

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

DROLL STORIES —
VOLUME 1

Honoré Balzac
Droll Stories – Volume 1

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Содержание

TRANSLATORS PREFACE	4
PROLOGUE	7
THE FAIR IMPERIA	11
THE VENIAL SIN	31
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	58

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TRANSLATORS PREFACE

When, in March, 1832, the first volume of the now famous *Contes Drolatiques* was published by Gosselin of Paris, Balzac, in a short preface, written in the publisher's name, replied to those attacks which he anticipated certain critics would make upon his hardy experiment. He claimed for his book the protection of all those to whom literature was dear, because it was a work of art – and a work of art, in the highest sense of the word, it undoubtedly is. Like Boccaccio, Rabelais, the Queen of Navarre, Ariosto, and Verville, the great author of *The Human Comedy* has painted an epoch. In the fresh and wonderful language of the Merry Vicar Of Meudon, he has given us a marvellous picture of French life and manners in the sixteenth century. The gallant knights and merry dames of that eventful period of French history stand out in bold relief upon his canvas. The background in these life-like figures is, as it were, "sketched upon the spot." After reading the *Contes Drolatiques*, one could almost find one's way about the towns and villages of Touraine, unassisted by map or guide. Not only is this book a work of art from its historical information and topographical accuracy;

its claims to that distinction rest upon a broader foundation. Written in the nineteenth century in imitation of the style of the sixteenth, it is a triumph of literary archaeology. It is a model of that which it professes to imitate; the production of a writer who, to accomplish it, must have been at once historian, linguist, philosopher, archaeologist, and anatomist, and each in no ordinary degree. In France, his work has long been regarded as a classic – as a faithful picture of the last days of the moyen age, when kings and princesses, brave gentlemen and haughty ladies laughed openly at stories and jokes which are considered disgraceful by their more fastidious descendants. In England the difficulties of the language employed, and the quaintness and peculiarity of its style, have placed it beyond the reach of all but those thoroughly acquainted with the French of the sixteenth century. Taking into consideration the vast amount of historical information enshrined in its pages, the archaeological value which it must always possess for the student, and the dramatic interest of its stories, the translator has thought that an English edition of Balzac's chef-d'oeuvre would be acceptable to many. It has, of course, been impossible to reproduce in all its vigour and freshness the language of the original. Many of the quips and cranks and puns have been lost in the process of Anglicising. These unavoidable blemishes apart, the writer ventures to hope that he has treated this great masterpiece in a reverent spirit, touched it with no sacrilegious hand, but, on the contrary, given as close a translation as the dissimilarities of

the two languages permit. With this idea, no attempt had been made to polish or round many of the awkwardly constructed sentences which are characteristic of this volume. Rough, and occasionally obscure, they are far more in keeping with the spirit of the original than the polished periods of modern romance. Taking into consideration the many difficulties which he has had to overcome, and which those best acquainted with the French edition will best appreciate, the translator claims the indulgence of the critical reader for any shortcomings he may discover. The best plea that can be offered for such indulgence is the fact that, although *Les Contes Drolatiques* was completed and published in 1837, the present is the first English version ever brought before the public.

London, January, 1874

PROLOGUE

This is a book of the highest flavour, full of right hearty merriment, spiced to the palate of the illustrious and very precious tosspots and drinkers, to whom our worthy compatriot, Francois Rabelais, the eternal honour of Touraine, addressed himself. Be it nevertheless understood, the author has no other desire than to be a good Touranian, and joyfully to chronicle the merry doings of the famous people of this sweet and productive land, more fertile in cuckolds, dandies and witty wags than any other, and which has furnished a good share of men of renown in France, as witness the departed Courier of piquant memory; Verville, author of *Moyen de Parvenir*, and others equally well known, among whom we will specially mention the Sieur Descartes, because he was a melancholy genius, and devoted himself more to brown studies than to drinks and dainties, a man of whom all the cooks and confectioners of Tours have a wise horror, whom they despise, and will not hear spoken of, and say, "Where does he live?" if his name is mentioned. Now this work is the production of the joyous leisure of good old monks, of whom there are many vestiges scattered about the country, at Grenadiere-les-St. – Cyr, in the village of Sacche-les-Azay-le-Rideau, at Marmoustiers, Veretz, Roche-Cobon, and the certain storehouses of good stories, which storehouses are the upper stories of old canons and wise dames, who remember

the good old days when they could enjoy a hearty laugh without looking to see if their hilarity disturbed the sit of your ruffle, as do the young women of the present day, who wish to take their pleasure gravely – a custom which suits our Gay France as much as a water jug would the head of a queen. Since laughter is a privilege granted to man alone, and he has sufficient causes for tears within his reach, without adding to them by books, I have considered it a thing most patriotic to publish a drachm of merriment for these times, when weariness falls like a fine rain, wetting us, soaking into us, and dissolving those ancient customs which make the people to reap public amusement from the Republic. But of those old pantagruelists who allowed God and the king to conduct their own affairs without putting of their finger in the pie oftener than they could help, being content to look on and laugh, there are very few left. They are dying out day by day in such manner that I fear greatly to see these illustrious fragments of the ancient breviary spat upon, staled upon, set at naught, dishonoured, and blamed, the which I should be loath to see, since I have and bear great respect for the refuse of our Gallic antiquities.

Bear in mind also, ye wild critics, you scrapers-up of words, harpies who mangle the intentions and inventions of everyone, that as children only do we laugh, and as we travel onward laughter sinks down and dies out, like the light of the oil-lit lamp. This signifies, that to laugh you must be innocent, and pure of a heart, lacking which qualities you purse your lips, drop your

jawes, and knit your brow, after the manner of men hiding vices and impurities. Take, then, this work as you would take a group of statue, certain features of which an artist could omit, and he would be the biggest of all big fools if he puts leaves upon them, seeing that these said works are not, any more than is this book, intended for nunneries. Nevertheless, I have taken care, much to my vexation, to weed from the manuscripts the old words, which, in spite of their age, were still strong, and which would have shocked the ears, astonished the eyes, reddened the cheeks and sullied the lips of trousered maidens, and Madame Virtue with three lovers; for certain things must be done to suit the vices of the age, and a periphrase is much more agreeable than the word. Indeed, we are old, and find long trifles, better than the short follies of our youth, because at that time our taste was better. Then spare me your slanders, and read this rather at night than in the daytime and give it not to young maidens, if there be any, because this book is inflammable. I will now rid you of myself. But I fear nothing from this book, since it is extracted from a high and splendid source, from which all that has issued has had a great success, as is amply proved by the royal orders of the Golden Fleece, of the Holy Ghost, of the Garter, of the Bath, and by many notable things which have been taken therefrom, under shelter of which I place myself.

Now make ye merry, my hearties, and gayly read with ease of body and rest of reins, and may a cancer carry you if you disown me after having read me.

These words are those of our good Master Rabelais, before whom we must also stand, hat in hand, in token of reverence and honour to him, prince of all wisdom, and king of Comedy.

THE FAIR IMPERIA

The Archbishop of Bordeaux had added to his suite when going to the Council at Constance quite a good-looking little priest of Touraine whose ways and manner of speech was so charming that he passed for a son of La Soldee and the Governor. The Archbishop of Tours had willingly given him to his confrere for his journey to that town, because it was usual for archbishops to make each other presents, they well knowing how sharp are the itchings of theological palms. Thus this young priest came to the Council and was lodged in the establishment of his prelate, a man of good morals and great science.

