HONORÉ DE BALZAC

DROLL STORIES — VOLUME 3

Оноре де Бальзак

Droll Stories — Volume 3

де Бальзак О.

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Honoré de Balzac
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PROLOGUE

Certain persons have interrogated the author as to why there was such a demand for these tales that no year passes without his giving an instalment of them, and why he has lately taken to writing commas mixed up with bad syllables, at which the ladies publicly knit their brows, and have put to him other questions of a like character.

The author declares that these treacherous words, cast like pebbles in his path, have touched him in the very depths of his heart, and he is sufficiently cognisant of his duty not to fail to give to his special audience in this prologue certain reasons other than the preceding ones, because it is always necessary to reason with children until they are grown up, understand things, and hold their tongues; and because he perceives many mischievous fellows among the crowd of noisy people, who ignore at pleasure the real object of these volumes.

In the first place know, that if certain virtuous ladies — I say virtuous because common and low class women do not read these stories, preferring those that are never published; on the contrary, other citizens' wives and ladies, of high respectability and godliness, although doubtless disgusted with the subject-matter, read them piously to satisfy an evil spirit, and thus keep themselves virtuous. Do you understand, my good reapers of horns? It is better to be deceived by the tale of a book than cuckolded through the story of a gentleman. You are saved the damage by this, poor fools! besides which, often your lady becomes enamoured, is seized with fecund agitations to your advantage, raised in her by the present book. Therefore do these volumes assist to populate the land and maintain it in mirth, honour and health. I say mirth, because much is to be derived from these tales. I say honour, because you save your nest from the claws of that youthful demon named cuckoldom in the language of the Celts. I say health, because this book incites that which was prescribed by the Church of Salerno, for the avoidance of cerebral plethora. Can you derive a like proof in any other typographically blackened portfolios? Ha! ha! where are the books that make children? Think! Nowhere. But you will find a glut of children making books which beget nothing but weariness.

But to continue. Now be it known that when ladies, of a virtuous nature and a talkative turn of mind, converse publicly on the subject of these volumes, a great number of them, far from reprimanding the author, confess that they like him very much, esteem him a valiant man, worthy to be a monk in the Abbey of Theleme. For as many reasons as there are stars in the heavens, he does not drop the style which he has adopted in these said tales, but lets himself be vituperated, and keeps steadily on his way, because noble France is a woman who refuses to yield, crying, twisting about, and saying,

"No, no, never! Oh, sir, what are you going to do? I won't let you; you'd rumple me."

And when the volume is done and finished, all smiles, she exclaims,

"Oh, master, are there any more to come?"

You may take it for granted that the author is a merry fellow, who troubles himself little about the cries, tears and tricks of the lady you call glory, fashion, or public favour, for he knows her to be a wanton who would put up with any violence. He knows that in France her war-cry is *Mount Joy*! A fine cry indeed, but one which certain writers have disfigured, and which signifies, "Joy it is not of the earth, it is there; seize it, otherwise good-bye." The author has this interpretation from Rabelais, who told it to him. If you search history, has France ever breathed a word when she was joyous mounted, bravely mounted, passionately mounted, mounted and out of breath? She goes furiously at everything, and likes this exercise better than drinking. Now, do you not see that these volumes are

French, joyfully French, wildly French, French before, French behind, French to the backbone. Back then, curs! strike up the music; silence, bigots! advance my merry wags, my little pages, put your soft hands into the ladies' hands and tickle them in the middle — of the hand of course. Ha! ha! these are high sounding and peripatetic reasons, or the author knows nothing of sound and the philosophy of Aristotle. He has on his side the crown of France and the oriflamme of the king and Monsieur St. Denis, who, having lost his head, said "Mount-my-Joy!" Do you mean to say, you quadrupeds, that the word is wrong? No. It was certainly heard by a great many people at the time; but in these days of deep wretchedness you believe nothing concerning the good old saints.

The author has not finished yet. Know all ye who read these tales with eye and hand, feel them in the head alone, and love them for the joy they bring you, and which goes to your heart, know that the author having in an evil hour let his ideas, *id est*, his inheritance, go astray, and being unable to get them together again, found himself in a state of mental nudity. Then he cried like the woodcutter in the prologue of the book of his dear master Rabelais, in order to make himself heard by the gentleman on high, Lord Paramount of all things, and obtain from Him fresh ideas. This said Most High, still busy with the congress of the time, threw to him through Mercury an inkstand with two cups, on which was engraved, after the manner of a motto, these three letters, *Ave*. Then the poor fellow, perceiving no other help, took great care to turn over this said inkstand to find out the hidden meaning of it, thinking over the mysterious words and trying to find a key to them. First, he saw that God was polite, like the great Lord as He is, because the world is His, and He holds the title of it from no one. But since, in thinking over the days of his youth, he remembered no great service rendered to God, the author was in doubt concerning this hollow civility, and pondered long without finding out the real substance of the celestial utensil. By reason of turning it and twisting it about, studying it, looking at it, feeling it, emptying it, knocking it in an interrogatory manner, smacking it down, standing it up straight, standing it on one side, and turning it upside down, he read backwards *Eva*. Who is *Eva*, if not all women in one? Therefore by the Voice Divine was it said to the author:

Think of women; woman will heal thy wound, stop the waste-hole in thy bag of tricks. Woman is thy wealth; have but one woman, dress, undress, and fondle that women, make use of the woman — woman is everything — woman has an inkstand of her own; dip thy pen in that bottomless inkpot. Women like love; make love to her with the pen only, tickle her phantasies, and sketch merrily for her a thousand pictures of love in a thousand pretty ways. Woman is generous, and all for one, or one for all, must pay the painter, and furnish the hairs of the brush. Now, muse upon that which is written here. *Ave*, Hail, *Eva*, woman; or *Eva*, woman, *Ave*, Hail. Yes, she makes and unmakes. Heigh, then, for the inkstand! What does woman like best? What does she desire? All the special things of love; and woman is right. To have children, to produce an imitation, of nature, which is always in labour. Come to me, then, woman! — come to me, Eva!

