ask? and besides a most amiable disposition he has that uncle in Normandy, who is extremely rich; at least so I hear. We are much obliged to your friend who first suggested him to us; indeed, my dear sister, it may be said that it is you who have made this match."

"I always said it would be an admirable arrangement," said Madame Charles, with modesty, neither refusing the credit nor making too much of it. "I have known something of the Mondroits all my life; indeed Henri de Mondroit, the father of the present Baron, was at one time thought of for me."

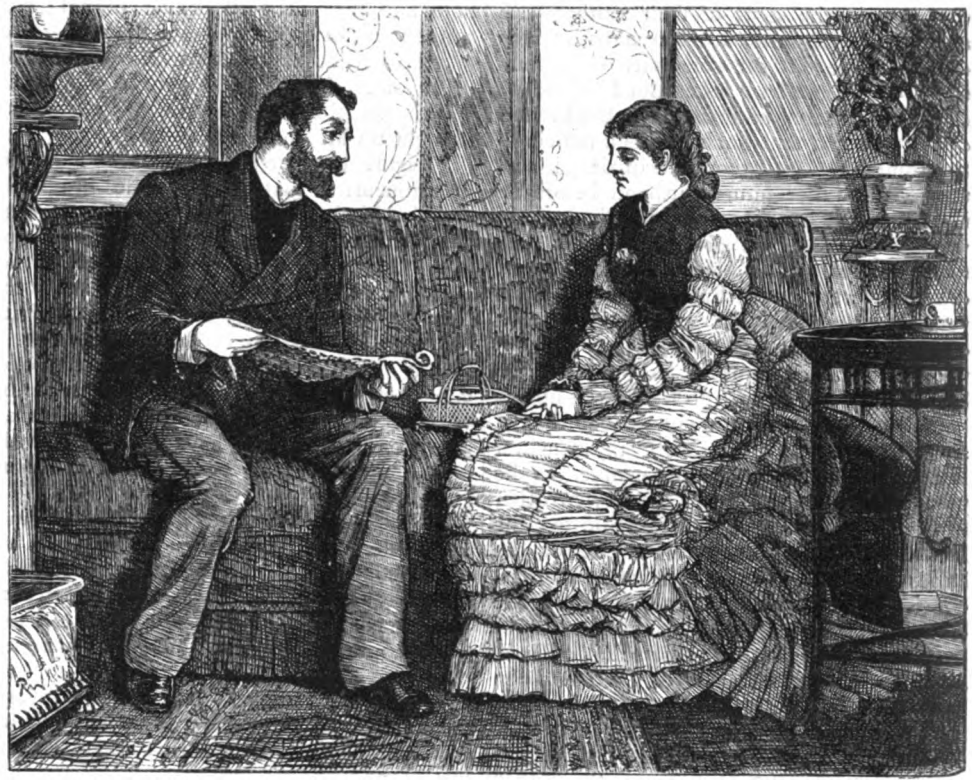
"The Champfleuris may congratulate themselves that matters were otherwise settled," said the courteous Count, with a bow and smile. Madame Charles inclined her head, accepting the compliment.

"Merci, mon frère," she said; and then added seriously, "It is curious that I should have been left a widow with one son just the same. It is a remarkable coincidence; but I should be happy had I found for my Charles as charming a fiancée as our Hélène."

"You are partial, my dear sister," said the Count; "and Charles, with his excellent position and the talent he has inherited from his mother, will probably do much better for himself."

These harmless little pleasantnesses go a long way towards making life tolerable; and neither on the one side nor the other were they insincere. It was true that Madame Charles did hope for and aspire to a larger *dot* than Hélène's for her clever son; but then it was perfectly true that she could not have desired for Charles a more charming fiancée. These good people said perhaps a trifle more than they meant, but nothing

contrary to it; and the little phrases were pleasant, and oiled the wheels of existence. The strangers, however, entered at this moment, and precluded further family conversation. Hélène's suitor was accompanied by his friend, that most necessary adjunct to every gentleman in trying circumstances. In this case, as so frequently happens in France and elsewhere, the two young men who came a-wooing together were the Damon and Pythias of a friendship which had lasted not only through college studies, but through the less tranquil experiences of young manhood. They knew each other's most private sentiments, each other's errors—not only everything that was known, but everything that there was to conceal in each other's lives. Achille de Santerre was considerably taller and stronger than Henri de Mondroit. He was le grand, and the other le petit; but he did not fence half so well as the elegant little Baron, nor was he so perfect in his exercise. He was less perfect altogether, to tell the truth; and he was a



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discontented young man, not knowing very well what to make of himself, longing for something, he could not tell what—a great war or a revolution, or something which should loose the bonds in which society was tied hard and fast, and restore to him some way of using his faculties. For what was he to do? He had no *terres* like Henri to give him occupation; he had a very tolerable income, but no wealth to speak of. To be a soldier in the then state of the army, with no prospect before him either of worthy war or personal advancement, did not tempt him. Public employment tempted him still less. He hated bureaucracy and centralisation, and everything that has been supposed most essentially French in the way of government. He was a Liberal, and an advanced one; but then with all the intensity of a poetic mind he hated the dead level of wordy democracy, and the ignorant and mad theorisings of extreme French liberalism; so that this young man was not happy, nor at all satisfied either with his position or his prospects, or even his present errand, which filled his friend, who was the principal, with

so much delightful complacency. Santerre thought it was a hideous bargain that was about to be made—so many thousand francs of *dot* against so many acres of land, so many leases about to fall in, and an old château. He looked forward to his first sight of the fiancée with a mixture of indignation and pity—sentiments which were utterly uncalled for in the circumstances, as the reader knows. M. de Santerre had been in England for three months, and had learned romantic notions.

The ladies came in together, the girls crowding in the steps of their mother with an embarrassment not at all usual with them; even Clotilde felt the solemnity of the moment. Hélène had entertained a foolish hope of remaining undistinguished until after dinner at least, and having thus a moment's breathing-time to become acquainted with the looks of her future husband before he identified her. But Madame de Champfleuri would by no means give in to any such foolish fancy. Men, she knew, if Hélène did not, were proverbially dull and proverbially perverse. Of course, in such a case, M. de Mondroit would fix upon the wrong one, and probably fall in love with her at once—an embroglio which was not to be thought of for a moment. Accordingly, she pronounced the name of "my daughter Hélène" in the most distinct manner, as the young men came forward. There were other little marks which would have indicated the fact to an acute observer. None of the ladies were in such toilet as is, or rather was, considered necessary in England. Madame de Champfleuri would have fainted outright had the idea of presenting herself décolletée at a small dinner in her own house been suggested to her mind. But all the female staff of her house had come to the front for the decoration of Hélène. Her sister and cousin had effaced themselves, as they would have said. They were dressed much alike to the common eye; but to their own consciousness, and to that of Madame Charles, who recognised the self-abnegation in a moment—and even to that of Henri de Mondroit, which was observant and cultivated in this point—the subtle, fine distinction could not be overlooked. For Hélène was radiant in the perfection of her simple and youthful toilet. Her beautiful shining hair was made the very most of; her pretty maidenly ornaments, not too rich or brilliant, were chosen with the utmost care. "My daughter Hélène; my daughter Mélanie, and my niece, Mademoiselle de Vertprés," was added carelessly, in a quite different tone. Thus all possibility of mistake was obviated There were four other guests besides those we have indicated to the reader—three gentlemen, of whom we have no particular need for the moment, and no space to introduce at length—to wit, M. Thelandier, a legal functionary, from the *chef-lieu* of the department; M. Deschaux, from Paris, who was a man of letters, collecting details for a history of the province; and M. de Bois-Sombre, a gentleman of the neighbourhood. All these gentlemen had bits of red ribbon at their buttonhole, and they were all conversational; but as they do not concern us nor the reader, we may be permitted at this moment to leave them out. The fourth person was Miss Winchester, the English governess, who had brought up Mélanie and Hélène.

"Figure to yourselves," said Madame de Champfleuri, "that Madame de Mondroit has the kindness to remember having seen me at my *début* in the world, I will not say how many years ago. What a regret for me that I am not equally clear in my recollections! The memory, I am certain of it, ought to be specially cultivated when one is young. How many delightful souvenirs one can then collect for the enlivenment of one's old age! And when you think that every one whom you have ever met with once, is very nearly certain to reappear in your life——"

"But what an appalling suggestion!" said Henri de Mondroit; "though there are indeed people whom one cannot see too much of. Ladies have an advantage over us in this respect. Their path is seldom crossed by the hideous visions which, for example, we see in travelling. What a relief it is to re-enter our smiling France, where every peasant has an agreeable word, after a journey à l'étranger! In America, where I have just been——"

"Ah! M. le Baron has come from America?" said the magistrate. "I have always taken a great interest in that curious society. It is there that democracy is fully on its trial. It is the great problem of our days—it is the——"

"Monsieur de Santerre has been a traveller too," said the Countess, turning graciously to the other side. He was placed between herself and Hélène, who, by excess of delicacy, had shrunk from the neighbourhood of her future husband, but who, amid the hum of conversation and the flutter of excitement, which made her head whirl, was more conscious of the voice discoursing about America

on her mother's other side than of anything addressed to herself. Santerre had been but a silent companion for a Frenchman. He was too curious about the business in which he found himself involved to carry out his own intention of inquiring into the mind, and ways of thinking, of Hélène. His eye had been attracted in spite of him by the soft eyes of Mélanie and the fair Flemish beauty of Clotilde. There was a bewildering flutter of woman-kind in the air, to which he was unaccustomed, and which turned his head slightly, though a man of his nation ought to have known better; but then, a man is a man first of all, and only a Frenchman or an Englishman in the second place, which is a distinction we are all apt to lose sight of. Henri de Mondroit was conscious of the same feminine atmosphere, but it only excited him pleasantly and moved him to do his best; it did not confuse him and turn his head. The consequence of the Countess's challenge was, that Hélène was left tolerably free to indulge her own thoughts, and to listen to that voice on her mother's other side which was to be more familiar than any other voice for the rest of her life. How strange it was! She could not even see him, for Madame de Champfleuri sat at the middle, not the end, of her oval table, and it was only a chance glimpse of his profile which presented itself to Hélène. But she sat and listened in a strange dream, answering very abstractedly to the gentle remarks of old M. de Bois-Sombre, who had known her all her life, and who made allowance for her. "Pauvre petite!" the old man even said once, making her blush. And then he added, pouring out for her the spoonful of wine, which he afterwards deluged with water from the decanter which stood between them, "M. de Mondroit is charming. He is a young man of his time, with all the amiability of the old régime. How pleasant it is for us, your father and me, Hélène, to see young men who will take our place when France calls!" Poor old M. de Bois-Sombre! France had never called him, so far as any one had heard; but he was quite convinced that his old sword and his old name would be a loss to her, and that it did him good to see new shoots from the old noblesse worthy to take his place.