Philippe de Mala, as he was called, resolved to behave well and worthily to serve his protector, but he saw in this mysterious Council many men leading a dissolute life and yet not making less, nay – gaining more indulgences, gold crowns and benefices than all the other virtuous and well-behaved ones. Now during one night – dangerous to his virtue – the devil whispered into his ear that he should live more luxuriously, since every one sucked the breasts of our Holy Mother Church and yet they were not drained, a miracle which proved beyond doubt the existence of God. And the priest of Touraine did not disappoint the devil. He promised to feast himself, to eat his bellyful of roast meats and other German delicacies, when he could do so without paying for them as he was poor. As he remained

quite continent (in which he followed the example of the poor old archbishop who sinned no longer because he was unable to, and passed for a saint,) he had to suffer from intolerable desires followed by fits of melancholy, since there were so many sweet courtesans, well developed, but cold to the poor people, who inhabited Constance, to enlighten the understanding of the Fathers of the Council. He was savage that he did not know how to make up to these gallant sirens, who snubbed cardinals, abbots, councillors, legates, bishops, princes and margraves just as if they have been penniless clerks. And in the evening, after prayers, he would practice speaking to them, teaching himself the breviary of love. He taught himself to answer all possible questions, but on the morrow if by chance he met one of the aforesaid princesses dressed out, seated in a litter and escorted by her proud and well-armed pages, he remained open-mouthed, like a dog in the act of catching flies, at the sight of sweet countenance that so much inflamed him. The secretary of a Monseigneur, a gentleman of Perigord, having clearly explained to him that the Fathers, procureurs, and auditors of the Rota bought by certain presents, not relics or indulgences, but jewels and gold, the favour of being familiar with the best of these pampered cats who lived under the protection of the lords of the Council; the poor Touranian, all simpleton and innocent as he was, treasured up under his mattress the money given him by the good archbishop for writings and copying – hoping one day to have enough just to see a cardinal's lady-love, and trusting to

God for the rest. He was hairless from top to toe and resembled a man about as much as a goat with a night-dress on resembles a young lady, but prompted by his desires he wandered in the evenings through the streets of Constance, careless of his life, and, at the risk of having his body halberded by the soldiers, he peeped at the cardinals entering the houses of their sweethearts. Then he saw the wax-candles lighted in the houses and suddenly the doors and the windows closed. Then he heard the blessed abbots or others jumping about, drinking, enjoying themselves, love-making, singing *Alleluia* and applauding the music with which they were being regaled. The kitchen performed miracles, the Offices said were fine rich pots-full, the Matins sweet little hams, the Vespers luscious mouthful, and the Laudes delicate sweetmeats, and after their little carouses, these brave priests were silent, their pages dived upon the stairs, their mules stamped restively in the streets; everything went well – but faith and religion was there. That is how it came to pass the good man Huss was burned. And the reason? He put his finger in the pie without being asked. Then why was he a Huguenot before the others?

To return, however to our sweet little Philippe, not unfrequently did he receive many a thump and hard blow, but the devil sustained him, inciting him to believe that sooner or later it would come to his turn to play the cardinal to some lovely dame. This ardent desire gave him the boldness of a stag in autumn, so much so that one evening he quietly tripped up the steps and into one of the first houses in Constance where often he had seen

officers, seneschals, valets, and pages waiting with torches for their masters, dukes, kings, cardinals and archbishops.

"Ah!" said he, "she must be very beautiful and amiable, this one."

A soldier well armed allowed him to pass, believing him to belong to the suite of the Elector of Bavaria, who had just left, and that he was going to deliver a message on behalf of the above-mentioned nobleman. Philippe de Mala mounted the stairs as lightly as a greyhound in love, and was guided by delectable odour of perfume to certain chamber where, surrounded by her handmaidens, the lady of the house was divesting herself of her attire. He stood quite dumbfounded like a thief surprised by sergeants. The lady was without petticoat or head-dress. The chambermaid and the servants, busy taking off her stockings and undressing her, so quickly and dextrously had her stripped, that the priest, overcome, gave vent to a long Ah! which had the flavour of love about it.

"What want *you*, little one?" said the lady to him.

"To yield my soul to you," said he, flashing his eyes upon her.

"You can come again to-morrow," said she, in order to be rid of him.

To which Philippe replied, blushing, "I will not fail."

Then she burst out laughing. Philippe, struck motionless, stood quite at his ease, letting wander over her his eyes that glowed and sparkled with the flame of love. What lovely thick hair hung upon her ivory white back, showing sweet white places,

fair and shining between the many tresses! She had upon her snow-white brow a ruby circlet, less fertile in rays of fire than her black eyes, still moist with tears from her hearty laugh. She even threw her slipper at a statue gilded like a shrine, twisting herself about from very ribaldry and allowed her bare foot, smaller than a swan's bill, to be seen. This evening she was in a good humour, otherwise she would have had the little shaven-crop put out by the window without more ado than her first bishop.

"He has fine eyes, Madame," said one of her handmaids.

"Where does he comes from?" asked another.

"Poor child!" cried Madame, "his mother must be looking for him. Show him his way home."

The Touranian, still sensible, gave a movement of delight at the sight of the brocaded bed where the sweet form was about to repose. This glance, full of amorous intelligence, awoke the lady's fantasy, who, half laughing and half smitten, repeated "Tomorrow," and dismissed him with a gesture which the Pope Jehan himself would have obeyed, especially as he was like a snail without a shell, since the Council had just deprived him of the holy keys.

"Ah! Madame, there is another vow of chastity changed into an amorous desire," said one of her women; and the chuckles commenced again thick as hail.

Philippe went his way, bumping his head against a wall like a hooded rook as he was. So giddy had he become at the sight of this creature, even more enticing than a siren rising from the

water. He noticed the animals carved over the door and returned to the house of the archbishop with his head full of diabolical longings and his entrails sophisticated.

Once in his little room he counted his coins all night long, but could make no more than four of them; and as that was all his treasure, he counted upon satisfying the fair one by giving her all he had in the world.

"What is it ails you?" said the good archbishop, uneasy at the groans and "oh! ohs!" of his clerk.

"Ah! my Lord," answered the poor priest, "I am wondering how it is that so light and sweet a woman can weigh so heavily upon my heart."

"Which one?" said the archbishop, putting down his breviary which he was reading for others – the good man.

"Oh! Mother of God! You will scold me, I know, my good master, my protector, because I have seen the lady of a cardinal at the least, and I am weeping because I lack more than one crown to enable me to convert her."

The archbishop, knitting the circumflex accent that he had above his nose, said not a word. Then the very humble priest trembled in his skin to have confessed so much to his superior. But the holy man directly said to him, "She must be very dear then – "

"Ah!" said he, "she has swallowed many a mitre and stolen many a cross."

"Well, Philippe, if thou will renounce her, I will present thee

with thirty angels from the poor-box."

"Ah! my lord, I should be losing too much," replied the lad, emboldened by the treat he promised himself.

"Ah! Philippe," said the good prelate, "thou wilt then go to the devil and displease God, like all our cardinals," and the master, with sorrow, began to pray St. Gatien, the patron saint of Innocents, to save his servant. He made him kneel down beside him, telling him to recommend himself also to St. Philippe, but the wretched priest implored the saint beneath his breath to prevent him from failing if on the morrow that the lady should receive him kindly and mercifully; and the good archbishop, observing the fervour of his servant, cried out him, "Courage little one, and Heaven will exorcise thee."

On the morrow, while Monsieur was declaiming at the Council against the shameless behaviour of the apostles of Christianity, Philippe de Mala spent his angels – acquired with so much labour – in perfumes, baths, fomentations, and other fooleries. He played the fop so well, one would have thought him the fancy cavalier of a gay lady. He wandered about the town in order to find the residence of his heart's queen; and when he asked the passers-by to whom belonged the aforesaid house, they laughed in his face, saying —

"Whence comes this precious fellow that has not heard of La Belle Imperia?"

He was very much afraid he and his angels were gone to the devil when he heard the name, and knew into what a nice mess

he had voluntarily fallen.