With this the author began to dip into that fertile inkpot, where there was a brain-fluid, concocted by virtues from on high in a talismanic fashion. From one cup there came serious things, which wrote themselves in brown ink; and from the other trifling things, which merely gave a roseate hue to the pages of the manuscript. The poor author has often, from carelessness, mixed the inks, now here, now there; but as soon as the heavy sentences, difficult to smooth, polish, and brighten up, of some work suitable to the taste of the day are finished, the author, eager to amuse himself, in spite of the small amount of merry ink remaining in the left cup, steals and bears eagerly therefrom a few penfuls with great delight. These said penfuls are, indeed, these same Droll Tales, the authority on which is above suspicion, because it flows from a divine source, as is shown in this the author's naive confession.

Certain evil-disposed people will still cry out at this; but can you find a man perfectly contented on this lump of mud? Is it not a shame? In this the author has wisely comported himself in imitation of a higher power; and he proves it by *atqui*. Listen. Is it not most clearly demonstrated to the learned that the sovereign Lord of worlds has made an infinite number of heavy, weighty, and serious machines

with great wheels, large chains, terrible notches, and frightfully complicated screws and weights like the roasting jack, but also has amused Himself with little trifles and grotesque things light as zephyrs, and has made also naive and pleasant creations, at which you laugh directly you see them? Is it not so? Then in all eccentric works, such as the very spacious edifice undertaken by the author, in order to model himself upon the laws of the above-named Lord, it is necessary to fashion certain delicate flowers, pleasant insects, fine dragons well twisted, imbricated, and coloured — nay, even gilt, although he is often short of gold — and throw them at the feet of his snow-clad mountains, piles of rocks, and other cloud-capped philosophers, long and terrible works, marble columns, real thoughts carved in porphyry.

Ah! unclean beasts, who despise and repudiate the figures, phantasies, harmonies, and roulades of the fair muse of drollery, will you not pare your claws, so that you may never again scratch her white skin, all azure with veins, her amorous reins, her flanks of surpassing elegance, her feet that stay modestly in bed, her satin face, her lustrous features, her heart devoid of bitterness? Ah! wooden-heads, what will you say when you find that this merry lass springs from the heart of France, agrees with all that is womanly in nature, has been saluted with a polite *Ave*! by the angels in the person of their spokesman, Mercury, and finally, is the clearest quintessence of Art. In this work are to be met with necessity, virtue, whim, the desire of a woman, the votive offering of a stout Pantagruelist, all are here. Hold your peace, then, drink to the author, and let his inkstand with the double cup endow the Gay Science with a hundred glorious Droll Tales.

Stand back then, curs; strike up the music! Silence, bigots; out of the way, dunces! step forward my merry wags! — my little pages! give your soft hand to the ladies, and tickle theirs in the centre in a pretty manner, saying to them, "Read to laugh." Afterwards you can tell them some mere jest to make them roar, since when they are laughing their lips are apart, and they make but a faint resistance to love.

PERSEVERANCE IN LOVE

During the first years of the thirteenth century after the coming of our Divine Saviour there happened in the City of Paris an amorous adventure, through the deed of a man of Tours, of which the town and even the king's court was never tired of speaking. As to the clergy, you will see by that which is related the part they played in this history, the testimony of which was by them preserved. This said man, called the Touranian by the common people, because he had been born in our merry Touraine, had for his true name that of Anseau. In his latter days the good man returned into his own country and was mayor of St. Martin, according to the chronicles of the abbey of that town; but at Paris he was a great silversmith.

But now in his prime, by his great honesty, his labours, and so forth, he became a citizen of Paris and subject of the king, whose protection he bought, according to the custom of the period. He had a house built for him free of all quit-rent, close the Church of St. Leu, in the Rue St. Denis, where his forge was well-known by those in want of fine jewels. Although he was a Touranian, and had plenty of spirit and animation, he kept himself virtuous as a true saint, in spite of the blandishments of the city, and had passed the days of his green season without once dragging his good name through the mire. Many will say this passes the bounds of that faculty of belief which God has placed in us to aid that faith due to the mysteries of our holy religion; so it is needful to demonstrate abundantly the secret cause of this silversmith's chastity. And, first remember that he came into the town on foot, poor as Job, according to the old saying; and unlike all the inhabitants of our part of the country, who have but one passion, he had a character of iron, and persevered in the path he had chosen as steadily as a monk in vengeance. As a workman, he laboured from morn to night; become a master, he laboured still, always learning new secrets, seeking new receipts, and in seeking, meeting with inventions of all kinds. Late idlers, watchmen, and vagrants saw always a modest lamp shining through the silversmith's window, and the good man tapping, sculpting, rounding, distilling, modeling, and finishing, with his apprentices, his door closed and his ears open. Poverty engendered hard work, hard work engendered his wonderful virtue, and his virtue engendered his great wealth. Take this to heart, ye children of Cain who eat doubloons and micturate water. If the good silversmith felt himself possessed with wild desires, which now in one way, now another, seize upon an unhappy bachelor when the devil tries to get hold of him, making the sign of the cross, the Touranian hammered away at his metal, drove out the rebellious spirits from his brain by bending down over the exquisite works of art, little engravings, figures of gold and silver forms, with which he appeased the anger of his Venus. Add to this that this Touranian was an artless man, of simple understanding, fearing God above all things, then robbers, next to that of nobles, and more than all, a disturbance. Although if he had two hands, he never did more than one thing at a time. His voice was as gentle as that of a bridegroom before marriage. Although the clergy, the military, and others gave him no reputation for knowledge, he knew well his mother's Latin, and spoke it correctly without waiting to be asked. Latterly the Parisians had taught him to walk uprightly, not to beat the bush for others, to measure his passions by the rule of his revenues, not to let them take his leather to make other's shoes, to trust no one farther then he could see them, never to say what he did, and always to do what he said; never to spill anything but water; to have a better memory than flies usually have; to keep his hands to himself, to do the same with his purse; to avoid a crowd at the corner of a street, and sell his jewels for more than they cost him; all things, the sage observance of which gave him as much wisdom as he had need of to do business comfortably and pleasantly. And so he did, without troubling anyone else. And watching this good little man unobserved, many said,