The excitement of the evening, however, culminated for all parties concerned, when at last, when the dinner was well over, and everybody had returned to the drawing-room, and the blazing faggot on the hearth had begun to fade from its first brightness, it was discovered that Henri and Hélène were talking to each other. It was managed in the easiest, the simplest way possible; and though every member of the party remarked the conjunction, and every one was dying to know what the two would say, the hum of talk did not catch a sudden chill, as it would have done in England, but rather grew louder and more earnest, with the benevolent intention of protecting and sheltering the lovers. The lovers!—were they entitled to that name, these two young people, brought together by their friends, and about to exchange so many worldly advantages on one side for so many on the other? Two people in the company doubted the fact, and felt hotly indignant in their different ways. One of them was Miss Winchester, who sat bolt upright, and worked at her lace as if she were working for a wager. Santerre looked on with something of the same feelings, though otherwise expressed. Was this all that life was to come to? he thought—life, and love, and passion, and all that poets had feigned, brought down to a decorous interview, with the whole family looking on. He felt disposed to the "hollow laugh" of Byronic scorn. Mélanie, too, was a little doubtful as she lifted her sweet eyes furtively to see what was to be seen. There was very little to be seen; but then Mélanie's whole soul was moved in one flow of sympathy for her sister. She could scarcely keep those sweet caressing words, "Mon Hélène bien-aimée, ma pauvre chère, ma douce petite sœur!" from dropping out of her lips, or the tears out of her eyes.

This was all that was said in the short *tête-à-tête* which interested so many spectators:

"Mademoiselle Hélène loves to be occupied, I see. How pretty it is, this lace! it is a charming fashion. My mother might have saved some of her old lace had she known how to work like this. She gave a whole parure, I have been told, to ornament the altar where I made my first communion."

"It was well employed," said Hélène with effusion. "I have heard of Madame your mother, M. de Mondroit—that she is so pious and so good to the poor."

"She is very good," said Henri; "they all love her at Mondroit. I hope Mademoiselle Hélène might find her agreeable were they to meet. There is a something, an expression, which makes a resemblance between you. The good always, I think, resemble each other. You love the country too? You prefer your old château, n'est-ce pas, Mademoiselle Hélène?"

"Yes," said Hélène, with momentary hesitation; and then feeling that she was, as it were, on her trial, and that absolute truth was necessary, she added with a voice that faltered slightly, "but, Monsieur, if I must be quite sincere, I must tell you that I love Paris too. I like to go a little into the world—not too much—not from one ball to another, and from one soirée to another, like some ladies; but still I should be false if I did not tell you that I am fond of Paris too."

"Mais c'est adorable!" cried the young man; and then he said, with all the respect and devotion which became his circumstances, "In this, if I may venture to say so, we agree perfectly; that is exactly my own feeling. A little of Paris—the opera and the theatre and the world—and then Mondroit—I mean, pardon me, the country, where one was born; and one's old friends, and that *vie de famille* which is the most perfect, the most delicious! How happy I am to feel myself so entirely in harmony with a belle âme like that of Mademoiselle Hélène!"

"Hélène, chérie, come and make tea for us," said the clear voice of the Countess from the other end of the room. They thought she was cruel; but Madame de Champfleuri knew exactly what was right to be done. And the gentle Hélène rose without a moment's hesitation and poured out the tea; which was very weak stuff, I am obliged to confess, and filled Miss Winchester with mighty contempt for French imperfection. And thus the wooing was done. The most charming thrill and flutter of youthful sentiment was in the heads and hearts of the two when they separated, and when M. de Mondroit ventured to kiss the hand of his fiancée after he had kissed her mother's.

III.

"But she is charming—she is adorable!" cried Henri. "And you, what shall I call you?—man without heart, without sympathy! how shall I teach you to feel as I do? Douce Hélène! ange de ma vie! I tell you she is divine!"

"And I tell you you know nothing about her," said Santerre the prosaic. "A few hours ago, mon cher, you knew her not at all. Say that it is a pleasant connection, that you wish for a wife, that she is suitable—I will believe you; but in love!—in love with a girl who has not spoken ten words to you——"

"They were such words," said the lover; "all a poem was in them. She told me of her love for the country and 'home.' That word of your English friends, I allow, has something sweet in it." (It is terrible to be compelled to add that he pronounced it "'ome.") "'Ome! Avec toi, mon Hélène! But fearing that I should be prosaic as thee, Achille, cette ange made haste to add that she was not all angelic—that she loved the world and gaiety and *bruit*, and even Paris. She would not have me think her other than she was; she said, 'I will conceal nothing from you; you have a right to know. I love my 'ome and my beautiful country—but I love the world too.'"

"That was candid, at least," said Santerre.

"Candid!—it was adorable—it was angelic! What more would you have had Innocence say?"

"I should like my Innocence to say a great deal more," said the sulky friend.

The reader will judge with what precision M. de Mondroit gave his report of the circumstances. Santerre was partially melted by the honesty of Hélène's avowal; and yet, being in a perverse condition generally, comparing her with his ideal, he concluded that she had said too much as well as too little. It was not what he would wish to have said to himself. Was it, perhaps, he wondered, what that other one with the sweet eyes and shadowy looks would say? That one—what did they call her? Marianne? Madeleine? Mélanie? Yes, Mélanie—something beginning with an M, he was sure.

"My mother will be enchanted. *Pauvre bonne mère!* now she will have some one who can understand her—who will make her happy. I should have supposed you had more interest in human nature, Achille, if nothing more. Let us suppose that you do not care for me; yet the sight of one happy as I am, and of that delicious *blanche créature* in her white robe, opening like a flower——"

"How do you know she is opening like a flower?"

"But I see!" cried Henri. "I breathe the fragrance; I have the use of my eyes. If you will not either smoke or sympathise, mon ami, go to bed, I entreat of you, and leave me to dream. Though it is only ten words, as you say, it is enough for a million dreams!"

The answer Santerre made was to light his cigar. It was extremely shocking and dreadful, I am aware, but they meant no harm. They were in Henri's bed-chamber: a long, large room, with two deeply-recessed windows, very lofty and not very light. The

curtains at the windows were scanty, and not meant to draw. There was a rug before the fire, but no carpet. The polished glistening floor, the white-panelled walls, were cold as the frozen moat outside, out of which the château rose in all its solid strength. Henri left the side of the stove for a moment, and threw open the closed shutter, letting the moonlight shine in. The moon shone white over a wilderness of snow, which had a white cold ghostly loveliness of its own; but the moonlight of a summer midnight would have suited better with Henri's state of mind. He came back shivering to the stove and took his seat by it, turning his back upon the night. But he had left the way open to a broad flood of moonlight which came in and filled the recess of the window, and marked itself out on the glistening floor in a great square of whiteness. Henri, turning his back, did not see this silent invasion of the natural and supernatural. Santerre, however, saw it, and somehow it softened him towards his friend's imbecility. It made him think not of Henri's "*blanche créature*," but perhaps of the other one, the shadowy maiden who was associated with her. And accordingly they sat half the night together smoking their cigars, talking of all that was past and all that was to come.

In Hélène's room there was another scene not dissimilar. Madame de Champfleuri had spared her daughter any questioning. She had read in Hélène's face all that was necessary, and had dismissed her with a kiss into Mélanie's sole society. The two sisters had shared the same room since ever they could remember. Their studies, their readings, all their girlish life, had passed in it. It was more to them than an English girl's bedchamber ever is to her. From the Madonna who stood with uplifted hands blessing their maiden existence from her pretty shrine against the wall, down to the cushions of needlework in their chairs, every pretty thing they possessed was in this place, where they spent so much of their lives. When they were left alone, Hélène drew Mélanie softly to the great window, which was full of the same moonlight. A woman in her hour of romance is always open to natural influences. She hung upon her sister's shoulder, and whispered all that had passed into her ear. "He told me of his mother," said Hélène. "That good Madame de Mondroit; and how good he is! to hear him speak of his mother is too beautiful. He says we resemble each other. Mélanie!" and here she held her sister tight with a sudden clasp, "I am going to be happy. I feel it. *Je vais être heureuse.*"

"Ma douce Hélène!" said Mélanie, with many kisses. "Ma chère petite sœur!" Her sympathy was a great deal more ready than that of Santerre. She listened to every word of that brief conversation over and over, and found it interesting; but her heart, too, was stirred with vague suggestions of an agitation which was different from that of Hélène. And when Hélène had said her prayers, and had gone sweetly to sleep, with a little flush of unusual colour on her cheek, her sister, in her white dressing-gown, went and had a last look at the moonlight. "Notwithstanding—" said Mélanie to herself; though the tear of sympathetic feeling was still in her eye.

Things went on after this much as they do everywhere when two young people have got so far in the pleasant path of mutual inclination. These young people were always perfectly reasonable. Their walks and their talks were not protracted affairs, tedious to everybody but themselves. Madame de Champfleuri knew exactly what was *convenable* in this respect, and kept everything in perfect proportion; and the docility of the gentle Hélène, which might have provoked some lovers, filled M. de Mondroit with ever-increasing admiration. Everything was arranged and settled between the high contracting parties; the day of the marriage; the residence of the young couple; and even other matters quite prospective. When everybody is agreed, it is a pleasure to make all one's little dispositions, M. de Champfleuri remarked, after he had ascertained a point that he was anxious about—to wit, as near as possible the *chiffre* of the possessions of the rich uncle in Normandy. He was a hopeful man, and he would listen to no unfavourable auguries in respect to this venerable relation. "Marry? pshaw! *pas si bête*," said M. le Comte. "At his age, and with a promising young nephew like Henri, aspiring to a connection with a family such as that of Champfleuri, it would be a crime; and few people are so abandoned as to become criminal in their old age." As for Madame de Champfleuri, though she refused to reckon the uncle, she was tolerably satisfied with the Baron's other revenues. "Had the Champfleuris been what they were once, our daughter should never have married into a rank below her father's; but what then? We cannot accomplish impossibilities. M. le Baron has principles and sentiments of which I perfectly approve, and his means are enough

'or comfort," the Comtesse informed her riends. And there was not one dissentient voice as to the eligibility of both parties, and :he perfectly satisfactory character of the whole arrangement. "Now that your mind s easy about Hélène, you will be able to give all your attention to the settlement of Mélanie," one of the Comtesse's friends said :o her. "I will do what I can," said Madame de Champfleuri, "to discharge my duty equally to both my girls; but you understand there are differences of disposi-ion to be considered—differences of tem-perament." She would not for the world have confessed what was the truth, that Mélanie was a great uneasiness to her, showing inclinations to think for herself, and none of that docility which was the charm of the gentle Hélène.