Imperia was the most precious, the most fantastic girl in the world, although she passed for the most dazzling and the beautiful, and the one who best understood the art of bamboozling cardinals and softening the hardest soldiers and oppressors of the people. She had brave captains, archers, and nobles, ready to serve her at every turn. She had only to breathe a word, and the business of anyone who had offended her was settled. A free fight only brought a smile to her lips, and often the Sire de Baudricourt – one of the King's Captains – would ask her if there were any one he could kill for her that day – a little joke at the expense of the abbots. With the exception of the potentates among the high clergy with whom Madame Imperia managed to accommodate her little tempers, she ruled everyone with a high hand in virtue of her pretty babble and enchanting ways, which enthralled the most virtuous and the most unimpressionable. Thus she lived beloved and respected, quite as much as the real ladies and princesses, and was called Madame, concerning which the good Emperor Sigismund replied to a lady who complained of it to him, "That they, the good ladies, might keep to their own proper way and holy virtues, and Madame Imperia to the sweet naughtiness of the goddess Venus" – Christian words which shocked the good ladies, to their credit be it said.

Philippe, then thinking over it in his mind that which on the preceding evening he had seen with his eyes, doubted if more did not remain behind. Then was he sad, and without taking

bite or sup, strolled about the town waiting the appointed hour, although he was well-favoured and gallant enough to find others less difficult to overcome than was Madame Imperia.

The night came; the little Touranian, exalted with pride caparisoned with desire, and spurred by his "alacks" and "alases" which nearly choked him, glided like an eel into the domicile of the veritable Queen of the Council – for before her bowed humbly all the authority, science, and wisdom of Christianity. The major domo did not know him, and was going to bundle him out again, when one of the chamber-women called him from the top of the stairs – "Eh, M. Imbert, it is Madame's young fellow," and poor Philippe, blushing like a wedding night, ran up the stairs, shaking with happiness and delight. The servant took him by the hand and led into the chamber where sat Madame, lightly attired like a brave woman who awaits her conqueror.

The dazzling Imperia was seated near a table covered with a shaggy cloth ornamented with gold, and with all the requisites for a dainty carouse. Flagons of wine, various drinking glasses, bottles of the hippocras, flasks full of good wine of Cyprus, pretty boxes full of spices, roast peacocks, green sauces, little salt hams – all that would gladden the eyes of the gallant if he had not so madly loved Madame Imperia.

She saw well that the eyes of the young priest were all for her. Although accustomed to the curl-paper devotion of the churchmen, she was well satisfied that she had made a conquest of the young priest who all day long had been in her head.

The windows had been closed; Madame was decked out in a manner fit to do honours to a prince of the Empire. Then the rogue, beatified by the holy beauty of Imperia, knew that Emperor, burgraf, nay, even a cardinal about to be elected pope, would willingly for that night have changed places with him, a little priest who, beneath his gown, had only the devil and love.

He put on a lordly air, and saluted her with a courtesy by no means ungraceful; and then the sweet lady said to him, regaling with a piercing glance —

"Come and sit close to me, that I may see if you have altered since yesterday."

"Oh yes," said he.

"And how?" said she.

"Yesterday," replied the artful fellow, "I loved you; today, we love each other, and from a poor sinner I have become richer than a king."

"Oh, little one, little one!" cried she, merrily; "yes, you are indeed changed, for from a young priest I see well you have turned into an old devil."

And side by side they sat down before a large fire, which helped to spread their ecstasy around. They remained always ready to begin eating, seeing that they only thought of gazing into each other's eyes, and never touched a dish. Just as they were beginning to feel comfortable and at their ease, there came a great noise at Madame's door, as if people were beating against it, and crying out.

"Madame," cried the little servant hastily, "here's another of them."

"Who is it?" cried she in a haughty manner, like a tyrant, savage at being interrupted.

"The Bishop of Coire wishes to speak with you."

"May the devil take him!" said she, looking at Philippe gently.

"Madame he has seen the light through the chinks, and is making a great noise."

"Tell him I have the fever, and you will be telling him no lie, for I am ill of this little priest who is torturing my brain."

But just as she had finished speaking, and was pressing with devotion the hand of Philippe who trembled in his skin, appeared the fat Bishop of Coire, indignant and angry. The officers followed him, bearing a trout canonically dressed, fresh from the Rhine, and shining in a golden platter, and spices contained in little ornamental boxes, and a thousand dainties, such as liqueurs and jams, made by the holy nuns at his Abbey.

"Ah, ah!" said he, with his deep voice, "I haven't time to go to the devil, but you must give me a touch of him in advance, eh! my little one."

"Your belly will one day make a nice sheath for a sword," replied she, knitting her brows above her eyes, which from being soft and gentle had become mischievous enough to make one tremble.

"And this little chorus singer is here to offer that?" said the bishop, insolently turning his great rubicund face towards

Philippe.

"Monseigneur, I'm here to confess Madame."

"Oh, oh, do you not know the canons? To confess the ladies at this time of night is a right reserved to bishops, so take yourself off; go and herd with simple monks, and never come back here again under pain of excommunication."

"Do not move," cried the blushing Imperia, more lovely with passion than she was with love, because now she was possessed both with passion and love. "Stop, my friend. Here you are in your own house." Then he knew that he was really loved by her.

"It is it not in the breviary, and an evangelical regulation, that you should be equal with God in the valley of Jehoshaphat?" asked she of the bishop.

"'Tis is an invention of the devil, who has adulterated the holy book," replied the great numskull of a bishop in a hurry to fall to.

"Well then, be equal now before me, who am here below your goddess," replied Imperia, "otherwise one of these days I will have you delicately strangled between the head and shoulders; I swear it by the power of my tonsure which is as good as the pope's." And wishing that the trout should be added to the feast as well as the sweets and other dainties, she added, cunningly, "Sit you down and drink with us." But the artful minx, being up to a trick or two, gave the little one a wink which told him plainly not to mind the German, whom she would soon find a means to be rid of.

The servant-maid seated the Bishop at the table, and tucked

him up, while Philippe, wild with rage that closed his mouth, because he saw his plans ending in smoke, gave the archbishop to more devils than ever were monks alive. Thus they got halfway through the repast, which the young priest had not yet touched, hungering only for Imperia, near whom he was already seated, but speaking that sweet language which the ladies so well understand, that has neither stops, commas, accents, letters, figures, characters, notes, nor images. The fat bishop, sensual and careful enough of the sleek, ecclesiastical garment of skin for which he was indebted to his late mother, allowed himself to be plentifully served with hippocras by the delicate hand of Madame, and it was just at his first hiccough that the sound of an approaching cavalcade was heard in the street. The number of horses, the "Ho, ho!" of the pages, showed plainly that some great prince hot with love, was about to arrive. In fact, a moment afterwards the Cardinal of Ragusa, against whom the servants of Imperia had not dared to bar the door, entered the room. At this terrible sight the poor courtesan and her young lover became ashamed and embarrassed, like fresh cured lepers; for it would be tempting the devil to try and oust the cardinal, the more so as at that time it was not known who would be pope, three aspirants having resigned their hoods for the benefit of Christianity. The cardinal, who was a cunning Italian, long bearded, a great sophist, and the life and soul of the Council, guessed, by the feeblest exercise of the faculties of his understanding, the alpha and omega of the adventure. He only had to weigh in his mind one

little thought before he knew how to proceed in order to be able to hypothecate his manly vigour. He arrived with the appetite of a hungry monk, and to obtain its satisfaction he was just the man to stab two monks and sell his bit of the true cross, which were wrong.

"Hulloa! friend," said he to Philippe, calling him towards him. The poor Tourainian, more dead than alive, and expecting the devil was about to interfere seriously with his arrangements, rose and said, "What is it?" to the redoubtable cardinal.

He taking him by the arm led him to the staircase, looked him in the white of the eye and said without any nonsense – "Ventredieu! You are a nice little fellow, and I should not like to have to let your master know the weight of your carcass. My revenge might cause me certain pious expenses in my old age, so choose to espouse an abbey for the remainder of your days, or to marry Madame to-night and die tomorrow."

The poor little Tourainian in despair murmured, "May I come back when your passion is over?"

The cardinal could scarcely keep his countenance, but he said sternly, "Choose the gallows or a mitre."

"Ah!" said the priest, maliciously; "a good fat abbey."