"By my faith, I should like to be this jeweller, even were I obliged to splash myself up to the eyes with the mud of Paris during a hundred years for it."

They might just as well have wished to be king of France, seeing that the silversmith had great powerful nervous arms, so wonderfully strong that when he closed his fist the cleverest trick of the roughest fellow could not open it; from which you may be sure that whatever he got hold of he stuck to. More than this, he had teeth fit to masticate iron, a stomach to dissolve it, a duodenum to digest it, a sphincter to let it out again without tearing, and shoulders that would bear a universe upon them, like that pagan gentleman to whom the job was confided, and whom the timely arrival of Jesus Christ discharged from the duty. He was, in fact, a man made with one stroke, and they are the best, for those who have to be touched are worth nothing, being patched up and finished at odd times. In short, Master Anseau was a thorough man, with a lion's face, and under his eyebrows a glance that would melt his gold if the fire of his forge had gone out, but a limpid water placed in his eyes by the great Moderator of all things tempered this great ardour, without which he would have burnt up everything. Was he not a splendid specimen of a man?

With such a sample of his cardinal virtues, some persist in asking why the good silversmith remained as unmarried as an oyster, seeing that these properties of nature are of good use in all places. But these opinionated critics, do they know what it is to love? Ho! Ho! Easy! The vocation of a lover is to go, to come, to listen, to watch, to hold his tongue, to talk, to stick in a corner, to make himself big, to make himself little, to agree, to play music, to drudge, to go to the devil wherever he may be, to count the gray peas in the dovecote, to find flowers under the snow, to say paternosters to the moon, to pat the cat and pat the dog, to salute the friends, to flatter the gout, or the cold of the aunt, to say to her at opportune moments "You have good looks, and will yet write the epitaph of the human race." To please all the relations, to tread on no one's corns, to break no glasses, to waste no breath, to talk nonsense, to hold ice in his hand, to say, "This is good!" or, "Really, madam, you are very beautiful so." And to vary that in a hundred different ways. To keep himself cool, to bear himself like a nobleman, to have a free tongue and a modest one, to endure with a smile all the evils the devil may invent on his behalf, to smother his anger, to hold nature in control, to have the finger of God, and the tail of the devil, to reward the mother, the cousin, the servant; in fact, to put a good face on everything. In default of which the female escapes and leaves you in a fix, without giving a single Christian reason. In fact, the lover of the most gentle maid that God ever created in a good-tempered moment, had he talked like a book, jumped like a flea, turned about like dice, played like King David, and built for the aforesaid woman the Corinthian order of the columns of the devil, if he failed in the essential and hidden thing which pleases his lady above all others, which often she does not know herself and which he has need to know, the lass leaves him like a red leper. She is quite right. No one can blame her for so doing. When this happens some men become ill-tempered, cross, and more wretched than you can possibly imagine. Have not many of them killed themselves through this petticoat tyranny? In this matter the man distinguishes himself from the beast, seeing that no animal ever yet lost his senses through blighted love, which proves abundantly that animals have no souls. The employment of a lover is that of a mountebank, of a soldier, of a quack, of a buffoon, of a prince, of a ninny, of a king, of an idler, of a monk, of a dupe, of a blackguard, of a liar, of a braggart, of a sycophant, of a numskull, of a frivolous fool, of a blockhead, of a know-nothing, of a knave. An employment from which Jesus abstained, in imitation of whom folks of great understanding likewise disdain it; it is a vocation in which a man of worth is required to spend above all things, his time, his life, his blood, his best words, besides his heart, his soul, and his brain; things to which the women are cruelly partial, because directly their tongues begin to go, they say among themselves that if they have not the whole of a man they have none of him. Be sure, also, that there are cats, who, knitting their eyebrows, complain that a man does but a hundred things for them, for the purpose of finding out if there be a hundred, at first seeing that in everything they desire the most thorough spirit of conquest and tyranny. And this high jurisprudence has always flourished among the customs of Paris, where the women receive more wit at their baptism than in any other place in the world, and thus are mischievous by birth.