The marriage took place in spring, three months after the first introduction which we have described. In the meantime the course of that gentle love ran perfectly smooth. They had one little quarrel which was kept up for two days, and which Hélène afterwards confessed was very exciting and the best part of the whole. But such dramatic episodes, though they enliven life, are not, as she wisely reflected, life itself; and Hélène's mind was fully and most seriously occupied with her trousseau, with her correspondence, and with all the little arrangements she had to make for the performance of the filial duties she could no longer attend to. "You will write mamma's notes, Mélanie," she said to her sister; "but I fear you will not be careful about all the *nuances* of the little words. Mamma is very careful in such matters. She does not say 'ma très-chère' to everybody, as we do. And you, Mélanie, you are not thoughtful; you will say '*mon aimable amie*' when you ought to be more familiar, and '*ma toute bonne*' to Madame la Duchesse de Haute-Maison. Yes, poor petite mamma, and poor Mélanie, you will both want me. And you will forget which part of the journal to read to papa while he takes his coffee. One's parents do not like to tell one the same things every day. But do not cry, Mélanie. Your eyes will be red for to-morrow, and we have still so much to do——"

"Mon Hélène! ma petite sœur!" said Mélanie, with many tears. It was the eve of the wedding, and the poor child's heart was full. But Hélène was gently tranquil, as she had been on the much more agitating evening when M. le Baron made his first appearance. That moment of deepest importance had indeed shaken her composure a little, but now everything was straightforward. She knew her duty, and the only thing was to do it. There was a great gathering of all the relations, to whom, however, we must not venture to introduce the reader. They were all excellent persons, and many of them interesting in their way; but in the poor little page which is allowed to us, how shall we produce these ornaments of society with the importance which is their due? Clotilde was of course one of the party, but in an anxious and depressed state of mind, which interfered with her enjoyment of the occasion. "Figure to yourself that though the one in Provence happily turned out ineligible, there is another with whom they threaten me," she said. "This Monsieur is of La Beauce; he has cornfields to fill the world. If it were not that I trusted in my holy patroness, and the good and blessed Virgin, I should die. But you will see, mes très-chères, something will happen. I shall be delivered once more."

But alas! we cannot enter further into all these maidenly confidences, or into the last words and legacies of a hundred little duties which Hélène made to Mélanie; nor can we describe the visit to the Mairie, with M. le Maire in his scarf and all his pomp, making Henri de Mondroit and Hélène de Champfleuri legally one; nor the more imposing and real ceremony next day, when Monseigneur himself delivered an address to the happy couple, recalling to them all the souvenirs of their respective families, and entreating them to walk in the footsteps of those noble and *digne* parents who had given them so beautiful an example, and of that *sainte dame* who awaited them in their future home. Monseigneur was famed for addresses of this description, and he was himself affected, and moved all the world when he spoke of the virtues of the Comte and Comtesse, and of all the admirable ancestry of both parties, who had left such an example to their descendants. Everything was bright for the young pair—lovely spring weather, clear skies, flowers and blessings; and M. le Curé radiant and congratulatory, and Monseigneur the bishop making his charming little address. It was printed afterwards for private circulation on glazed paper with gilt edges, and the young Baroness de Mondroit has always considered it a masterpiece of eloquence. Even Miss Winchester, when she wrote an account of it to her friends in England, was obliged to confess that everything went off beautifully, and

that the bride was charming, and the bridegroom all that could be desired. The gentle Hélène went away with her husband into her new home with the intention of being a very good daughter to her new mother, in a tender flush of sentiment, dutiful, affectionate, happy, and sweet. Perhaps there was not much passion in the matter; but then passion would have been considered extremely inappropriate both by Madame la Comtesse de Champfleuri and Henri de Mondroit—who were the two persons most chiefly considered.

"Cependant—" said Mélanie.

PART II.—UN MARIAGE ROMANESQUE.

I.

After the marriage of Hélène the family of Champfleuri relapsed into quiet. Whether the Comtesse was exhausted with her exertions, or whether she thought Mélanie young enough to leave her at leisure for a time, or whether Mélanie herself, who was certainly fantastical and indulged in notions, was the cause of this lull, nobody exactly knew. There were many persons who thought Madame de Champfleuri exceedingly remiss in her maternal duties. "She has married one daughter—bien!" said these critics, "but she has still a daughter to marry; and unless there is some private arrangement of which the world knows nothing, it is unheard of that the Champfleuris should return to their château, and give themselves up to that vie de campagne, which is no doubt delightful to the old and weary, but death alive to the young; and where, we should like to know, does she expect to find a husband for Melanie?" "Husbands are not picked up in ploughed fields like turnips!" cried the more indignant. There were others, however, who belonged to the circle in which the Champfleuris moved, who cried "Hush!" and whispered to each other little phrases, in which the words *entêtée* and *romanesque* invariably occurred. These critics smiled, but they smiled kindly; for, to tell the truth, to be romantic as well as to be religious has become an evidence of high breeding and good taste among the highest circles in France. A member of the old noblesse can do nothing more admirable, more popular, than to marry for love, to live like a patriarch in his old castle, and to have fifteen children—in short, to do exactly what his grandfather would have thought plebeian, if not *épicier*. Such is the revolution of the times! The old noblesse used to be corrupt and the people simple and good, so far as any mass of people are ever good and simple; but the times have changed, and now it is the marquises and dukes who have succeeded to the peasants' virtues, while the peasant himself emulates the grand seigneur of pre-revolution times. Accordingly, the Faubourg, which the Champfleuris had abandoned for the country, had a tenderness for Mélanie, who was romantic, and took an interest in her, even though it gently condemned her mother for yielding to the *petite's* fanciful notions. "So long as it does not go too far!" they said. When, however, Mélanie approached twenty without being married, the world in general began to feel that it was going too far. What did the Comtesse mean by giving in to her? A daughter of a good house, and with no reasonable cause to prevent her from marrying, yet at twenty unmarried, unbetrothed, and nobody taking any trouble about her! Romance is good; it is a mark of delicate feeling, of fine sensibility, of taste and noble blood; but then it ought not to go too far. At seventeen, bien! but at twenty it certainly was the duty of the family to interfere.

This was the text upon which Madame Charles preached many effective little sermons, when the second spring came round after Hélène's marriage, and not even the initial step had been taken by way of marrying Mélanie. "I comprehend," said Madame Charles, "that in England there is no objection that a young girl should remain unmarried. It is the custom of the country. But here it is not so. Figure to yourself that our Mélanie is twenty! I have had the pleasure of mentioning to you, ma sœur, three different gentlemen, any one of whom would have been a match perfectly well assorted. But time passes, and nothing is done."

"Ma sœur, it is true! alas, it is true!" said Madame de Champfleuri. She shrugged her shoulders, and an anxious wrinkle in her forehead grew deeper. "Nothing can exceed the bounty you have had for my daughter; but que voulez-vous? Mélanie is a fool. She will do nothing that it is right for a young girl to do. Am I a tyrant, to force my child to marry a man whom she hates? You ask, and with reason, how does she know she will hate them till she sees them? But no! to make her listen to reason is impossible. I tell her that when she is older she will be compelled to throw herself into the chasse aux

maris, like the English, or not to marry at all."

"And she replies——?"

"That she will not marry, then, at all. Figure it to yourself! I think of nothing else night and day. Imagine a Mademoiselle de Champfleuri at sixty! It is monstrous —nay, it is an anachronism! It belongs to the ancien régime."

"Without even a vocation!" said Madame Charles, "which was something, and consoled the family. My aunt and my grand-aunt were both Ursulines at Saint-Pierre; but Mélanie is not made for a religious life; she has no vocation. I do not understand what she means."

The Comtesse shrugged her shoulders once more. She was more perplexed than any

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one else as to what Mélanie could mean, and she was worse than perplexed—she was baffled. It was the first time in her life that this had happened to Madame de Champfleuri. She had always succeeded hitherto in her undertakings. She had married her son and her daughter, and no one had rebelled against her will; and when first she met with Mélanie's resistance she was petrified; but by this time she had become accustomed to it. Mélanie resisted persistently, would not see any one, declined even to hear of the suitable *partis* whom Madame Charles had heard of. In France, parents are not in the way of seriously crossing their children. When such a tremendous accident happens as that a child resists the matrimonial or other arrangements made for it, there is a

terrible commotion; but after a while, in ordinary cases, the parents give in; and so it had been here. The Comtesse was ashamed of her own dereliction of duty, and felt herself wanting in courage and pertinacity. She said to herself that it was shameful to sacrifice Mélanie's interests to her whims, and felt that she dared not compromise herself with all her friends by confessing to them that the girl's romantic scruples had thus set at nought all the traditions of French society; but notwithstanding she gave in somewhat bitterly and grimly. She yielded against her will, against her principles; and even Madame Charles, whose criticism was especially obnoxious to her sister-in-law, had it in her power to twit her with failure. She was at the mercy of her friends; she deserved all that could be said to her; Mélanie was twenty, and no arrangements for her marriage had as yet reached even the most preliminary stage!

As for Mélanie herself, she was in a gently pensive, but on the whole happy state of mind. She had no particular desire to be married. She did not want to be at liberty to read naughty novels, and go to opera balls. She had a great many simple pleasures, which quite satisfied her. She was fond of her father and mother, as a great many girls are everywhere; and though she liked her brother-in-law, Henri de Mondroit, very much, and knew that Hélène was a happy wife, yet this romantic young person looked down upon that unromantic match with condescending pity and a gentle contempt. Yes; it suited Hélène very well, no one could doubt that; but it would not suit Mélanie. To live unmarried was nothing; but to have a marriage arranged for one, without love, without choice—*ciel!* Mélanie felt that she would rather die; and as twenty, after all, is not a very advanced age, she did not feel herself on the wane, as her anxious friends began to do. If it had not been for her mother's cautious overtures about one after another of Madame Charles's *partis*, Mélanie would have thought no more on the subject of marriage than other well-conditioned girls do; that is, she would have felt in her gentle soul a delicious possibility, throwing a soft haze of brightness over every day, more or less, of her life—that on that day something might happen to her, somebody appear who should decide her fate, some new, unknown, entrancing sentiment take possession of her heart, making its soft beatings audible, sensible, and filling her soft existence with warmth and colour unknown before. This was all she would have felt on the subject; and it is a very pleasant state of feeling, the tender expectation of the morning, the sweet consciousness of a sweeter something yet to come. But since Hélène's marriage, this gentle visionary thrill of romance had acquired a deeper tone by the fact that she was consciously resisting the fate of Hélène. She was, to her own knowledge, almost a heroine, holding that maiden fortress of her heart against all mercenary or conventional assaults—holding it for the enchanted prince who was coming, and sometimes warming into a poetical enthusiasm for him, though she did not know who he was.

In all this she was of course abetted by Miss Winchester. I don't know that the subject was ever mentioned between them, but Mélanie had learned many English ideas on the subject. Having Miss Winchester by her side to carry on visionary arguments with, and her father and mother to serve and wait upon in a hundred delightful filial ways, and her garden, and her friends, and her poor people in the village, and her share of pleasures in Paris, such pleasures as are permissible to the much-cared-for maiden, and which were quite enough for her—Mélanie led a very happy life, and had no desire to change it. I cannot penetrate further into her modest secrets; perhaps she had a little thrill of recollection among her other gentle emotions, and occasionally felt as if she had seen in some vision a glimpse of her knight who was coming, and had a kind of notion what colour his eyes were, and remembered one particular wave of his hair.