Thereupon the cardinal went back into the room, opened an escritoire, and scribbled upon a piece of parchment an order to the envoy of France.

"Monseigneur," said the Tourainian to him while he was spelling out the order, "you will not get rid of the Bishop of Coire

so easily as you have got rid of me, for he has as many abbeys as the soldiers have drinking shops in the town; besides, he is in the favour of his lord. Now I fancy to show you my gratitude for this so fine Abbey I owe you good piece of advice. You know how fatal has been and how rapidly spread this terrible pestilence which has cruelly harassed Paris. Tell him that you have just left the bedside of your old friend the Archbishop of Bordeaux; thus you will make him scutter away like straw before a whirl-wind.

"Oh, oh!" cried the cardinal, "thou meritest more than an abbey. Ah, Ventredieu! my young friend, here are 100 golden crowns for thy journey to the Abbey of Turpenay, which I won yesterday at cards, and of which I make you a free gift."

Hearing these words, and seeing Philippe de Mala disappear without giving her the amorous glances she expected, the beautiful Imperia, puffing like a dolphin, denounced all the cowardice of the priest. She was not then a sufficiently good Catholic to pardon her lover deceiving her, by not knowing how to die for her pleasure. Thus the death of Philippe was foreshadowed in the viper's glance she cast at him to insult him, which glance pleased the cardinal much, for the wily Italian saw he would soon get his abbey back again. The Touranian, heeding not the brewing storm avoided it by walking out silently with his ears down, like a wet dog being kicked out of a Church. Madame drew a sigh from her heart. She must have had her own ideas of humanity for the little value she held in it. The fire which possessed her had mounted to her head, and scintillated in rays

about her, and there was good reason for it, for this was the first time that she had been humbugged by priest. Then the cardinal smiled, believing it was all to his advantage: was not he a cunning fellow? Yes, he was the possessor of a red hat.

"Ah, ah! my friend," said he to the Bishop, "I congratulate myself on being in your company, and I am glad to have been able to get rid of that little wretch unworthy of Madame, the more so as if you had gone near him, my lovely and amiable creature, you would have perished miserably through the deed of a simple priest."

"Ah! How?"

"He is the secretary of the Archbishop of Bordeaux. The good man was seized this morning with the pestilence."

The bishop opened his mouth wide enough to swallow a Dutch cheese.

"How do you know that?" asked he.

"Ah!" said the cardinal, taking the good German's hand, "I have just administered to him, and consoled him; at this moment the holy man has a fair wind to waft him to paradise."

The Bishop of Coire demonstrated immediately how light fat man are; for when men are big-bellied, a merciful providence, in the consideration of their works, often makes their internal tubes as elastic as balloons. The aforesaid bishop sprang backwards with one bound, burst into a perspiration and coughed like a cow who finds feathers mixed with her hay. Then becoming suddenly pale, he rushed down the stairs without even bidding Madame

adieu. When the door had closed upon the bishop, and he was fairly in the street, the Cardinal of Ragusa began laughing fit to split his sides.

"Ah! my fair one, am I not worthy to be Pope, and better than that, thy lover this evening?"

But seeing Imperia thoughtful he approached her to take her in his arms, and pet her after the usual fashion of cardinals, men who embrace better than all others, even the soldiers, because they are lazy, and do not spare their essential properties.

"Ha!" said she, drawing back, "you wish to cause my death, you ecclesiastical idiot. The principal thing for you is to enjoy yourself; my sweet carcass, a thing accessory. Your pleasure will be my death, and then you'll canonise me perhaps? Ah, you have the plague, and you would give it to me. Go somewhere else, you brainless priest. Ah! touch me not," said she, seeing him about to advance, "or I will stab you with this dagger."

And the clever hussy drew from her armoire a little dagger, which she knew how to use with great skill when necessary.

"But my little paradise, my sweet one," said the other, laughing, "don't you see the trick? Wasn't it necessary to be get rid of that old bullock of Coire?"

"Well then, if you love me, show it" replied she. "I desire that you leave me instantly. If you are touched with the disease my death will not worry you. I know you well enough to know at what price you will put a moment of pleasure at your last hour. You would drown the earth. Ah, ah! you have boasted of it when

drunk. I love only myself, my treasures, and my health. Go, and if tomorrow your veins are not frozen by the disease, you can come again. Today, I hate you, good cardinal," said she, smiling.

"Imperia!" cried the cardinal on his knees, "my blessed Imperia, do not play with me thus."

"No," said she, "I never play with blessed and sacred things."

"Ah! ribald woman, I will excommunicate thee tomorrow."

"And now you are out of your cardinal sense."

"Imperia, cursed daughter of Satan! Oh, my little beauty – my love – !"

"Respect yourself more. Don't kneel to me, fie for shame!"

"Wilt thou have a dispensation in articulo mortis? Wilt thou have my fortune – or better still, a bit of the veritable true Cross? – Wilt thou?"

"This evening, all the wealth of heaven above and earth beneath would not buy my heart," said she, laughing. "I should be the blackest of sinners, unworthy to receive the Blessed Sacrament if I had not my little caprices."

"I'll burn the house down. Sorceress, you have bewitched me. You shall perish at the stake. Listen to me, my love, – my gentle Dove – I promise you the best place in heaven. Eh? No. Death to you then – death to the sorceress."

"Oh, oh! I will kill you, Monseigneur."

And the cardinal foamed with rage.

"You are making a fool of yourself," said she. "Go away, you'll tire yourself."

"I shall be pope, and you shall pay for this!"

"Then you are no longer disposed to obey me?"

"What can I do this evening to please you?"

"Get out."

And she sprang lightly like a wagtail into her room, and locked herself in, leaving the cardinal to storm that he was obliged to go. When the fair Imperia found herself alone, seated before the fire, and without her little priest, she exclaimed, snapping angrily the gold links of her chain, "By the double triple horn on the devil, if the little one has made me have this row with the Cardinal, and exposed me to the danger of being poisoned tomorrow, unless I pay him over to my heart's content, I will not die till I have seen him burned alive before my eyes. Ah!" said she, weeping, this time real tears, "I lead a most unhappy life, and the little pleasure I have costs me the life of a dog, let alone my salvation."

As she finished this jeremiad, wailing like a calf that is being slaughtered, she beheld the blushing face of the young priest, who had hidden himself, peeping at her from behind her large Venetian mirror.

"Ah!" said she, "Thou art the most perfect monk that ever dwelt in this blessed and amorous town of Constance. Ah, ah! Come my gentle cavalier, my dear boy, my little charm, my paradise of delectation, let me drink thine eyes, eat thee, kill thee with my love. Oh! my ever-flourishing, ever-green, sempiternal god; from a little monk I would make a king, emperor, pope, and happier than either. There, thou canst put anything to fire and

sword, I am thine, and thou shalt see it well; for thou shalt be all a cardinal, even when to redden thy hood I shed all my heart's blood." And with her trembling hands all joyously she filled with Greek wine the golden cup, brought by the Bishop of Coire, and presented it to her sweetheart, whom she served upon her knee, she whose slipper princes found more to their taste than that of the pope.

But he gazed at her in silence, with his eye so lustrous with love, that she said to him, trembling with joy "Ah! be quiet, little one. Let us have supper."

THE VENIAL SIN

HOW THE GOOD MAN BRUYN TOOK A WIFE.