But our silversmith, always busy at his work, burnishing gold and melting silver, had no time to warm his love or to burnish and make shine his fantasies, nor to show off, gad about, waste his time in mischief, or to run after she-males. Now seeing that in Paris virgins do not fall into the beds of young men any more than roast pheasants into the streets, not even when the young men are royal silversmiths, the Touranian had the advantage of having, as I have before observed, a continent member in his shirt. However, the good man could not close his eyes to the advantage of nature with which were so amply furnished the ladies with whom he dilated upon the value of his jewels. So it was that, after listening to the gentle discourse of the ladies, who tried to wheedle and to fondle him to obtain a favour from him, the good Touranian would return to his home, dreamy as a poet, wretched as a restless cuckoo, and would say to himself, "I must take to myself a wife. She would keep the house tidy, keep the plates hot for me, fold the clothes for me, sew my buttons on, sing merrily about the house, tease me to do everything according to her taste, would say to me as they all say to their husbands when they want a jewel, 'Oh, my own pet, look at this, is it not pretty?' And every one in the quarter will think of my wife and then of me, and say 'There's a happy man.' Then the getting married, the bridal festivities, to fondle Madame Silversmith, to dress her superbly, give her a fine gold chain, to worship her from crown to toe, to give her the whole management of the house, except the cash, to give her a nice little room upstairs, with good windows, pretty, and hung around with tapestry, with a wonderful chest in it and a fine large bed, with twisted columns and curtains of yellow silk. He would buy her beautiful mirrors, and there would always be a dozen or so of children, his and hers, when he came home to greet him." Then wife and children would vanish into the clouds. He transferred his melancholy imaginings to fantastic designs, fashioned his amorous thoughts into grotesque jewels that pleased their buyers well, they not knowing how many wives and children were lost in the productions of the good man, who, the more talent he threw into his art, the more disordered he became. Now if God had not had pity upon him, he would have quitted this world without knowing what love was, but would have known it in the other without that metamorphosis of the flesh which spares it, according to Monsieur Plato, a man of some authority, but who, not being a Christian, was wrong. But, there! these preparatory digressions are the idle digressions and fastidious commentaries which certain unbelievers compel a man to wind about a tale, swaddling clothes about an infant when it should run about stark naked. May the great devil give them a clyster with his red-hot three-pronged fork. I am going on with my story now without further circumlocution.

This is what happened to the silversmith in the one-and-fortieth year of his age. One Sabbath-day while walking on the left bank of the Seine, led by an idle fancy, he ventured as far as that meadow which has since been called the Pre-aux-Clercs and which at that time was in the domain of the abbey of St. Germain, and not in that of the University. There, still strolling on the Touranian found himself in the open fields, and there met a poor young girl who, seeing that he was well-dressed, curtsied to him, saying "Heaven preserve you, monseigneur." In saying this her voice had such sympathetic sweetness that the silversmith felt his soul ravished by this feminine melody, and conceived an affection for the girl, the more so as, tormented with ideas of marriage as he was, everything was favourable thereto. Nevertheless, as he had passed the wench by he dared not go back, because he was as timid as a young maid who would die in her petticoats rather than raise them for her pleasure. But when he was a bowshot off he bethought him that he was a man who for ten years had been a master silversmith, had become a citizen, and was a man of mark, and could look a woman in the face if his fancy so led him, the more so as his imagination had great power over him. So he turned suddenly back, as if he had changed the direction of his stroll, and came upon the girl, who held by an old cord her poor cow, who was munching grass that had grown on the border of a ditch at the side of the road.

"Ah, my pretty one," said he, "you are not overburdened with the goods of this world that you thus work with your hands upon the Lord's Day. Are you not afraid of being cast into prison?"

"Monseigneur," replied the maid, casting down her eyes, "I have nothing to fear, because I belong to the abbey. The Lord Abbot has given me leave to exercise the cow after vespers."

"You love your cow, then, more than the salvation of your soul?"

"Ah, monseigneur, our beast is almost the half of our poor lives."

"I am astonished, my girl, to see you poor and in rags, clothed like a fagot, running barefoot about the fields on the Sabbath, when you carry about you more treasures than you could dig up in the grounds of the abbey. Do not the townspeople pursue, and torment you with love?"

"Oh, never monseigneur. I belong to the abbey", replied she, showing the jeweller a collar on her left arm like those that the beasts of the field have, but without the little bell, and at the same time casting such a deplorable glance at our townsman that he was stricken quite sad, for by the eyes are communicated contagions of the heart when they are strong.

"And what does this mean?" he said, wishing to hear all about it.

And he touched the collar, upon which was engraved the arms of the abbey very distinctly, but which he did not wish to see.

"Monseigneur, I am the daughter of an homme de corps; thus whoever unites himself to me by marriage, will become a bondsman, even if he were a citizen of Paris, and would belong body and goods to the abbey. If he loved me otherwise, his children would still belong to the domain. For this reason I am neglected by everyone, abandoned like a poor beast of the field. But what makes me most unhappy is, that according to the pleasure of monseigneur the abbot, I shall be coupled at some time with a bondsman. And if I were less ugly than I am, at the sight of my collar the most amorous would flee from me as from the black plague."

So saying, she pulled her cow by the cord to make it follow her.

"And how old are you?" asked the silversmith.

"I do not know, monseigneur; but our master, the abbot, has kept account."

This great misery touched the heart of the good man, who had in his day eaten the bread of sorrow. He regulated his pace to the girl's, and they went together towards the water in painful silence. The good man gazed at the fine forehead, the round red arms, the queen's waist, the feet dusty, but made like those of a Virgin Mary; and the sweet physiognomy of this girl, who was the living image of St. Genevieve, the patroness of Paris, and the maidens who live in the fields. And make sure that this Joseph suspected the pretty white of this sweet girl's breasts, which were by a modest grace carefully covered with an old rag, and looked at them as a schoolboy looks at a rosy apple on a hot day. Also, may you depend upon it that these little hillocks of nature denoted a wench fashioned with delicious perfection, like everything that the monks possess. Now, the more it was forbidden our silversmith to touch them, the more his mouth watered for these fruits of love. And his heart leaped almost into his mouth.