Whether this might be the case or not in respect to Mélanie, it certainly was the case with another person, whose ideal had come to bear her likeness ever since the time of Hélène's marriage. Achille de Santerre had not gone away from the château of Saint-Martin without carrying something with him which he had not meant to take, but which clung to him with curious tenacity. He did not want to marry any more than Mélanie did, and chiefly for the same reason. He too was romantic. I think he would have come to England and married here, had he not felt a slight jar of reality, out of keeping with his ideal, when he had visited our island, and heard young Englishmen talk of young Englishwomen in a way not quite consistent with that universal sway of pure love, apart from all questions of interest and family arrangements, which in his enthusiasm for English virtue he would fain have believed

in. To hear of girls who were trying to "catch" men, and of men who had been successfully entrapped and hunted down was even more terrible to the young Frenchman than were the discussions about *dot*, and how much *biens* on one side should mate with so much on the other, to which he was accustomed at home. He had long determined, accordingly, not to marry at all, unless—a possibility, which seemed very faint and far-off, yet occupied his mind more than he would have liked to acknowledge—he should some day find some one whom he would win to love him by himself and for himself alone. After his visit to the Champfleuris this some one identified herself somehow in a curious way. She became more real, and she took to herself Mélanie's face. This, the reader will say, was a great step in advance, and ought to have decided him at once. But alas! dear reader, that is all you know about it. How was he to proceed? To communicate his wishes to the father and mother, accompanied by a statement of his possessions to be balanced against those of the young lady; and then to be presented to Mélanie as her *futur*, and to be accepted by her as Hélène had accepted Mondroit? —No! a hundred times no! He would rather never see her face again, or that of any woman, than have her put into his arms in this way; and the poor young fellow did not know what else to do. Boldly to offer himself to Mélanie in his own proper person, or to write to her boldly, in an independent way, through the post, would have been to transgress every precedent and outrage every tradition. He might have made Hélène his friend, to be sure, and approached her sister through her; but Hélène had no notion of those over-refinements, and would have conducted the affair, as her mother would, as a matter of business. Neither would Henri have understood him had he laid bare to him the delicate distress of his soul. "Mon ami, you need not fear a bad reception. In every point of view you were made for each other. I will see my belle-mère at once," the good Henri would have said, and driven his friend frantic. So what was he to do? Had he been passionately, madly in love, probably he would have risked it; but being as yet only fancifully, longingly in love, the very idea shocked, revolted, and made him flee. If he could win her to love him, that would be happiness indeed; but how, or when, or where, or by what means was he to do this? Poor Santerre, being somewhat destitute of invention, and knowing the hopelessness of all those bold strokes which make the fortune of an English lover, could not tell what to do.

But in the meantime he did what is next best in every difficulty of life, when you cannot do what you want to do—he did his duty in the way in which that duty is interpreted by the pure-minded and highly-principled young French noble of the time, who, wavering between Legitimatism and Orleanism, and shut out to a great extent from public life, is more anxiously alive to all the theoretical difficulties and dangers of his age than perhaps he would have leisure to be had he more practical means of solving and providing against them. The time of which I speak was the time of the Empire, when men of Santerre's mind were almost completely shut out from any share in the government of their country. He would not attempt to enter the Chamber, even had there been a chance of his success against a Government candidate, for he had no heart for the expedients of fruitless opposition, and still less desire to carry out the intentions of an absolute ruler, whose title and whose cause he altogether disowned and disapproved So what remained for a young man of ability and ambition to do but to write a book upon an important social subject, according to the example set by Princes of the Blood? This accordingly was what he did. He wrote his book not as we others do, dear reader, whose trade it is to write books, and who live by amusing you or instructing you, just as the architect lives by building houses for you, or the farmer by growing corn for your daily bread. Achille de Santerre did not write in this way. He took up his pen in the same spirit as his ancestor, the Crusader, had set lance in rest. Whether his book brought him in twopence-halfpenny of profit, or whether it cost him the half of his year's income, he did not much care. It was his *essai d'armes*, his first battle, his proof of knighthood. The subject he chose was an important question touching the working classes, their tendencies, their habits, the causes of that democratic heat which is always fermenting among them, and which is so great a danger for France; with some very weighty chapters touching the rural population, whose attitude is thought by some people to be even more alarming for the country than that of the citizens. The book was very eloquent, full of enthusiasm and philanthropy, and sympathy for the people, and that visionary passion for liberty which burns so warmly in the bosom of the enlightened young

Frenchman of Santerre's class. The English reader is not much acquainted, I fear, with this kind of man, and may be disposed to smile at a new type so different from all the ordinary notions of a noble young Frenchman; but still it is a true, if a new, type of that old *noblesse* which has borne so many reproaches and deserved so many, which has suffered so much and inflicted so much suffering, and which now includes within its ancient ranks the purest families, the most high-principled individuals that France can boast of, and which any country might be proud to own. They fell by hundreds in the late war, glad of the chance of doing anything for their country; and if they only were as wise as they are good and true, it would be well for France and for the world. I am not sure that Santerre was very wise. He had a kind of traditionary faith in Henri Cinq, and tried with all his might to shut the eyes of his understanding, and not perceive that that king of ghosts was in reality the owl he has proved himself to be. The Orleans family were more in his way, and indeed he was himself formed, without knowing it, on the model of that clever and most respectable house; but yet he felt a want of enterprise in them, and sighed, without allowing it to himself, for a little less respectability, a little more passion, in those model princes. Thus he had not the advantage of being devoted with his whole heart to any party, but saw the deficiencies even of those for whom, had it been necessary, he would have spent his fortune, and shed his blood with all the traditionary ardour of a *fils de croisé*. Perhaps I am saying too much about Achille de Santerre, who was himself an example of the feebleness of enterprise he deplored in others, and who all this time fancifully worshipped the recollection of Mélanie de Champfleuri, without attempting or knowing how to attempt to get any nearer to her. But Providence helps those (sometimes) who do their duty. He wrote his book with the highest and noblest meaning, and a supreme and sincere desire to serve France; and he served himself without knowing it, as shall be seen.

The book was a very good book, full of fervour, youth, and beautiful intentions, and faith in humankind, especially in French humankind, the most intelligent and sympathetic (as Santerre thought) of all races. It made a reputation. It was reviewed in the *Revue de Deux Mondes* (what could writer wish for more?), and noticed in the English *Times*, and discussed, at once as an able book, and a curious sign of the exigencies of the age, which sent a chivalrous young Frenchman to poke into strikes and workmen's societies, and to unravel the foolish politics of the cottage and the cabaret. The rural chapters were indeed recognised by everybody as full of real knowledge and discrimination, and all the critics remarked upon the eloquence of several passages in which the past and the present were contrasted—and some of them sneered at, while some commended, the enthusiasm which the young writer displayed for those influences of religion and tradition which had unfortunately lost so much of their potency, and for the good curé and the kind seigneur, whose places he (naturally) thought no new functionary could fitly fill. Alas! the pleasant superstition of the kind seigneur has been so rudely broken up in France by the Revolution, that the enthusiast has to go a long way back before he can make any stand upon that delightful imagination. But the Revolution, like all other blind revenges, was as cruelly unjust in individual cases as it was cruelly deserved in others; and a young writer like Santerre could find many a tender and delightful picture of French rural life to contrast with the present day, as indeed the slave-owner himself could find many a patriarchal family scene to give the lie to the cruel pictures which suited the Abolitionist. Santerre's book had, by right of his name and its subject, access to many a noble house in France not usually curious of the literature of the day; and Henri de Mondroit himself, in the enthusiasm of friendship, sent a copy to the Champfleuris, asking if they recollected his friend, who all at once had made himself famous? "Yes, mamma, I recollect M. de Santerre perfectly well," said Mélanie, with gentle seriousness. "If you wish it, I will read to you the chapters Henri has marked." "Certainly, petite," said Madame la Comtesse; "it is a duty one owes to one's friends;" and she took her worsted-work while Melanie read. This reading took place in Madame de Champfleuri's room, in the afternoon of a rainy day. She got up now and then to look from the great window to see if the rain had stopped, or to throw a new log on the fire, or to get a different shade of silk; and even called up Jacqueline in the midst of the reading, to say something which she had forgotten to say in the morning about the great family wash, which was to take place next week—all of which incidents were very trying to Mélanie, whose heart was beating, whose eyes were

lighting up, whose veins felt fuller, and her very fingers warmer, while she thus made acquaintance with the sentiments of that other human being in whom, despite of herself, she was conscious of feeling an interest. She had not read two pages, notwithstanding these interruptions, when that sudden acceleration took place in the beating of her heart. How noble it was, how true, how warm and full of life! Mélanie blushed all over when she took up the book and carried it off, almost secretly, to her own room; for it was not a book to her, but a sudden communication to herself out of the unknown. She sat up half the night reading it, lighting her candle again with a delicious sense of guilt after Madame de Champfleuri had gone to bed. The Comtesse thought it was very good, and showed excellent principles; but still the great family wash was more important; and she had not a notion why it was that Mélanie's eyes were so bright and her colour so brilliant on that especial evening. "She grows prettier every day," Madame de Champfleuri said, with a sigh, to the confidential Jacqueline. What was the good of it? when she did not venture so much as to speak of that admirable young man, with a magnificent château on the Loire, and connections entirely *comme il faut*, who had lately been mentioned to her as the most desirable of husbands? And the child had not even a vocation, which might in some degree have explained a state of mind so foolish and unprecedented. But I think the Comtesse would have been deeply shocked had she known how fast Mélanie's heart was beating over that book of Santerre's.

II.

It happened just at this time that Miss Winchester took it into her head to pay a visit to a friend in Paris; or rather I should say, to begin at the beginning, put it into the head of the friend who lived in the Rue de l'Université to invite Miss Winchester. The Champfleuris themselves were going to Paris later in the spring, but Miss Winchester preceded them just after Christmas. She too had read Santerre's book, and though she received it with less enthusiasm than Mélanie, from various reasons—amongst other things because she had no such faith in the French nation as the writer had, but regarded the race with British scepticism—yet she was quite willing to confess its ability, and not at all reluctant to say that she knew M. de Santerre, who was the lion of the moment, and had divined before he became famous, that there was a great deal in him. Who does not like to be able to say this, when such an opportunity occurs? M. de Santerre was for the moment so great a lion that the reputation of knowing him, procured for Miss Winchester and her friend an invitation to a well-known salon in Paris, where a little old fairy lady, illustrious by no right but that of *esprit*, convokes about her all the notables that are afloat at whatsoever season. If I said much about this lady, though she is well worth describing, the reader who knows Paris would think he recognised the description, which is not my meaning. In this old lady's little old rooms Miss Winchester had the felicity of presenting herself, along with all the best people in the Faubourg and the cleverest people in Paris, to meet M. de Santerre. She was a little afraid that the young author might have forgotten her, and so fail to ratify her modest boast of having known him before he was famous; but Miss Winchester's gratification was very deep and heart-felt when she found herself fully justified in her boast by a recognition which was not friendly merely, but enthusiastic, from Santerre. He found her out at once, and devoted himself to her with such warmth, that this most worthy woman asked herself for a moment whether it was possible that she, middle-aged and sober-minded as she was, could have exercised an inadvertent fascination over the young man? The idea was a passing one, dismissed immediately—but still when a middle-aged lady of no social position or pretensions is sought out by the lion of a fashionable assembly it is gratifying, and lights up everything with a favourable light.