Messire Bruyn, he who completed the Castle of Roche-Corbon-les-Vouvray, on the banks of the Loire, was a boisterous fellow in his youth. When quite little, he squeezed young ladies, turned the house out of windows, and played the devil with everything, when he was called upon to put his Sire the Baron of Roche-Corbon some few feet under the turf. Then he was his own master, free to lead a life of wild dissipation, and indeed he worked very hard to get a surfeit of enjoyment. Now by making his crowns sweat and his goods scarce, draining his land, and a bleeding his hogsheads, and regaling frail beauties, he found himself excommunicated from decent society, and had for his friends only the plunderers of towns and the Lombardians. But the usurers turned rough and bitter as chestnut husks, when he had no other security to give them than his said estate of Roche-Corbon, since the *Rupes Carbonis* was held from our Lord the king. Then Bruyn found himself just in the humour to give a blow here and there, to break a collar-bone or two, and quarrel with everyone about trifles. Seeing which, the Abbot of Marmoustiers, his neighbour, and a man liberal with his advice, told him that it was an evident sign of lordly perfection, that he was walking in the right road, but if he would go and slaughter, to the great glory of God, the Mahommedans who defiled the

Holy Land, it would be better still, and that he would undoubtedly return full of wealth and indulgences into Touraine, or into Paradise, whence all barons formerly came.

The said Bruyn, admiring the great sense of the prelate, left the country equipped by the monastery, and blessed by the abbot, to the great delight of his friends and neighbours. Then he put to the sack enough many towns of Asia and Africa, and fell upon the infidels without giving them warning, burning the Saracens, the Greeks, the English, and others, caring little whether they were friends or enemies, or where they came from, since among his merits he had that of being in no way curious, and he never questioned them until after he had killed them. At this business, agreeable to God, to the King and to himself, Bruyn gained renown as a good Christian and loyal knight, and enjoyed himself thoroughly in these lands beyond the seas, since he more willingly gave a crown to the girls than to the poor, although he met many more poor people than perfect maids; but like a good Touranian he made soup of anything. At length, when he was satiated with the Turks, relics, and other blessings of the Holy Land, Bruyn, to the great astonishment of the people of Vouvrillons, returned from the Crusades laden with crowns and precious stones; rather differently from some who, rich when they set out, came back heavy with leprosy, but light with gold. On his return from Tunis, our Lord, King Philippe, made him a Count, and appointed him his seneschal in our country and that of Poitou. There he was greatly beloved and properly thought well of, since over and

above his good qualities he founded the Church of the Carmes-Deschaulx, in the parish of Egrignolles, as the peace-offering to Heaven for the follies of his youth. Thus was he cardinally consigned to the good graces of the Church and of God. From a wicked youth and reckless man, he became a good, wise man, and discreet in his dissipations and pleasures; rarely was in anger, unless someone blasphemed God before him, the which he would not tolerate because he had blasphemed enough for every one in his wild youth. In short, he never quarrelled, because, being seneschal, people gave up to him instantly. It is true that he at that time beheld all his desires accomplished, the which would render even an imp of Satan calm and tranquil from his horns to his heels. And besides this he possessed a castle all jagged at the corners, and shaped and pointed like a Spanish doublet, situated upon a bank from which it was reflected in the Loire. In the rooms were royal tapestries, furniture, Saracen pomps, vanities, and inventions which were much admired by people of Tours, and even by the archbishop and clerks of St. Martin, to whom he sent as a free gift a banner fringed with fine gold. In the neighbourhood of the said castle abounded fair domains, wind-mills, and forests, yielding a harvest of rents of all kinds, so that he was one of the strongest knights-banneret of the province, and could easily have led to battle for our lord the king a thousand men. In his old days, if by chance his bailiff, a diligent man at hanging, brought before him a poor peasant suspected of some offence, he would say, smiling —

"Let this one go, Brediff, he will count against those I inconsiderately slaughtered across the seas"; oftentimes, however, he would let them bravely hang on a chestnut tree or swing on his gallows, but this was solely that justice might be done, and that the custom should not lapse in his domain. Thus the people on his lands were good and orderly, like fresh veiled nuns, and peaceful since he protected them from the robbers and vagabonds whom he never spared, knowing by experience how much mischief is caused by these cursed beasts of prey. For the rest, most devout, finishing everything quickly, his prayers as well as good wine, he managed the processes after the Turkish fashion, having a thousand little jokes ready for the losers, and dining with them to console them. He had all the people who had been hanged buried in consecrated ground like godly ones, some people thinking they had been sufficiently punished by having their breath stopped. He only persecuted the Jews now and then, and when they were gluttoned with usury and wealth. He let them gather their spoil as the bees do honey, saying that they were the best of tax-gatherers. And never did he despoil them save for the profit and use of the churchmen, the king, the province, or himself.

This jovial way gained for him the affection and esteem of every one, great and small. If he came back smiling from his judicial throne, the Abbot of Marmoustiers, an old man like himself, would say, "Ho, ha! messire, there is some hanging on since you laugh thus!" And when coming from Roche-Corbon to

Tours he passed on horseback along the Fauborg St. Symphorien, the little girls would say, "Ah! this is the justice day, there is the good man Bruyn," and without being afraid they would look at him astride on a big white hack, that he had brought back with him from the Levant. On the bridge the little boys would stop playing with the ball, and would call out, "Good day, Mr. Seneschal" and he would reply, jokingly, "Enjoy yourselves, my children, until you get whipped." "Yes, Mr. Seneschal."

Also he made the country so contented and so free from robbers that during the year of the great over-flowing of the Loire there were only twenty-two malefactors hanged that winter, not counting a Jew burned in the Commune of Chateau-Neuf for having stolen a consecrated wafer, or bought it, some said, for he was very rich.

One day, in the following year about harvest time, or mowing time, as we say in Touraine, there came Egyptians, Bohemians, and other wandering troupes who stole the holy things from the Church of St. Martin, and in the place and exact situation of Madam the Virgin, left by way of insult and mockery to our Holy Faith, an abandoned pretty little girl, about the age of an old dog, stark naked, an acrobat, and of Moorish descent like themselves. For this almost nameless crime it was equally decided by the king, people, and the churchmen that the Mooress, to pay for all, should be burned and cooked alive in the square near the fountain where the herb market is. Then the good man Bruyn clearly and dextrously demonstrated to the others that it would be a thing

most profitable and pleasant to God to gain over this African soul to the true religion, and if the devil were lodged in this feminine body the faggots would be useless to burn him, as said the said order. To which the archbishop sagely thought most canonical and conformable to Christian charity and the gospel. The ladies of the town and other persons of authority said loudly that they were cheated of a fine ceremony, since the Mooress was crying her eyes out in the jail and would certainly be converted to God in order to live as long as a crow, if she were allowed to do so, to which the seneschal replied that if the foreigner would wholly commit herself to the Christian religion there would be a gallant ceremony of another kind, and that he would undertake that it should be royally magnificent, because he would be her sponsor at the baptismal font, and that a virgin should be his partner in the affair in order the better to please the Almighty, while himself was reputed never to have lost the bloom or innocence, in fact to be a coquebin. In our country of Touraine thus are called the young virgin men, unmarried or so esteemed to distinguish them from the husbands and the widowers, but the girls always pick them without the name, because they are more light-hearted and merry than those seasoned in marriage.

The young Mooress did not hesitate between the flaming faggots and the baptismal water. She much preferred to be a Christian and live than be Egyptian and be burned; thus to escape a moment's baking, her heart would burn unquenched through all her life, since for the greater surety of her religion she was

placed in the convent of nuns near Chardonneret, where she took the vow of sanctity. The said ceremony was concluded at the residence of the archbishop, where on this occasion, in honour of the Saviour or men, the lords and ladies of Touraine hopped, skipped and danced, for in this country the people dance, skip, eat, flirt, have more feasts and make merrier than any in the whole world. The good old seneschal had taken for his associate the daughter of the lord of Azay-le-Ridel, which afterwards became Azay-le-Brusle, the which lord being a Crusader was left before Acre, a far distant town, in the hands of a Saracen who demanded a royal ransom for him because the said lord was of high position.