"You have a fine cow," said he.

"Would you like a little milk?" replied she. "It is so warm these early days of May. You are far from the town."

In truth, the sky was a cloudless blue, and glared like a forge. Everything was radiant with youth, the leaves, the air, the girls, the lads; everything was burning, was green, and smelt like balm. This naive offer, made without the hope of recompense, though a byzant would not have paid for the special grace of this speech; and the modesty of the gesture with which the poor girl turned to him gained the heart of the jeweller, who would have liked to be able to put this bondswoman into the skin of a queen, and Paris at her feet.

"Nay, my child, I thirst not for milk, but for you, whom I would have leave to liberate."

"That cannot be, and I shall die the property of the abbey. For years we have lived so, from father to son, from mother to daughter. Like my ancestors, I shall pass my days on this land, as will also my children, because the abbot cannot legally let us go."

"What!" said the Touranian; "has no gallant been tempted by your bright eyes to buy your liberty, as I bought mine from the king?"

"It would cost too dear; thus it is those whom at first sight I please, go as they came."

"And you have never thought of gaining another country in company of a lover on horseback on a fleet courser?"

"Oh yes. But, monseigneur, if I were caught I should be hanged at least; and my gallant, even were he a lord, would lose more than one domain over it, besides other things. I am not worth so much; besides, the abbey has arms longer than my feet are swift. So I live on in perfect obedience to God, who has placed me in this plight."

"What is your father?"

"He tends the vines in the gardens of the abbey."

"And your mother?"

"She is a washerwoman."

"And what is your name?"

"I have no name, dear sir. My father was baptised Etienne, my mother is Etienne, and I am Tiennette, at your service."

"Sweetheart," said the jeweller, "never has woman pleased me as you please me; and I believe that your heart contains a wealth of goodness. Now, since you offered yourself to my eyes at the moment when I was firmly deliberating upon taking a companion, I believe that I see in you a sign from heaven! And if I am not displeasing to you, I beg you to accept me as your friend."

Immediately the maid lowered her eyes. These words were uttered in such a way, in so grave a tone, so penetrating a manner, that the said Tiennette burst into tears.

"No, monseigneur, I should be the cause of a thousand unpleasantnesses, and of your misfortune. For a poor bondsmaid, the conversation has gone far enough."

"Ho!" cried Anseau; "you do not know, my child, the man you are dealing with."

The Touranian crossed himself, joined his hands, and said —

"I make a vow to Monsieur the Saint Eloi, under whose invocation are the silversmiths, to fashion two images of pure silver, with the best workmanship I am able to perform. One shall be a statue of Madame the Virgin, to this end, to thank her for the liberty of my dear wife; and the other for my said patron, if I am successful in my undertaking to liberate the bondswoman Tiennette here present, and for which I rely upon his assistance. Moreover, I swear by my eternal salvation, to persevere with courage in this affair, to spend therein all I process, and only to quit it with my life. God has heard me," said he. "And you, little one," he added, turning towards the maid.

"Ha! monseigneur, look! My cow is running about the fields," cried she, sobbing at the good man's knees. "I will love you all my life; but withdraw your vow."

"Let us to look after the cow," said the silversmith, raising her, without daring yet to kiss her, although the maid was well disposed to it.

"Yes," said she, "for I shall be beaten."

And behold now the silversmith, scampering after the cursed cow, who gave no heed to their amours; she was taken by the horns, and held in the grip of the Touranian, who for a trifle would have thrown her in the air, like a straw.

"Adieu, my sweet one! If you go into the town, come to my house, over against St Leu's Church. I am called Master Anseau, and am silversmith to the King of France, at the sign of St. Eloi. Make me a promise to be in this field the next Lord's-Day; fail not to come, even should it rain halberds."

"Yes, dear Sir. For this I would leap the walls, and, in gratitude, would I be yours without mischief, and cause you no sorrow, at the price of my everlasting future. Awaiting the happy moment, I will pray God for you with all my heart."

And then she remained standing like a stone saint, moving not, until she could see the good citizen no longer, and he went away with lagging steps, turning from time to time further to gaze upon

her. And when he was far off, and out of her sight, she stayed on, until nightfall, lost in meditation, knowing not if she had dreamed that which had happened to her. Then she went back to the house, where she was beaten for staying out, but felt not the blows. The good silversmith could neither eat nor drink, but closed his workshop, possessed of this girl, thinking of nothing but this girl, seeing everywhere the girl; everything to him being to possess this girl. Now when the morrow was come, he went with great apprehension towards the abbey to speak to the lord abbot. On the road, however, he suddenly thought of putting himself under the protection of one of the king's people, and with this idea returned to the court, which was then held in the town. Being esteemed by all for his prudence, and loved for his little works and kindnesses, the king's chamberlain — for whom he had once made, for a present to a lady of the court, a golden casket set with precious stones and unique of its kind — promised him assistance, had a horse saddled for himself, and a hack for the silversmith, with whom he set out for the abbey, and asked to see the abbot, who was Monseigneur Hugon de Sennecterre, aged ninety-three. Being come into the room with the silversmith, waiting nervously to receive his sentence, the chamberlain begged the abbot to sell him in advance a thing which was easy for him to sell, and which would be pleasant to him.