"We have been reading your book, M. de Santerre," said Miss Winchester, seizing the opportunity to pay him back for the pleasure he had given her in his warm salutations. "Nothing has made so much commotion at Saint-Martin since I have been there."

"Ah!" he said, with his eyes lighting up. "You have too much bounty for me. I am proud to have excited a little interest—in an important subject——"

"Nonsense!" said Miss Winchester, who prided herself upon plain-speaking, "what do they care about your subject? Oh!—I? Yes, I am different; I am of course very much interested; but it is you and not your subject that interests the others. Naturally; for to know a distinguished author is delightful—but you could not expect, for instance, that a young girl like Mélanie could take a very deep interest in the colliers' strike."

"Ah!" said Santerre again, with a softened glow in his eyes and a mellowing of all his looks which his companion scarcely understood, "does Mademoiselle de Champfleuri then condescend to take an interest——"

"Now that is a thing I never can endure in you French," said Miss Winchester; "you know very well that a girl cannot be acquainted with the subject, and that her opinion one way or other is of no importance, and yet you speak of her as condescending to take an interest! Of course she takes an interest! Of course she is quite proud of having known you. She has copied out I don't know how many passages into her common-place book. I tell her she is a little crazy on the subject, and that it is only great and well-known authors who should have so much honour done them."

"You are right; you are right," said Santerre, with glowing eyes; "but really—actually——? Nay, you must not laugh at me. Of course it is only a pleasantry, and you do not mean this."

"I mean every word of it," said Miss Winchester. "The Comtesse thinks it extremely clever too, and as for Madame Charles, she quotes you continually, and tells us that she saw quite clearly that you had genius, and were totally unlike other young men."

This was very flattering, no doubt, but Santerre's interest visibly flagged, and Miss Winchester saw it; so she added at once, beginning to catch a glimpse of the real state of affairs, "But it is the young reader who is the most enthusiastic. Mélanie, you know—of course you are a friend of the family, M. de Santerre, or I would not speak of her. I know it is stupid to talk of individuals who are mere acquaintances, and whom you may barely recollect——"

"I recollect all the family at Saint-Martin perfectly well," said, quickly, M. de Santerre.

"Mélanie is very fond of reading—and she has never," said Miss Winchester, fixing her eyes on him, "known a real live author before."

"That is all then?" he said with a little sigh. Then with a short laugh and rising colour, feeling that he had betrayed himself, he added, "Don't take from me all hopes of having left a little amitié, a pleasant recollection at Saint-Martin. I assure you I have always had the warmest gratitude for the—kindness that was shown me—for the—friendly feeling——"

Here the poor young fellow paused and looked at her, appealing to her to help him out; and though he was the lion and Miss Winchester nobody, she felt at once the delight of superiority, and that he was in her power.

"Why then," she said, "did you never come again? The Count is very hospitable, he would have been delighted to see you. Why did you never come again?"

Poor Santerre! so far from helping him out, this question confused him doubly, and closed his lips. What could he say? In the midst of this crowded *salon*, where all the world was watching him, could he throw himself upon Miss Winchester's benevolence, at her feet as it were? He could not do this. He sighed and said, "How I should like to do so!" but dared no more.

"If you would like to do so, come," said the lady; "we should all be proud. The entire district would be asked to meet you, and Madame de Champfleuri would have the gratification of leaving out the Prefect, who is literary himself and would feel it very much. You should come if it were for nothing but to give her this pleasure."

Santerre looked at her again. "I have no excuse, no reason," he said, half to himself; and then he added, "Will you let me come and see you—in Paris, where you are staying? That will be true friendship. I have so many things to say——"

"Certainly, with the greatest pleasure," said Miss Winchester, delighted. "Rue de l'Université, number eighty-three, *au second*. We shall be enchanted to see you, my friend and I."

And very much enchanted the friend was, who kissed Miss Winchester, and felt that the angel whom she was entertaining was about to introduce her to the very highest society. Madame Taupé's salon to-night, M. de Santerre as a visitor to-morrow! nothing could be more delightful. But when M. de Santerre came to call for the first time, his visit was disappointing. The friend stayed by them all the time, meaning to have her share of the distinguished visitor; and they talked of the Mondroits and their château, and their baby, and of the eccentricities of Clotilde de Vert-Prés, Madame de Champfleuri's Flemish niece, and of the Comte and Comtesse themselves—of everything indeed but Mélanie. Miss Winchester felt that she had been too frank in respect to Mélanie, and kept a judicious silence. As for Santerre, he paid a long visit, but did not seem to enjoy it, and Miss Winchester's friend declared openly that she had often before heard that authors were quite uninteresting, but had never fully believed it

till now; and the visit was felt on all sides to be a failure. "M. de Santerre called on me to-day," Miss Winchester wrote to her pupil, "and it is quite astonishing that a man who can write so well should be so uninteresting in himself. He made a pause of five minutes, I am sure, between every remark, and hummed and hawed and hesitated, and looked as if he wanted to say something and didn't, and altogether appeared quite stupid. I cannot think how it was, for he did not give me the impression of being stupid when he was at Saint-Martin two years ago. I suppose he has put all his brains into his book." This letter did not give Mélanie any satisfaction, and it lowered her opinion of Miss Winchester's discrimination. Who could doubt that if the young author appeared uninteresting it must be entirely his interlocutor's fault?

However, two mornings after, before the twelve o'clock breakfast, which is the time when prudent housewives in Paris go out to do their shopping and look after the markets, a moment when only intimate friends dare venture to call upon each other, Santerre suddenly appeared in the Rue de l'Université. He told Miss Winchester, completely gaining her heart by the flattering certainty, that he felt secure of finding an Englishwoman ready to receive him, even at such an early hour, though he would not have ventured to intrude upon the *déshabillé* of one of his own countrywomen. Miss Winchester, I need not say, was proudly conscious of the integrity of her cuffs and collar, and knew herself to be incapable of being slipshod at any hour. And then he talked to her amusingly of her home at Saint-Martin, and beguiled her to tell him about herself, that true talisman to everybody's heart. She opened up quite unconsciously on this inducement, and related to him her life with the Champfleuris, and how kind they were on the whole, though not always understanding of an Englishwoman's necessities, and how Mélanie had always been her favourite pupil, and what a trial it would be to leave her when the inevitable moment came. "But, fortunately for me, she won't hear of marriage," Miss Winchester said, half laughing, half crying. "When Madame Charles talks of *dots* and *partis* you should see Mélanie's looks; and, though she is the best child in the world, nothing will induce her to be talked into a match as Hélène was. Oh yes, Hélène's marriage has turned out very well. Happy accidents happen sometimes as well as unhappy ones. But Mélanie will never marry like that. I am sure I don't want her to remain single like myself," said the governess, "for of course marriage has its advantages, and in France especially a single woman has a great deal to bear. But I can't help being pleased in the meantime that she is in no hurry to marry. It must come some time, and it will be a great struggle to part with her when it comes."

"Dear Miss Winchester, how full of kindness you are! And I feel for you with all my heart," said the deceiver by her side. He was so much in earnest and so sorry for her, that she thought the tears were in his eyes.

"It is very hard when one thinks of it for persons in my position," said Miss Winchester, feeling the moisture start into her own. "We throw ourselves into the very life of a child and give her everything, brains, and love, and all one has—as much as a mother does or more sometimes—and then, when the time comes, we have to part with her as if she were nothing to us. The mother has to do it too, no doubt, but then whatever happens she always belongs to the mother; but the woman that has trained her is nothing, not a drop's blood, as they say in Scotland, no relation at all, only a governess; though the child may be her very reflection, her making, the image of her. You must allow it is hard."

"It is hard, very hard," said the sympathetic young man. "But if I had anything to do with it," he added, after a pause, "it should not be so. If, for example, such a thing might happen as that it should be—one like myself—who should have the happiness——"

There was no mistaking him now; his eyes were suffused with something—light of love, or tears of feeling, she could not tell which; his face was glowing, the lines of his features moving. Miss Winchester was not an angelic maternal being altogether rapt in the idea of Mélanie. The first thing that struck her was the extreme deceitfulness of his pretended sympathy with herself. It struck her at first painfully, then with a sense of the humour of the position. "So that was all you were thinking of," she cried; "not me at all!" and then she laughed. After all it was more natural that he should be thinking of Mélanie, and when the first prick was over she forgave him.

"Ah, Miss Winchester," he said, "if you were not so good I could not open my heart to you. What can I do? I have wished and prayed that this happiness might be mine for these two years."

"Wishing is all very well," said the governess, "and praying still better, M. de Santerre. But in my country, when a man is of that way of thinking, he does something to show it. He does not content himself with wishes or even prayers."

"What shall I do?" said Santerre. "How can I approach her? Ah! it is very different in England. There one might go to her, one might say—what one longs to say. But if I should never marry at all, I am resolved not to have my wife given to me as Henri de Mondroit had his. She must love me as I love her, or I shall never marry at all."

"And pray how is she to show her feelings?" said Miss Winchester. "Is she to propose to you? Is she to take it into her own hands, and do what you don't venture to do? If you are frightened, do you expect she is bolder? If you dare not pay your addresses to her like a man, what do you suppose *she* can do?"

"Spare me!" said the young man. "I know all you would say, from your point of view; but you don't know France and my country-people as I do. If I could but speak to her, write to her, so as no one in the world but herself should know what I was saying; but Miss Winchester knows that such a thing is impossible here."

Miss Winchester shook her head. "When a man is resolute and determined I don't know what is impossible to him," she said. "We have a song in England which says that whatever may fail, Love will find out the way. You don't think so, M. de Santerre? but that is what people think in England, and I think it is the same all over the world," said the Englishwoman. I am not sure that poor Santerre was sorry when the friend came in fresh from her shopping, and the hour struck for the déjeuner, and he, with many apologies, had to go. For she was too many for him, and had driven him, so to speak, into a corner, and he wanted to think what he was to do.

Next day he went back to her at the same hour. "Dear Miss Winchester," he said, "you are right, and I have made up my mind to a great venture. What is it you say in your country about a faint heart? I remember the proverb. See! I have not a faint heart any longer. I have overcome my fears. You return soon to Saint-Martin? and you will give this to Mademoiselle Mélanie, like the kind and charming friend you are—and you will ask her to pardon me, and plead my cause? What! you will not—you are angry? But why? but why? after what you said!"