The lady of Azay having given his estate as security to the Lombards and extortioners in order to raise the sum, remained, without a penny in the world, awaiting her lord in a poor lodging in the town, without a carpet to sit upon, but proud as the Queen of Sheba and brave as a mastiff who defends the property of his master. Seeing this great distress the seneschal went delicately to request this lady's daughter to be the godmother of the said Egyptian, in order that he might have the right of assisting the Lady of Azay. And, in fact, he kept a heavy chain of gold which he had preserved since the commencement of the taking of Cyprus, and the which he determined to clasp about the neck of his pretty associate, but he hung there at the same time his domain, and his white hairs, his money and his horses; in short, he placed there everything he possessed, directly he had seen

Blanche of Azay dancing a pavan among the ladies of Tours. Although the Moorish girl, making the most of her last day, had astonished the assembly by her twists, jumps, steps, springs, and elevations and artistic efforts, Blanche had the advantage of her, as everyone agreed, so virginally and delicately did she dance.

Now Bruyn, admiring this gentle maiden whose toes seemed to fear the boards, and who amused herself so innocently for her seventeen years – like a grasshopper trying her first note – was seized with an old man's desire; a desire apoplectic and vigorous from weakness, which heated him from the sole of foot to the nape of his neck – for his head had too much snow on the top of it to let love lodge there. Then the good man perceived that he needed a wife in his manor, and it appeared more lonely to him than it was. And what then was a castle without a chatelaine? As well have a clapper without its bell. In short, a wife was the only thing that he had to desire, so he wished to have one promptly, seeing that if the Lady of Azay made him wait, he had just time to pass out of this world into the other. But during the baptismal entertainment, he thought little of his severe wounds, and still less of the eighty years that had stripped his head; he found his eyes clear enough to see distinctly his young companion, who, following the injunctions of the Lady of Azay, regaled him well with glance and gesture, believing there could be no danger near so old a fellow, in such wise that Blanche – naive and nice as she was in contradistinction to the girls of Touraine, who are as wide-awake as a spring morning – permitted the good man first

to kiss her hand, and afterwards her neck, rather low-down; at least so said the archbishop who married them the week after; and that was a beautiful bridal, and a still more beautiful bride.

The said Blanche was slender and graceful as no other girl, and still better than that, more maidenly than ever maiden was; a maiden all ignorant of love, who knew not why or what it was; a maiden who wondered why certain people lingered in their beds; a maiden who believed that children were found in parsley beds. Her mother had thus reared her in innocence, without even allowing her to consider, trifle as it was, how she sucked in her soup between her teeth. Thus she was a sweet flower, and intact, joyous and innocent; an angel, who needed but the wings to fly away to Paradise. When she left the poor lodging of her weeping mother to consummate her betrothal at the cathedral of St. Gatien and St. Maurice, the country people came to a feast their eyes upon the bride, and on the carpets which were laid down all along the Rue de la Scellerie, and all said that never had tinier feet pressed the ground of Touraine, prettier eyes gazed up to heaven, or a more splendid festival adorned the streets with carpets and with flowers. The young girls of St. Martin and of the boroughs of Chateau-Neuf, all envied the long brown tresses with which doubtless Blanche had fished for a count, but much more did they desire the gold embroidered dress, the foreign stones, the white diamonds, and the chains with which the little darling played, and which bound her for ever to the said seneschal. The old soldier was so merry by her side, that his happiness showed

itself in his wrinkles, his looks, and his movements. Although he was hardly as straight as a billhook, he held himself so by the side of Blanche, that one would have taken him for a soldier on parade receiving his officer, and he placed his hand on his diaphragm like a man whose pleasure stifles and troubles him. Delighted with the sound of the swinging bells, the procession, the pomps, and the vanities of the said marriage, which was talked of long after the episcopal rejoicings, the women desired a harvest of Moorish girls, a deluge of old seneschals, and baskets full of Egyptian baptisms. But this was the only one that ever happened in Touraine, seeing that the country is far from Egypt and from Bohemia. The Lady of Azay received a large sum of money after the ceremony, which enabled her to start immediately for Acre to go to her spouse, accompanied by the lieutenant and soldiers of the Count of Roche-Corbon, who furnished them with everything necessary. She set out on the day of the wedding, after having placed her daughter in the hands of the seneschal, enjoining him to treat her well; and later on she returned with the Sire d'Azay, who was leprous, and she cured him, tending him herself, running the risk of being contaminated, the which was greatly admired.

The marriage ceremony finished and at an end – for it lasted three days, to the great contentment of the people – Messire Bruyn with great pomp led the little one to his castle, and, according to the custom of husbands, had her put solemnly to bed in his couch, which was blessed by the Abbot of Marmoustiers;

then came and placed himself beside her in the great feudal chamber of Roche-Corbon, which had been hung with green blockade and ribbon of golden wire. When old Bruyn, perfumed all over, found himself side by side with his pretty wife, he kissed her first upon the forehead, and then upon the little round, white breast, on the same spot where she had allowed him to clasp the fastenings of the chain, but that was all. The old fellow had too great confidence in himself in fancying himself able to accomplish more; so then he abstained from love in spite of the merry nuptial songs, the epithalamiums and jokes which were going on in the rooms beneath where the dancing was still kept up. He refreshed himself with a drink of the marriage beverage, which according to custom, had been blessed and placed near them in a golden cup. The spices warmed his stomach well enough, but not the heart of his dead ardour. Blanche was not at all astonished at the demeanour of her spouse, because she was a virgin in mind, and in marriage she saw only that which is visible to the eyes of young girls – namely dresses, banquets, horses, to be a lady and mistress, to have a country seat, to amuse oneself and give orders; so, like the child that she was, she played with the gold tassels on the bed, and marvelled at the richness of the shrine in which her innocence should be interred. Feeling, a little later in the day, his culpability, and relying on the future, which, however, would spoil a little every day that with which he pretended to regale his wife, the seneschal tried to substitute the word for the deed. So he entertained his wife in various ways,

promised her the keys of his sideboards, his granaries and chests, the perfect government of his houses and domains without any control, hanging round her neck "the other half of the loaf," which is the popular saying in Touraine. She became like a young charger full of hay, found her good man the most gallant fellow in the world, and raising herself upon her pillow began to smile, and beheld with greater joy this beautiful green brocaded bed, where henceforward she would be permitted, without any sin, to sleep every night. Seeing she was getting playful, the cunning lord, who had not been used to maidens, but knew from experience the little tricks that women will practice, seeing that he had much associated with ladies of the town, feared those handy tricks, little kisses, and minor amusements of love which formerly he did not object to, but which at the present time would have found him cold as the obit of a pope. Then he drew back towards the end of the bed, afraid of his happiness, and said to his too delectable spouse, "Well, darling, you are a seneschal's wife now, and very well seneschaled as well."

"Oh no!" said she.

"How no!" replied he in great fear; "are you not a wife?"

"No!" said she. "Nor shall I be till I have had a child."

"Did you while coming here see the meadows?" began again the old fellow.

"Yes," said she.

"Well, they are yours."

"Oh! Oh!" replied she laughing, "I shall amuse myself much

there catching butterflies."

"That's a good girl," says her lord. "And the woods?"

"Ah! I should not like to be there alone, you will take me there. But," said she, "give me a little of that liquor which La Ponneuse has taken such pains to prepare for us."

"And why, my darling? It would put fire in your body."

"Oh! That's what I should like," said she, biting her lip with vexation, "because I desire to give you a child as soon as possible; and I'm sure that liquor is good for the purpose."

"Ah! my little one," said the seneschal, knowing by this that Blanche was a virgin from head to foot, "the goodwill of God is necessary for this business, and women must be in a state of harvest."

"And when should I be in a state of harvest?" asked she, smiling.

"When nature so wills it," said he, trying to laugh.

"What is it necessary to do for this?" replied she.

"Ah! A cabalistical and alchemical operation which is very dangerous."

"Ah!" said she, with a dreamy look, "that's the reason why my mother cried when thinking of the said metamorphosis; but Bertha de Breuilly, who is so thankful for being made a wife, told me it was the easiest thing in the world."

"That's according to the age," replied the old lord. "But did you see at the stable the beautiful white mare so much spoken of in Touraine?"

"Yes, she is very gentle and nice."

"Well, I give her to you, and you can ride her as often as the fancy takes you."