To which the abbot replied, looking at the chamberlain —

"That the canons inhibited and forbade him thus to engage his word."

"Behold, my dear father," said the chamberlain, "the jeweller of the Court who has conceived a great love for a bondswoman belonging to your abbey, and I request you, in consideration of my obliging you in any such desire as you may wish to see accomplished, to emancipate this maid."

"Which is she?" asked the abbot of the citizen.

"Her name is Tiennette," answered the silversmith, timidly.

"Ho! ho!" said the good old Hugon, smiling. "The angler has caught us a good fish! This is a grave business, and I know not how to decide by myself."

"I know, my father, what those words mean," said that chamberlain, knitting his brows.

"Fine sir," said the abbot, "know you what this maid is worth?"

The abbot ordered Tiennette to be fetched, telling his clerk to dress her in her finest clothes, and to make her look as nice as possible.

"Your love is in danger," said that chamberlain to the silversmith, pulling him on one side. "Dismiss this fantasy. You can meet anywhere, even at Court, with women of wealth, young and pretty, who would willingly marry you. For this, if need be, the king would assist you by giving you some title, which in course of time would enable you to found a good family. Are you sufficiently well furnished with crowns to become the founder of a noble line?"

"I know not, monseigneur," replied Anseau. "I have put money by."

"Then see if you cannot buy the manumission of this maid. I know the monks. With them money does everything."

"Monseigneur," said the silversmith to the abbot, coming towards him, "you have the charge and office representing here below the goodness of God, who is often clement towards us, and has infinite treasures of mercy for our sorrows. Now, I will remember you each evening and each morning in my prayers, and never forget that I received my happiness at your hands, if you aid me to gain this maid in lawful wedlock, without keeping in servitude the children born of this union. And for this I will make you a receptacle for the Holy Eucharist, so elaborate, so rich with gold, precious stones and winged angels, that no other shall be like it in all Christendom. It shall remain unique, it shall dazzle your eyesight, and shall be so far the glory of your altar, that the people of the towns and foreign nobles shall rush to it, so magnificent shall it be."

"My son," replied the abbot "have you lost your senses? If you are so resolved to have this wench for a legal wife, your goods and your person belong to the Chapter of the abbey."

"Yes, monseigneur, I am passionately in love with this girl, and more touched with her misery and her Christian heart than even with her perfections; but I am," said he, with tears in his eyes, "still

more astonished at your harshness, and I say it although I know that my fate is in your hands. Yes, monseigneur, I know the law; and if my goods fall to your domain, if I become a bondsman, if I lose my house and my citizenship, I will still keep that engine, gained by my labours and my studies, on which lies there," cried he, striking his forehead "in a place of which no one, save God, can be lord but myself. And your whole abbey could not pay for the special creations which proceed therefrom. You may have my body, my wife, my children, but nothing shall get you my engine; nay, not even torture, seeing that I am stronger than iron is hard, and more patient than sorrow is great."

So saying, the silversmith, enraged by the calmness of the abbot, who seemed resolved to acquire for the abbey the good man's doubloons, brought down his fist upon an oaken chair and shivered it into fragments, for it split as under the blow of a mace.

"Behold, monseigneur, what kind of servant you will have, and of an artificer of things divine you will make a mere cart-horse."

"My son," replied the abbot, "you have wrongfully broken my chair, and lightly judged my mind. This wench belongs to the abbey and not to me. I am the faithful servant of the rights and customs of this glorious monastery; although I might grant this woman license to bear free children, I am responsible for this to God and to the abbey. Now, since there was here an altar, bondsmen and monks, *id est*, from time immemorial, there has never occurred the case of a citizen becoming the property of the abbey by marriage with a bondswoman. Now, therefore, is there need to exercise the right, and to make use of it so that it would not be lost, weakened, worn out, or fallen into disuse, which would occasion a thousand difficulties. And this is of higher advantage to the State and to the abbey than your stones, however beautiful they be, seeing that we have treasure wherewith to buy rare jewels, and that no treasure can establish customs and laws. I call upon the king's chamberlain to bear witness to the infinite pains which his majesty takes every day to fight for the establishment of his orders."

"That is to close my mouth," said the chamberlain.

The silversmith, who was not a great scholar, remained thoughtful. Then came Tiennette, clean as a new pin, her hair raised up, dressed in a robe of white wool with a blue sash, with tiny shoes and white stockings; in fact, so royally beautiful, so noble in her bearing was she, that the silversmith was petrified with ecstasy, and the chamberlain confessed he had never seen so perfect a creature. Thinking there was too much danger in this sight for the poor jeweller, he led him into the town, and begged him to think no further of the affair, since the abbey was not likely to liberate so good a bait for the citizens and nobles of the Parisian stream. In fact, the Chapter let the poor lover know that if he married this girl he must resolve to yield up his goods and his house to the abbey, consider himself a bondsman, both he and the children of the aforesaid marriage; although, by a special grace, the abbey would let him his house on the condition of his giving an inventory of his furniture and paying a yearly rent, and coming during eight days to live in a shed adjoining the domain, thus performing an act of service. The silversmith, to whom everyone spoke of the cupidity of the monks, saw clearly that the abbot would incommutably maintain this order, and his soul was filled with despair. At one time he determined to burn down the monastery; at another, he proposed to lure the abbot into a place where he could torment him until he had signed a charter for Tiennette's liberation; in fact a thousand ideas possessed his brain, and as quickly evaporated. But after much lamentation he determined to carry off the girl, and fly with her into her a sure place from which nothing could draw him, and made his preparations accordingly; for once out of the kingdom, his friends or the king could better tackle the monks and bring them to reason. The good man counted, however, without his abbot, for going to the meadows, he found Tiennette no more there, and learned that she was confined in the abbey, and with much rigour, that to get at her it would be necessary to lay siege to the monastery. Then Master Anseau passed his time in tears, complaints, and lamentations; and all the city, the townspeople, and housewives, talked of his adventure, the noise of which was so great, that the king sent for the old

abbot to court, and demanded of him why he did not yield under the circumstances to the great love of the silversmith, and why he did not put into practice Christian charity.