"How dare you, sir?" cried Miss Winchester, crimson with indignation; "how dare you! I carry a clandestine letter! I make myself a go-between! What do you take me for, M. de Santerre? Have I lived to my time of life doing my duty, to have such a thing proposed to me now? This is your French honour and fine feeling! To think because a woman receives your confidence kindly and encourages you to declare yourself, that she is ready to carry secret letters, and get up a clandestine correspondence. And do you think, sir, that a pupil of mine would consent to such a thing? For shame, M. de Santerre."

Poor Santerre had risen to his feet, and stood before her petrified, holding his letter in his hand. As she poured out thus the vials of her indignation, the unfortunate young man looked at his letter with downcast eyes, and a kind of whimsical horror. Was it really such a guilty purpose, such a terrible design, this attempt of his? No man could have written a more reverential, a more tenderly respectful letter; and he would not have ventured to do so at all, but for the encouragement this now furious woman had given him. He was bewildered. The storm that beat over his head was so utterly unexpected. "Am I then to give her up? must I give up every hope?" he said faltering. His disappointment was grievous, and it was increased by his extreme surprise.

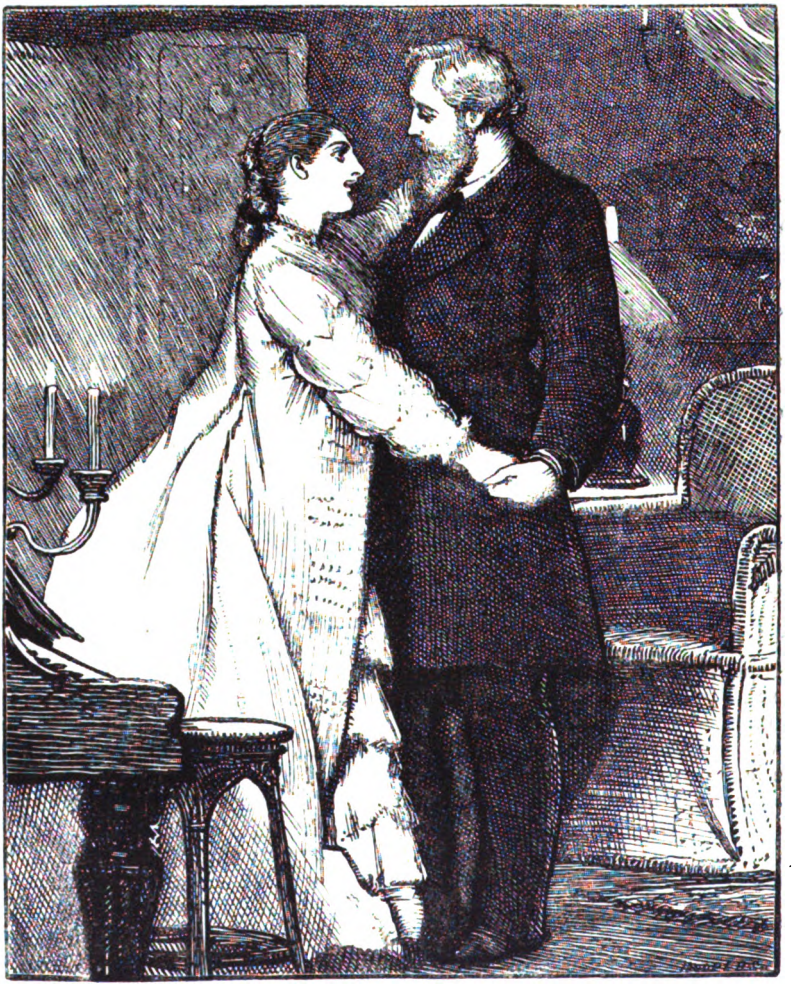
"Write to her by the post like a man," said Miss Winchester; "the post goes to Saint-Martin every day. What do you mean by taking clandestine measures when the post will carry your letter just as safely as I could? It is neither honourable nor manly," said the governess; "it is not what I expected of you, M. de Santerre."

"But—but—I do not understand you," said the unfortunate lover. "The post—ah, mademoiselle! do you understand so little? —how could I dare? and then, what would Madame de Champfleuri say if I ventured to address her daughter so boldly? But if a friend like yourself—one that knows both, one that all would trust," said the ignorant young man insinuatingly,—"if you, in a quiet moment, would but glide this little, little innocent letter into her hand——"

The reader may suppose that Miss Winchester blazed hotter and hotter. She to glide a love-letter into a girl's hand, without the cognizance of her parents! Never was there a more innocent artifice as Santerre conceived it; never was there a device more treacherous, more like a French intrigue, to

the British eyes of the governess. She dismissed him in high dudgeon and would listen to no explanation, and fumed for days after, reviling the French nation and all their ways, and mankind in general, who had no honour or feeling in them where women were concerned. It shook her a little, however, to hear her friend's view of the matter, who was not so indignant. "He is romanesque," she said. "You may be sure, my dear, that he has no doubt about the consent of the family. No Frenchman would venture to take such a step without that; and he wishes to be romantic like you English—not to settle everything in a reasonable way as we others do in France."

"Do you suppose we encourage clandestine correspondence in England?" said



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the indignant woman; "in my country, let me tell you, everything is open and aboveboard."

"Ah yes! it has spoiled him, your country," said the friend. "Poor M. de Santerre; he cannot be brutal and what you call open like an Englishman; and you have given him a disgust at our French way; and now you refuse to be of any use to him! I wish I was going to Saint-Martin, and knew Mademoiselle Mélanie; I should not let him perish for want of a little help, you may be sure."

This staggered Miss Winchester, and made her think for a moment that perhaps—though English ways, at all times and in all places, are undoubtedly the best—a benighted foreigner might be pardoned for not exactly

understanding them, for even twisting them a little in his ignorance, and confounding what was legitimate and permissible with that which was not permissible, and indeed past thinking of altogether. Poor Santerre's innocent eagerness, and then his blank look of bewilderment when she refused to accept his commission, returned to her mind again and again, and troubled her composure. When a man gets confused with the strange idioms of a new language, it is not to be wondered at; and lawful English freedom, which is not license, is it not always perplexing to the mere Frenchman, who cannot, without much practice, understand it? This reflection made her forgive him, but it did not soften her obduracy; and thus poor Santerre was foiled in his first venture. His failure threw him almost into despair.

III.

When Miss Winchester returned to Saint-Martin, which she did somewhat precipitately, not waiting in her agitation to join the family when they came to Paris, she found the house in a great commotion, a series of perpetual interviews taking place in the different rooms, and an air of universal, though suppressed, excitement filling the château. At first she thought, with a pang almost of self-reproach, that Mélanie had after all yielded to the usual fate of the French girl, and that it was the approaching arrival of a *futur*, with all the preliminaries which had preceded the marriage of Hélène, which had stirred all the elements so strangely. Madame de Champfleuri was moving about the house with a look half resolute, half frightened, talking louder than usual, putting down every one who ventured to oppose her, and looking twice as energetic and determined as ever. M. le Comte was standing before the fire, with such a look of care and sombre seriousness on his brow as had not been seen there for years. Madame Charles sat in her usual place, with her usual *tapisserie*, and she had a smile on her face, and gave a little nod from time to time, as much as to say, "I always knew how it would be." Jacqueline, who took Miss Winchester's wraps from her in the hall, looked the very impersonation of mystery, and gave her private looks full of meaning in answer to the wonder in her face. And when she rushed up-stairs to Mélanie's room, her pupil came to meet her with red eyes, as if she had been crying.

"Something has happened?" cried Miss Winchester.

"Hush! it is Clotilde," said the girl, drying her eyes and pointing to the closed door of a room which was her cousin's when she came to Saint-Martin. Mélanie placed the governess in her own easy-chair by the stove, and bade Jacqueline bring some chocolate, and in low tones told her the story. The secret had come out now of Clotilde's unwillingness to marry. She had arrived at Saint-Martin two days before, very serious, and with an anxious aspect, but only this morning had disclosed her intentions in a long interview with her aunt. "It has been in her mind for years," said Mélanie, "but she would not tell any one till she had been in the world and seen everything. She has been a great deal in the world, you know, much more than I have been, or even Hélène; so she knows what it is. One ought not to be so grieved, I know, but how can I help being grieved? Mademoiselle, it has happened to us as it happens so often in families—how can I say it to you?—Clotilde has a vocation. She is going to be the bride of heaven!"

"The bride of—whom?" cried Miss Winchester, her Protestantism instantly aflame.

"The bride of heaven!" cried Mélanie with gentle reverence, letting fall a tear. "Oh, do not laugh in that dreadful English way. If you cried, I could understand. Our Clotilde, that was always so gay and full of life! One ought not to grudge her; one ought to be glad that she has such a high purpose, that God has given her a vocation; but I cannot help it, I must cry when I think. Thank heaven, she has not chosen to be a Carmelite, or any very hard order," said Mélanie. "She is going into the convent of the Sacré Cœur."

"Going into the convent? But she must be mad, and they will never allow it; surely they will never allow it," said Miss Winchester, aghast.

"She is twenty-three," said Mélanie, "who can stop her? She says she has always had it in her mind. She never would marry, you know, but always made some objection to every parti that ever offered——"

"So do you, I believe," interjected the other with a quick glance at Mélanie's face.

"Ah, that is different!" said Mélanie with a blush. "Clotilde has a vocation. She has held quite steadily to her idea, she has never changed. I hear her door open. Ah, do not be disagreeable, don't be English! You know I love English, dear mademoiselle, but sometimes—ah, poor Clotilde! she has enough to bear with mamma and my uncles, and all of them. Let us be kind to her here."

Clotilde came in at this moment, somewhat flushed and excited, in her large, fair Flemish beauty, a picture of life, and vigour, and animation.

"Bon jour, Mademoiselle Vinchester," she said. "Mélanie has told you? Bien! I have at last had the courage to tell what I mean. Thank heaven, there will be no more talk of this monsieur or that, no more remonstrances and struggles. I made up my mind years ago, when I was almost a child; but I never said anything, for I knew what they would do. Now no one can say I am ignorant, and don't know what the world is. I have had enough of the world. I have gone even to the Tuileries—figure it to yourself—that I might know everything, even ces gens-là! And now I am happy; it is all settled, and in a month I shall be in my dear convent. Ah, le beau jour! they are so happy, those dear sisters—happier far than any one is in the world."

"They are acting like cowards," said Miss Winchester, very red, "running away from natural cares and duties, giving themselves up to dreams and idleness; and Clotilde, I am astonished at you—you, so full of life. You will be like a caged bird, you will kill yourself; you poor girl, you are deceived."