"Oh, you are very kind, and they did not lie when they told me so."

"Here," continued he, "sweetheart; the butler, the chaplain, the treasurer, the equerry, the farrier, the bailiff, even the Sire de Montsoreau, the young varlet whose name is Gauttier and bears my banner, with his men at arms, captains, followers, and beasts – all are yours, and will instantly obey your orders under pain of being incommoded with a hempen collar."

"But," replied she, "this mysterious operation – cannot it be performed immediately?"

"Oh no!" replied the seneschal. "Because it is necessary above all things that both the one and the other of us should be in a state of grace before God; otherwise we should have a bad child, full of sin; which is forbidden by the canons of the church. This is the reason that there are so many incorrigible scapegraces in the world. Their parents have not wisely waited to have their souls pure, and have given wicked souls to their children. The beautiful and the virtuous come of immaculate fathers; that is why we cause our beds to be blessed, as the Abbot of Marmoustiers has done this one. Have you not transgressed the ordinances of the Church?"

"Oh no," said she, quickly, "I received before Mass absolution for all my faults and have remained since without committing the

slightest sin."

"You are very perfect," said the cunning lord, "and I am delighted to have you for a wife; but I have sworn like an infidel."

"Oh! and why?"

"Because the dancing did not finish, and I could not have you to myself to bring you here and kiss you."

Thereupon he gallantly took her hands and covered them with kisses, whispering to her little endearments and superficial words of affection which made her quite pleased and contented.

Then, fatigued with the dance and all the ceremonies, she settled down to her slumbers, saying to the seneschal —

"I will take care tomorrow that you shall not sin," and she left the old man quite smitten with her white beauty, amorous of her delicate nature, and as embarrassed to know how he should be able to keep her in her innocence as to explain why oxen chew their food twice over. Although he did not augur to himself any good therefrom, it inflamed him so much to see the exquisite perfections of Blanche during her innocent and gentle sleep, that he resolved to preserve and defend this pretty jewel of love. With tears in his eyes he kissed her sweet golden tresses, the beautiful eyelids, and her ripe red mouth, and he did it softly for fear of waking her. There was all his fruition, the dumb delight which still inflamed his heart without in the least affecting Blanche. Then he deplored the snows of his leafless old age, the poor old man, that he saw clearly that God had amused himself by giving him nuts when his teeth were gone.

HOW THE SENESCHAL STRUGGLED WITH HIS WIFE'S MODESTY

During the first days of his marriage the seneschal imprinted many fibs to tell his wife, whose so estimable innocence he abused. Firstly, he found in his judicial functions good excuses for leaving her at times alone; then he occupied himself with the peasants of the neighbourhood, and took them to dress the vines on his lands at Vouvray, and at length pampered her up with a thousand absurd tales.

At one time he would say that lords did not behave like common people, that the children were only planted at certain celestial conjunctions ascertained by learned astrologers; at another that one should abstain from begetting children on feast days, because it was a great undertaking; and he observed the feasts like a man who wished to enter into Paradise without consent. Sometimes he would pretend that if by chance the parents were not in a state of grace, the children commenced on the date of St. Claire would be blind, of St. Gatien had the gout, of St. Agnes were scaldheaded, of St. Roch had the plague; sometimes that those begotten in February were chilly; in March, too turbulent; in April, were worth nothing at all; and that handsome boys were conceived in May. In short, he wished his child to be perfect, to have his hair of two colours; and for this it was necessary that all the required conditions should be

observed. At other times he would say to Blanche that the right of a man was to bestow a child upon his wife according to his sole and unique will, and that if she pretended to be a virtuous woman she should conform to the wishes of her husband; in fact it was necessary to await the return of the Lady of Azay in order that she should assist at the confinement; from all of which Blanche concluded that the seneschal was annoyed by her requests, and was perhaps right, since he was old and full of experience; so she submitted herself and thought no more, except to herself, of this so much-desired child, that is to say, she was always thinking of it, like a woman who has a desire in her head, without suspecting that she was behaving like a gay lady or a town-walker running after her enjoyment. One evening, by accident, Bruyn spoke of children, a discourse that he avoided as cats avoid water, but he was complaining of a boy condemned by him that morning for great misdeeds, saying for certain he was the offspring of people laden with mortal sins.

"Alas!" said Blanche, "if you will give me one, although you have not got absolution, I will correct so well that you will be pleased with him."

Then the count saw that his wife was bitten by a warm desire, and that it was time to dissipate her innocence in order to make himself master of it, to conquer it, to beat it, or to appease and extinguish it.

"What, my dear, you wish to be a mother?" said he; "you do not yet know the business of a wife, you are not accustomed to

being mistress of the house."

"Oh! Oh!" said she, "to be a perfect countess, and have in my loins a little count, must I play the great lady? I will do it, and thoroughly."

Then Blanche, in order to obtain issue, began to hunt the fawns and stags, leaping the ditches, galloping upon her mare over valleys and mountain, through the woods and the fields, taking great delight in watching the falcons fly, in unhooding them and while hunting always carried them gracefully upon her little wrist, which was what the seneschal had desired. But in this pursuit, Blanche gained an appetite of nun and prelate, that is to say, wished to procreate, had her desires whetted, and could scarcely restrain her hunger, when on her return she gave play to her teeth. Now by reason of reading the legends written by the way, and of separating by death the embraces of birds and wild beasts, she discovered a mystery of natural alchemy, while colouring her complexion, and superagitating her feeble imagination, which did little to pacify her warlike nature, and strongly tickled her desire which laughed, played, and frisked unmistakably. The seneschal thought to disarm the rebellious virtue of his wife by making her scour the country; but his fraud turned out badly, for the unknown lust that circulated in the veins of Blanche emerged from these assaults more hardy than before, inviting jousts and tourneys as the herald the armed knight.

The good lord saw then that he had grossly erred and that he was now upon the horns of a dilemma; also he no longer

knew what course to adopt; the longer he left it the more it would resist. From this combat, there must result one conquered and one contused – a diabolical contusion which he wished to keep distant from his physiognomy by God's help until after his death. The poor seneschal had already great trouble to follow his lady to the chase, without being dismounted; he sweated under the weight of his trappings, and almost expired in that pursuit wherein his frisky wife cheered her life and took great pleasure. Many times in the evening she wished to dance. Now the good man, swathed in his heavy clothing, found himself quite worn out with these exercises, in which he was constrained to participate either in giving her his hand, when she performed the vaults of the Moorish girl, or in holding the lighted fagot for her, when she had a fancy to do the torchlight dance; and in spite of his sciaticas, accretions, and rheumatisms, he was obliged to smile and say to her some gentle words and gallantries after all the evolutions, mummeries, and comic pantomimes, which she indulged in to divert herself; for he loved her so madly that if she had asked him for an impossibility he would have sought one for her immediately.

Nevertheless, one fine day he recognised the fact that his frame was in a state of too great debility to struggle with the vigorous nature of his wife, and humiliating himself before his wife's virtue he resolved to let things take their course, relying a little upon the modesty, religion, and bashfulness of Blanche, but he always slept with one eye open, for he suspected that God

had perhaps made virginities to be taken like partridges, to be spitted and roasted. One wet morning, when the weather was that in which the snails make their tracks, a melancholy time, and suitable to reverie, Blanche was in the house sitting in her chair in deep thought, because nothing produces more lively concoctions of the substantive essences, and no receipt, specific or philter is more penetrating, transpiercing or doubly transpiercing and titillating than the subtle warmth which simmers between the nap of the chair and a maiden sitting during certain weather.

Now without knowing it the Countess was incommoded by her innocence, which gave more trouble than it was worth to her brain, and gnawed her all over. Then the good man, seriously grieved to see her languishing, wished to drive away the thoughts which were ultra-conjugal principles of love.

"Whence comes your sadness, sweetheart?" said he.

"From shame."

"What then affronts you?"