"Because, monseigneur," replied the priest, "all rights are knit together like the pieces of a coat of mail, and if one makes default, all fail. If this girl was taken from us against our wish, and if the custom were not observed, your subjects would soon take off your crown, and raise up in various places violence and sedition, in order to abolish the taxes and imposts that weigh upon the populace."

The king's mouth was closed. Everyone was eager to know the end of this adventure. So great was the curiosity that certain lords wagered that the Touranian would desist from his love, and the ladies wagered to the contrary. The silversmith having complained to the queen that the monks had hidden his well-beloved from his sight, she found the deed detestable and horrible; and in consequence of her commands to the lord abbot it was permitted to the Touranian to go every day into the parlour of the abbey, where came Tiennette, but under the control of an old monk, and she always came attired in great splendour like a lady. The two lovers had no other license than to see each other, and to speak to each other, without being able to snatch the smallest atom of pleasure, and always grew their love more powerful.

One day Tiennette discoursed thus with her lover — "My dear lord, I have determined to make you a gift of my life, in order to relieve your suffering, and in this wise; in informing myself concerning everything I have found a means to set aside the rights of the abbey, and to give you all the joy you hope for from my fruition."

"The ecclesiastical judge has ruled that as you become a bondsman only by accession, and because you were not born a bondsman, your servitude will cease with the cause that makes you a serf. Now, if you love me more than all else, lose your goods to purchase our happiness, and espouse me. Then when you have had your will of me, when you have hugged me and embraced me to your heart's content, before I have offspring will I voluntarily kill myself, and thus you become free again; at least you will have the king on your side, who, it is said, wishes you well. And without doubt, God will pardon me that I cause my own death, in order to deliver my lord spouse."

"My dear Tiennette," cried the jeweller, "it is finished — I will be a bondsman, and thou wilt live to make my happiness as long as my days. In thy company, the hardest chains will weigh but lightly, and little shall I reck the want of gold, when all my riches are in thy heart, and my only pleasure in thy sweet body. I place myself in the hands of St. Eloi, will deign in this misery to look upon us with pitying eyes, and guard us from all evils. Now I shall go hence to a scrivener to have the deeds and contracts drawn up. At least, dear flower of my days, thou shalt be gorgeously attired, well housed, and served like a queen during thy lifetime, since the lord abbot leaves me the earnings of my profession."

Tiennette, crying and laughing, tried to put off her good fortune and wished to die, rather than reduce to slavery a free man; but the good Anseau whispered such soft words to her, and threatened so firmly to follow her to the tomb, that she agreed to the said marriage, thinking that she could always free herself after having tasted the pleasures of love.

When the submission of the Touranian became known in the town, and that for his sweetheart he yielded up his wealth and his liberty, everyone wished to see him. The ladies of the court encumbered themselves with jewels, in order to speak with him, and there fell upon him as from the clouds women enough to make up for the time he had been without them; but if any of them approached Tiennette in beauty, none had her heart. To be brief, when the hour of slavery and love was at hand, Anseau remolded all of his gold into a royal crown, in which he fixed all his pearls and diamonds, and went secretly to the queen, and gave it to her, saying, "Madame, I know not how to dispose of my fortune, which you here behold. Tomorrow everything that is found in my house will be the property of the cursed monks, who have had no pity on me. Then deign, madame, to accept this. It is a slight return for the joy which, through you, I have experienced in seeing her I love; for

no sum of money is worth one of her glances. I do not know what will become of me, but if one day my children are delivered, I rely upon your queenly generosity."

"Well said, good man," cried the king. "The abbey will one day need my aid and I will not lose the remembrance of this."

There was a vast crowd at the abbey for the nuptials of Tiennette, to whom the queen presented the bridal dress, and to whom the king granted a licence to wear every day golden rings in her ears. When the charming pair came from the abbey to the house of Anseau (now serf) over against St. Leu, there were torches at the windows to see them pass, and a double line in the streets, as though it were a royal entry. The poor husband had made himself a collar of gold, which he wore on his left arm in token of his belonging to the abbey of St. Germain. But in spite of his servitude the people cried out, "Noel! Noel!" as to a new crowned king. And the good man bowed to them gracefully, happy as a lover, and joyful at the homage which every one rendered to the grace and modesty of Tiennette. Then the good Touranian found green boughs and violets in crowns in his honour; and the principal inhabitants of the quarter were all there, who as a great honour, played music to him, and cried to him, "You will always be a noble man in spite of the abbey." You may be sure that the happy pair indulged an amorous conflict to their hearts' content; that the good man's blows were vigorous; and that his sweetheart, like a good country maiden, was of a nature to return them. Thus they lived together a whole month, happy as the doves, who in springtime build their nest twig by twig. Tiennette was delighted with the beautiful house and the customers, who came and went away astonished at her. This month of flowers past, there came one day, with great pomp, the good old Abbot Hugon, their lord and master, who entered the house, which then belonged not the jeweller but to the Chapter, and said to the two spouses: —

"My children, you are released, free and quit of everything; and I should tell you that from the first I was much struck with the love which united you one to the other. The rights of the abbey once recognised, I was, so far as I was concerned, determined to restore you to perfect enjoyment, after having proved your loyalty by the test of God. And this manumission will cost you nothing." Having thus said, he gave them each a little tap with his hand on the cheek. And they fell about his knees weeping tears of joy for such good reasons. The Touranian informed the people of the neighbourhood, who picked up in the street the largesse, and received the predictions of the good Abbott Hugon.