"Is it so much better to spend hours at one's toilette, to drive in the Bois, to make visits, to go from the ball to the opera, and from the opera to the ball?" said Clotilde, "or to sit at home like Hélène, and talk about the village and the baby to Henri, who is charming, but so dull, the poor dear? Me, I am not like Hélène. I should kill that good Henri if he sat opposite to me for ever, and smiled. And as for the vie du monde, I am sick of it; I have tried it; it is all so stale, so monotone! One does a hundred stupid things that one hates, to amuse one's self, and one is not amused. No," cried Clotilde, walking about the room in her excitement, "had I been poor, had I had parents to work for, to take care of, I might have endured the *vie mondaine;* but at present, no! And you think one dreams and is idle at the Sacré Cœur," she added with a laugh. "Come there, and try; you will soon see how much idle we can be, how long time we shall have to dream!"

Dear reader, I will not trouble you with the long discussion which followed; for Miss Winchester, I need not say, was frantic at this—as she thought, and as probably you will think—overturn of reason and relinquishment of common sense. She argued with Clothilde hotly for hours together, though she was tired with her journey, and not altogether in that dispassionate and sober state of mind which is necessary for a discussion. Clotilde was excited, but not angry, like Miss Winchester, and I think on the whole she had the best of it. Miss Winchester's good, honest, conventional English idea of domestic happiness did not shake the young woman who had a vocation, and who had also before her eyes the admirable, virtuous, irreproachable, but somewhat humdrum domesticity of Henri and Hélène.

"But theirs was not a marriage of love," said the English champion of matrimony and the world against the cloister.

"Mon dieu! what, then, do you call a love-marriage?" said Madame de Champfleuri, who had come in; "they are infatuated with each other. Hélène believes in no one but Henri, and Henri is imbecile on the subject of Hélène. Their seniors, who know better, are nothing to them in comparison," said the mother aggrieved. "Je me demande, what, then, is a marriage of love?"

And this was so true, that Miss Winchester for the moment was silenced. The family arrangement in Hélène's case had succeeded to perfection, and the young household of the Mondroits was something almost more than English in its domestic virtue, in its self-absorption in its own happiness, and gentle contempt for everybody who was unmarried and had no baby. But then it was dull. Clotilde yawned till her cheeks ached at the very thought of it, though the young husband and wife were perfectly happy. So that the ground was cut from under the Englishwoman's feet in both ways. When she retired to her own room at last to prepare for dinner, feeling very red, flushed, and discomposed, she felt, though she would not have owned to defeat for the world, that she had had the worst in the discussion. The Mondroits were a pair of wedded lovers, in spite of her conviction that a totally different result ought to have followed. Yet their perfect domestic happiness, so far from moving Clotilde to natural dreams of a husband and a baby too, made her shiver, and rush with double enthusiasm to her convent. Could such things be?

My business, however, at present is not with Clotilde, who proved quite equal to fighting her own battle. However parents may struggle, it is very evident that against a real "vocation," no good Catholic can ever hope to carry the day. There are no doubt a great many fictitious vocations which come

to nothing, and give an infinite deal of trouble to everybody concerned; but when you come in contact with the real thing, you may be assured that none of your efforts will stand against it. Clotilde was not foolish, or an enthusiast. She took care to dispose of a great part of her possessions discreetly, for the use of her family, before she retired from "the world;" and the *dot* which she carried with her to her convent, though large, was not so magnificent as perhaps—I cannot tell—the convent hoped. The last time I heard of her she was mistress of the novices, a very brisk and busy personage, with a good deal of power and influence, and a life fully occupied. And no doubt, with her family and connections, she will rise to be Superior, if she lives long enough.

Mélanie, however, who is more important to this history, was very much shaken and agitated by these discussions. It did not escape her that her family were observant and curious of her demeanour, with a half suspicion in their looks. She had not managed matters as Clotilde did, receiving the suggestion of one *parti* after another sedately, but finding some flaw in each, as by right of her great wealth and independent condition, and orphan state, she had been privileged to do. Mélanie had eluded the subject altogether. She had begged with tears and blushes that her mamma would say nothing to her about this matter, but leave her alone and tranquil in her present duties. Clotilde's *éclaircissement*, however, naturally forced the thought on Madame de Champfleuri's mind, driving her half frantic with terror. What if Mélanie had a "vocation" too—and the frightened look in her mother's eyes communicated like a breath of fire the same thought to Mélanie. Was it possible? Could this be what she, too, was dreaming of, without knowing it? Was it the secret stirring in her of the higher inspirations of religion? Mélanie asked herself this question, but as she did so she shivered; and I think if Madame de Champfleuri had seen this shiver, she would have been reassured. No; no "vocation," present or prospective, hung its visionary halo over Mélanie's pretty head. Something else, she could not tell what, lighted up dreamily her maiden fancies. She was not captivated by the humdrum happiness of the Mondroits any more than Clotilde was. *Cependant*—there was surely something better yet, more divine, more exquisite, a finer flower of existence to be found in this beautiful sunshiny world.

The next time that Miss Winchester and Mélanie were alone, half by way of experiment, half to escape from the other subject which absorbed the household, and with which, as she said, she had "no patience," she began to talk of Santerre—of how she had met him "in the world," of how he had come to see her, of how he had talked of his book, and she had told him how deeply it had been appreciated at Saint-Martin.

"I told him you had copied some passages into your commonplace book," she said, with a keen look from under her eyelids. A fine promising colour sprang up over Mélanie's face.

"Oh, how could you say so?" she cried, bending over the lace she was working. "He would think——" Then Mélanie paused a moment, and asked very demurely, "What did M. de Santerre say?"

"Oh, he said a great deal," said Miss Winchester, "more than I dare repeat to you. M. de Santerre is very fluent, he has a great flow of language; I cannot charge my memory with all he said."

There was another brief pause, and Mélanie did a little flower in her lace very rapidly and very well. She always remembered this conversation afterwards by these petals, which were crisp and concise, as things generally are when done under the influence of an inspiration. Then she said sedately, not raising her eyes, "I did not ask to hear *all* he said; for probably the conversation was on a great many subjects, and I might not understand."

"Oh, about the commonplace book?" said Miss Winchester. "He said, of course, that he was deeply gratified, and so forth, which it was natural for a young author to say."

Mélanie went on with her work without raising her head; her fingers went very fast, and her heart beat somewhat quickly too. To be answered in this way was aggravating, and it was done on purpose, she felt. Just then Madame Charles came with her work, and took a seat beside them. She perceived that something was going on, and she liked to have a share in anything that was amusing.

"What are you talking of?" she said. "Mélanie has the air of being a little offended; what is it? It is a relief to talk of something else than Clotilde. May I know?"

"Oh yes, you may know," said Mélanie. "Miss Winchester has seen M. de Santerre in Paris, and I have a natural curiosity to learn how he will talk now he is a great author; and she tells me she cannot burden her memory with *all* he said—as if I wanted to

know *all!*—but only how he talks now he is great."

"Probably it will not make much difference," said Madame Charles; "but Mademoiselle Vinchester is a little méchante. Is it that applause has turned his head? He did not talk much, if I remember rightly, and was very serious, a little stiff, like an Englishman—n'est-ce pas?"

"Not stiff in the least, ma tante, and I think he talked very well," said Mélanie; "and not more serious than a thoughtful person, one with genius, ought to be."

"And as for being like an Englishman," said Miss Winchester, "that, of course, seems to me the highest commendation possible."

"Very well, mesdames," said Madame Charles, laughing; "it is apparent that I do not satisfy you. Let us say, then, that he is charming, with all the native grace of an Englishman, and all the esprit of a Frenchman, and that he talks admirably. Tell us, then, chère mademoiselle, something this hero said."

Then followed another pause. Madame Charles, a person with all her eyes about her, observed that, though Mélanie was working very fast, and giving great attention to her lace, there were little glimmers of the eyelid which told of a divided attention, and a certain suppressed eagerness in her aspect, while Miss Winchester on her side visibly held back.

"Really, I don't know what to tell you," the governess said, hesitating. "He talked very pleasantly; but as for any individual thing he said, except about his delight in having been admired at Saint-Martin, and compliments such as every French gentleman excels in——"

"You told him, then, that we liked his book?"

"Oh yes, it is the first thing one says to an author; and that Mademoiselle Mélanie had copied passages into her commonplace book; and that I had told her it was absurd, and a compliment only to be paid to great authors—classics——"

"Yes; and what did he say?"

"He pretended not to believe me," cried Miss Winchester, excited by the delight of superior information. "He said, of course, it was a pleasantry—that I could not mean it. I never saw a man so pleased."

Mélanie did not raise her head. She even bent lower over her lace, affording to Madame Charles the spectacle of one pink ear merely, no more. But this ear was very pink, and so was the pretty neck, usually so white. She did not say a word, but the white lace round her throat, and her white evening dress, looked doubly white from the rose flush of the delicate neck. "Ah, bien!" said Madame Charles to herself; but she was kind, and said nothing aloud. She went on talking to Miss Winchester, and she spared Mélanie; but then she was a clever woman, the cleverest person in the house. Madame Charles stayed behind with her sister-in-law in the drawing-room, in obedience to a signal from that lady's eye, after the rest had gone to bed, and to her the mother poured forth all her fears.

"Listen, ma sœur," she said. "I am in great trouble; a new idea has come to me. For Clotilde, I say nothing. It is over—we must submit; but Mélanie! Think! has not she, too, refused to listen to everything? After you had taken all the trouble possible about that charming young man from Brittany, finding out everything about him, you remember, ma sœur? after all, I dared not say a word. Figure to yourself, if Mélanie should have a vocation too!"

"No, no; tranquillise yourself," said Madame Charles in soothing tones. "No, no, ma chère, it is not so."

"Ah, how can we tell?" said the mother, drying a tear from her eye. "I should have said Clotilde was the last, the very last! and Mélanie, if you recollect, has always been very tranquil, very good. Ah, I never thought that the day would come when I should wish to see my children less good! But figure to yourself, ma sœur, my Mélanie! ma petite! in that frightful dress, in that triste convent, gone from us never to come back, never to bring her baby like Hélène!"

"Tranquillisez-vous, ma sœur," said Madame Charles, "it is not so; I assure you it is not so. Mélanie has no vocation, I am sure of it, even; I have watched her. Ah, if you would but let me take my way! I have an idea for her. I think I have found out a *parti* which she will not refuse."

"But tell me, then," cried the Comtesse, springing to her feet, "tell me, then! How can I sufficiently thank you, ma sœur? Tell me, and I will act on it at once."

"It is very delicate," said Madame Charles, shaking her head, "very; it is but an idea. You will frighten the child if you act upon it. Chère sœur, perhaps I ask too much; you are wiser, you know better than I do. Still, as it is my idea, if I had your permission to watch and plan a little—for her good!—and when I see more clearly, I will communicate the whole, and you shall act in your

own energetic way. Is it agreed? And I think in the end you will be satisfied. The mouse is not the lion, but sometimes she can help him," said Madame Charles with an insinuating look into the Comtesse's face.