"The not being a good woman; because I am without a child, and you without lineage! Is one a lady without progeny? Nay! Look!.. All my neighbours have it, and I was married to have it, as you to give it to me; the nobles of Touraine are all amply furnished with children, and their wives give them lapfuls, you alone have none, they laugh at you there. What will become of your name and your fiefs and your seigniories? A child is our natural company; it is a delight to us to make a fright of it, to fondle it, to swaddle it, to dress and undress it, to cuddle it, to

sing it lullabies, to cradle it, to get it up, to put it to bed, and to nourish it, and I feel that if I had only the half of one, I would kiss it, swaddle it, and unharness it, and I would make it jump and crow all day long, as the other ladies do."

"Were it not that in giving them birth women die, and that for this you are still too delicate and too close in the bud, you would already be a mother," replied the seneschal, made giddy with the flow of words. "But will you buy one ready-made? – that will cost you neither pain nor labour."

"But," said she, "I want the pain and labour, without which it will not be ours. I know very well it should be the fruit of my body, because at church they say that Jesus was the fruit of the Virgin's womb."

"Very well, then pray God that it may be so," cried the seneschal, "and intercede with the Virgin of Egrignolles. Many a lady has conceived after the neuvaine; you must not fail to do one."

Then the same day Blanche set out towards Notre-Dame de l'Egrignolles, decked out like a queen riding her beautiful mare, having on her a robe of green velvet, laced down with fine gold lace, open at the breast, having sleeves of scarlet, little shoes and a high hat ornamented with precious stones, and a gold waistband that showed off her little waist, as slim as a pole. She wished to give her dress to Madame the Virgin, and in fact promised it to her, for the day of her churching. The Sire de Montsoreau galloped before her, his eye bright as that of a hawk, keeping

the people back and guarding with his knights the security of the journey. Near Marmoustiers the seneschal, rendered sleepy by the heat, seeing it was the month of August, waggled about in his saddle, like a diadem upon the head of a cow, and seeing so frolicsome and so pretty a lady by the side of so old a fellow, a peasant girl, who was squatting near the trunk of a tree and drinking water out of her stone jug inquired of a toothless old hag, who picked up a trifle by gleaning, if this princess was going to bury her dead.

"Nay," said the old woman, "it is our lady of Roche-Corbon, wife of the seneschal of Poitou and Touraine, in quest of a child."

"Ah! Ah!" said the young girl, laughing like a fly just satisfied; then pointing to the handsome knight who was at the head of the procession — "he who marches at the head would manage that; she would save the wax-candles and the vow."

"Ha! my little one," replied the hag, "I am rather surprised that she should go to Notre-Dame de l'Egrignolles seeing that there are no handsome priests there. She might very well stop for a short time beneath the shadow the belfry of Marmoustiers; she would soon be fertile, those good fathers are so lively."

"By a nun's oath!" said a tramp walking up, "look; the Sire de Montsoreau is lively and delicate enough to open the lady's heart, the more so as he is well formed to do so."

And all commenced a laugh. The Sire de Montsoreau wished to go to them and hang them in lime-tree by the road as a punishment for their bad words, but Blanche cried out quickly —

"Oh, sir, do not hang them yet. They have not said all they mean; and we shall see them on our return."

She blushed, and the Sire de Montsoreau looked at her eagerly, as though to shoot into her the mystic comprehensions of love, but the clearing out of her intelligence had already been commenced by the sayings of the peasants which were fructifying in her understanding – her innocence was like touchwood, there was only need for a word to inflame it.

Thus Blanche perceived now the notable and physical differences between the qualities of her old husband and perfections of the said Gauttier, a gentleman who was not over affected with his twenty-three years, but held himself upright as a ninepin in the saddle, and as wide-awake as the matin chimes, while in contrast to him, slept the seneschal; he had courage and dexterity there where his master failed. He was one of those smart fellows whom the jades would sooner wear at night than a leathern garment, because they then no longer fear the fleas; there are some who vituperate them, but no one should be blamed, because every one should sleep as he likes.

So much did the seneschal's lady think, and so imperially well, that by the time she arrived at the bridge of Tours, she loved Gauttier secretly, as a maiden loves, without suspecting that it is love. From that she became a proper woman, that is to say, she desired the good of others, the best that men have, she fell into a fit of love-sickness, going at the first jump to the depth of her misery, seeing that all is flame between the first coveting and the

last desire, and she knew not how she then learned that by the eyes can flow in a subtle essence, causing such powerful corrosions in all the veins of the body, recesses of the heart, nerves of the members, roots of the hair, perspiration of the substance, limbo of the brain, orifices of the epidermis, windings of the pluck, tubes of the hypochondriac and other channels which in her was suddenly dilated, heated, tickled, envenomed, clawed, harrowed, and disturbed, as if she had a basketful of needles in her inside. This was a maiden's desire, a well-conditioned desire, which troubled her sight to such a degree that she no longer saw her old spouse, but clearly the young Gauttier, whose nature was as ample as the glorious chin of an abbot. When the good man entered Tours the Ah! Ah! of the crowd woke him up, and he came with great pomp with his suite to the Church of Notre-Dame de l'Egrignolles, formerly called la greigneur, as if you said that which has the most merit. Blanche went into the chapel where children are asked to God and of the Virgin, and went there alone, as was the custom, always however in the presence of the seneschal, of his varlets and the loiterers who remained outside the grill. When the countess saw the priest come who had charge of the masses said for children, and who received the said vows, she asked him if there were many barren women. To which the good priest replied, that he must not complain, and that the children were good revenue to the Church.

"And do you often see," said Blanche, "young women with such old husbands as my lord?"

"Rarely," said he.

"But have those obtained offspring?"

"Always," replied the priest smiling.

"And the others whose companions are not so old?"

"Sometimes."

"Oh! Oh!" said she, "there is more certainty then with one like the seneschal?"

"To be sure," said the priest.

"Why?" said she.

"Madame," gravely replied priest, "before that age God alone interferes with the affair, after, it is the men."

At this time it was a true thing that all the wisdom had gone to the clergy. Blanch made her vow, which was a very profitable one, seeing that her decorations were worth quite two thousand gold crowns.

"You are very joyful!" said the old seneschal to her when on the home journey she made her mare prance, jump, and frisk.

"Yes, yes!" said she. "There is no longer any doubt about my having a child, because any one can help me, the priest said: I shall take Gauttier."

The seneschal wished to go and slay the monk, but he thought that was a crime which would cost him too much, and he resolved cunningly to arrange his vengeance with the help of the archbishop; and before the housetops of Roche-Carbon came in sight he had ordered the Sire de Montsoreau to seek a little retirement in his own country, which the young Gauttier did,

knowing the ways of the lord. The seneschal put in the place of the said Gauttier the son of the Sire de Jallanges, whose fief was held from Roche-Corbon. He was a young boy named Rene, approaching fourteen years, and he made him a page, awaiting the time when he should be old enough to be an equerry, and gave the command of his men to an old cripple, with whom he had knocked about a great deal in Palestine and other places. Thus the good man believed he would avoid the horned trappings of cuckoldom, and would still be able to girth, bridle, and curb the factious innocence of his wife, which struggled like a mule held by a rope.

THAT WHICH IS ONLY A VENIAL SIN

The Sunday following the arrival of Rene at the manor of Roche-Corbon, Blanche went out hunting without her goodman, and when she was in the forest near Les Carneaux, saw a monk who appeared to be pushing a girl about more than was necessary, and spurred on her horse, saying to her people, "Ho there! Don't let him kill her." But when the seneschal's lady arrived close to them, she turned her horse's head quickly and the sight she beheld prevented her from hunting. She came back pensive, and then the lantern of her intelligence opened, and received a bright light, which made a thousand things clear, such as church and other pictures, fables, and lays of the troubadours, or the domestic arrangements of birds; suddenly she discovered

the sweet mystery of love written in all languages, even in that of the Carps'. Is it not silly thus to seal this science from maidens? Soon Blanche went to bed, and soon said she to the seneschal —

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