Madame de Champfleuri was vanquished. Though it went against her a little to yield up Mélanie's fate into any hands but her own, and though she liked a straightforward coming to the point more than the watching and scheming which were congenial to the other, yet she consented, with a little sigh of impatience. How easily she could have settled it all, had Mélanie only been like Hélène! Many most suitable matches had already been proposed for the Comte de Champfleuri's daughter. Ah, why is it that young people are made so fanciful, and cannot perceive that their parents are the best judges? She did not at all like to abdicate, but she was a good mother, and honestly loved her child more than she loved her own pride and her own way; so, with a little grudge, but magnanimously, she withdrew from the field, and left this most momentous matter in Madame Charles's hands.

IV.

The family removed to Paris shortly after, and then Madame Charles set herself fairly to work. Santerre, of course, by right of his previous introduction, and of being the friend of the Baron de Mondroit, called shortly after they arrived; and without doing anything to call special attention to him, Madame Charles managed to have him invited on two or three occasions. In France, the reader knows, young men and young women have not the same leisure of forming acquaintance as among ourselves. A young lady who is *comme il faut* is never out of hearing and sight of her mother, or of some other responsible person. Had Mélanie been left alone with her lover, all the Faubourg would have been in arms, and Madame Charles, however enterprising, would no more have thought of taking such a step than she would have permitted a positive crime. She watched the young people, however, when they were in the same room, though she did not allow them to whisper in a corner, as perhaps in an English drawing-room they might have been permitted to do. She saw how Mélanie listened when Santerre was talking. She saw how Santerre's eyes besieged the door when Mélanie was not in the room. She let them even talk to each other once or twice when nobody else was on duty, and just at the moment that the conversation began to be interesting, came softly rustling in her black silk gown, and sat down beside them.

"Do they think I would say anything wrong to her?" Santerre cried, pouring out his heart of flame to Miss Winchester.

She, excellent woman, shrugged her shoulders.

"They are your own countryfolks, you ought to comprehend each other," she said. "I don't pretend that I understand either the one side or the other. Why can't you take your courage in both hands, and speak to her straight out?"

But this was what Santerre, even if he could have found an opportunity, had not the courage to do.

When she had amused herself a good deal with these two young people, like an elegant cat with a couple of miserable mice, Madame Charles concluded that it would be as well to bring matters to a crisis. Accordingly, she took an early opportunity to recommend herself to Santerre's confidence. She spoke to him of his book, and of the sympathy she felt in his sentiments, and of her own village at Saint-Martin, to which his description of village life in France was so true.

"We all think so," she said, "and between ourselves, as there is no one listening, and that odious Englishwoman is out of hearing, it may be allowed, M. de Santerre, that there are some things in our dear France that would bear mending—n'est-ce pas? The relations between the poor and the rich, and various other even domestic matters——"

"I am delighted that you think so," said Santerre. "I feared that you were all for old customs, and the *mode française*. I hope I love my country very much, but in some things I am so bold as to think other fashions are best."

"Ah, I divine," said Madame Charles, shaking her fan at him. "I might have known you would have said so. But I am not Anglomane. It is the fashion to applaud these islanders, but it is a fashion that will not last. In what are they better than we are? Their parliament? bah! it will never answer in France. Here we want to be ruled—to have a strong government."

"Dear Madame Charles! to hear a person of your excellent sense support such an idea! You to adopt Cæsarism! you, who know so much better."

"Well, well," she said, "not for *us*, perhaps; but these foolish peasants you talk of in your admirable book, do they understand anything else? Every general rule must have

its victims; what is good for the mass is often very bad for individuals. So it must be, I suppose," she added, "as long as the world lasts."

Then there was a pause; but, after a while, Madame Charles resumed—

"And I know you as a fanatic about something else, M. de Santerre; in marriage, and what you call love, you do not like the mode française? Oh, yes, I know very well; in society one finds out everything. I am not of your opinion in general, but I allow that now and then there are cases—— Ah, pardon me, I am very outspoken. Now, why don't you marry, for example? You are the head of your family, and you owe it to your race."

"I deny the debt," said Santerre. "When I marry, it shall not be as a duty. Is it not the crown of life? but not according to the mode française, madame. I shall not marry except where I love, and I would rather perish than marry one who accepted me because her parents told her to do so. My wife must be a Frenchwoman; but if I may not win her whom I love without help of father or mother or friends, I shall never marry at all."

"You must not let the Comtesse hear you," said Madame Charles. "For me it is different; I myself was always considered rather romanesque; but my excellent sister entertains very different sentiments. And we all know how happy Hélène is with M. de Mondroit. In that marriage she has succeeded very well."

"And, I presume," said Santerre, with a faltering in his voice, "Madame de Champfleuri has also decided for her other daughter?"

It was a perfectly improper question, and he knew it: but his heart had begun to beat, and got the better of him, so that he did not think what he was saying. Madame Charles showed no resentment, which was more than he dared expect.

"Mon Dieu!" she said, "how can I tell? Hélène and Mélanie are very different. The petite is rébelle. She is not so easily guided as her sister. Those girls of to-day, they are allowed to read English romances, English poems; it fills their little heads with foolish thoughts. My sister is admirable, but she begins to grow impatient; and if Mélanie is disgusted, I do not know what we shall do."

A pause again. Santerre looked at her with great eyes—cautious, timid, yet beseeching.

"I know your son very well," he said, with some tremulousness in his voice; "we were together in America. Did he ever tell you? You are so like him that I felt you must be a friend to me, as Charles always was."

"So I will, you may be sure," said Madame Charles with a smile, "but that sounds very alarming, and I don't know how I may be compromising myself. I am sure there is something very terrible that you want me to do."

"No, no," he cried, eager and breathless; and then, in very rapid tones, and very low, he told her his story. Mélanie came to the door of the room while they were thus engaged, but Santerre did not see her, and she withdrew, half wondering, half annoyed. What close confidence could he have to give to Madame Charles? But Mélanie was still more surprised when Madame Charles paid her a visit that evening in her room, where she was pensively seated in her white dressing-gown, with her hair twisted up for the night, and one of the Tauchnitz volumes clasped lightly in her two pretty hands. She was not reading it, but tried to look as if she had been doing so when her aunt paid her this visit. The little Parisian room, with its heavy curtains and tiny space, was not like the great spacious chambers in the château. She made room for Madame Charles beside her on the little sofa, and wondered much what she could have to say.

"Chérie, I have not come to talk," said Madame Charles. "It is late, and I have only a word to say. Here is something for thee to read at thy leisure," and she put a letter softly on Mélanie's white lap.

The girl drew back with a start, taken by surprise.

"For me?—a letter! But what is it?—am I to read it, ma tante?"

"What does one generally do with a letter?" said the aunt playfully. "You must not tell any one. It is a little secret, but it is not wrong. When you are alone, read it, Mélanie, and there will be an answer to give."

"But, ma tante, my mother!"

"Bah! I take thy mother in my hands. Good night, chérie, and God bless you. Read it, and to-morrow you will tell me the answer; but never let any one know that thy Aunt Charles, who ought to know better, is une romantique, like thee!"

She was gone before Mélanie could ask one more of the questions with which she was overbrimming. Madame Charles tripped softly away, leaving a delicious excitement behind her, somewhat moved herself, and thoroughly enjoying her *rôle*. She had no such scruples as Miss Winchester had enter-

tained. If the foolish children preferred to manage matters thus, why not humour them? she had said to herself.

As for Mélanie, I cannot tell how long she sat looking at the letter, scarcely daring to touch it. It had a fascinating effect upon her—keeping her still, and filling her mind in a moment with mists of happy visions. "For me!" she said to herself below her breath, with a thrill of fright and pleasure—then broke the seal; for it was carefully folded and sealed to show the importance of the missive—and read words which made her heart beat faster at every line. When she threw herself down upon her little white bed, and lay awake watching the moonlight steal in over the housetops, white through the drawn muslin curtains, what a flutter and commotion of happiness was in her soul! Yes, this was what her books told of, what breathed through all song; but oh, ciel! oh, all ye gentle skies and protecting angels! what would Madame de Champfleuri say?

Next morning Madame Charles paid a visit to the Comtesse's room, where she sat in *déshabillé*, with her hair in curl-papers, making up her accounts.

"Ma sœur," she said, "I have at last heard of a husband for Mélanie—one who will please you; one who is all we could desire—"

"Ah! tell me about it!" cried Madame de Champfleuri eagerly; "but what is the good," she added, shaking her head, "when you know what an impracticable child she is? Nevertheless, I should like to hear."

Need I tell the issue? Before anything could be arranged, before any parent interfered, Santerre had a little letter from Mélanie, every line of which trembled, fluttered, like her own heart, with happiness, and shy assent, and delicious terror. This was what she said:—

"MONSIEUR,—I do not know what to say to you. I thank you for your letter. It makes me very much agitated to have a secret, and I hope it is not wrong. What you say is beautiful, and I understand it, and feel what it is you mean. But what can I say, one like me? I will speak to my mother, who is always good, and I hope—I hope she may not think it wrong.

"MÉLANIE."

And this postscript was added very hastily:—"Do not think me ungrateful, because I am frightened, and don't know what to say. It is so strange that you should think the same! I hope, with all my heart, mamma may not think it is wrong."

This little epistle was vague enough to keep the young man in a state of intense excitement—excitement great and somewhat anxious, but delightful; how different from the perfect calm with which Henri de Mondroit had received the placid approval of his bride! This delicious suspense was not quite over even when the business part of the transaction commenced, when everything had been put in due order by Madame de Champfleuri's experienced hands—the *biens* compared on either side, the birth and connections of the *futur* reviewed and approved, the whole matter duly balanced and established on reasonable foundations. But during the interval, Madame Charles undertook the charge of Mélanie, and, contrary to all precedent, allowed the lovers one or two peeps of each other, stolen and rapturous, which freed the romantic young man from all terrors of parental influence. Madame Charles felt that in this triumphant piece of business she was above precedent, and might well be allowed to be a law to herself.

However, when it comes to its conclusion, a romantic marriage, let us allow, has to take place very much like a prosaic one, and there is now little more to say. Mélanie was married, as Hélène had been, by the same excellent bishop, who composed another *discours*, which was equally eloquent and equally appreciated; and I do not know that the romantic couple were happier than the others, when they set off on their romantic wedding tour to Italy, and all poetical places—to the blue mountains, and the bluer sea. Hélène and Henri had been as happy as they could be, and no one can be happier than that. The vessels may be larger and hold more, but hearts, like cups, cannot be more than full, whatever their dimensions may be.

I think, however, there was one person who had a right to feel injured, and that was Miss Winchester, who might have acted as the unraveller of the plot, had her high principle permitted her to accept such a *rôle*. She felt somewhat sore when she knew how she had been supplanted, and that Madame Charles had accepted the office which she rejected so indignantly.