Then it was with great honour, Master Anseau held the reins of his mule, so far as the gate of Bussy. During the journey the jeweller, who had taken a bag of silver, threw the pieces to the poor and suffering, crying, "Largesse, largesse to God! God save and guard the abbot! Long live the good Lord Hugon!" And returning to his house he regaled his friends, and had fresh wedding festivities, which lasted a fortnight. You can imagine that the abbot was reproached by the Chapter, for his clemency in opening the door for such good prey to escape, so that when a year after the good man Hugon fell ill, his prior told him that it was a punishment from Heaven because he had neglected the sacred interests of the Chapter and of God.

"If I have judged that man aright," said the abbot, "he will not forget what he owes us."

In fact, this day happening by chance to be the anniversary of the marriage, a monk came to announce that the silversmith supplicated his benefactor to receive him. Soon he entered the room where the abbot was, and spread out before him two marvellous shrines, which since that time no workman has surpassed, in any portion of the Christian world, and which were named "Vow of a Steadfast Love." These two treasures are, as everyone knows, placed on the principal altar of the church, and are esteemed as an inestimable work, for the silversmith had spent therein all his wealth. Nevertheless, this wealth, far from emptying his purse, filled it full to overflowing, because so rapidly increased his fame and his fortune that he was able to buy a patent of nobility and lands, and he founded the house of Anseau, which has since been held in great honour in fair Touraine.

This teaches us to have always recourse to God and the saints in all the undertakings of life, to be steadfast in all things, and, above all, that a great love triumphs over everything, which is an old sentence; but the author has rewritten it because it is a most pleasant one.

CONCERNING A PROVOST WHO DID NOT RECOGNISE THINGS

In the good town of Bourges, at the time when that lord the king disported himself there, who afterwards abandoned his search after pleasure to conquer the kingdom, and did indeed conquer it, lived there a provost, entrusted by him with the maintenance of order, and called the provost-royal. From which came, under the glorious son of the said king, the office of provost of the hotel, in which behaved rather harshly my lord Tristan of Mere, of whom these tales oft make mention, although he was by no means a merry fellow. I give this information to the friends who pilfer from old manuscripts to manufacture new ones, and I show thereby how learned these Tales really are, without appearing to be so. Very well, then, this provost was named Picot or Picault, of which some made picotin, picoter, and picoree; by some Pitot or Pitaut, from which comes *pitance*; by others in Languedoc, Pichot from which comes nothing comes worth knowing; by these Petiot or Petiet; by those Petitot and Petinault, or Petiniaud, which was the masonic appellation; but at Bourges he was called Petit, a name which was eventually adopted by the family, which has multiplied exceedingly, for everywhere you find "*des Petits*," and so he will be called Petit in this narrative. I have given this etymology in order to throw a light on our language, and show how our citizens have finished by acquiring names. But enough of science.

This said provost, who had as many names as there were provinces into which the court went, was in reality a little bit of a man, whose mother had given him so strange a hide, that when he wanted to laugh he used to stretch his cheeks like a cow making water, and this smile at court was called the provost's smile. One day the king, hearing this proverbial expression used by certain lords, said jokingly —

"You are in error, gentlemen, Petit does not laugh, he's short of skin below the mouth."

But with his forced laugh Petit was all the more suited to his occupation of watching and catching evil-doers. In fact, he was worth what he cost. For all malice, he was a bit of a cuckold, for all vice, he went to vespers, for all wisdom he obeyed God, when it was convenient; for all joy he had a wife in his house; and for all change in his joy he looked for a man to hang, and when he was asked to find one he never failed to meet him; but when he was between the sheets he never troubled himself about thieves. Can you find in all Christendom a more virtuous provost? No! All provosts hang too little, or too much, while this one just hanged as much as was necessary to be a provost.

This good fellow had for his wife in legitimate marriage, and much to the astonishment of everyone, the prettiest little woman in Bourges. So it was that often, while on his road to the execution, he would ask God the same question as several others in the town did — namely, why he, Petit, he the sheriff, he the provost royal, had to himself, Petit, provost royal and sheriff, a wife so exquisitely shapely, said dowered with charms, that a donkey seeing her pass by would bray with delight. To this God vouchsafed no reply, and doubtless had his reasons. But the slanderous tongues of the town replied for him, that the young lady was by no means a maiden when she became the wife of Petit. Others said she did not keep her affections solely for him. The wags answered, that donkeys often get into fine stables. Everyone had taunts ready which would have made a nice little collection had anyone gathered them together. From them, however, it is necessary to take nearly four-fourths, seeing that Petit's wife was a virtuous woman, who had a lover for pleasure and a husband for duty. How many were there in the town as careful of their hearts and mouths? If you can point out one to me, I'll give you a kick or a half-penny, whichever you like. You will find some who have neither husband nor lover. Certain females have a lover and no husband. Ugly women have a husband and no lover. But to meet with a woman who, having one husband and one lover, keeps to the deuce without trying for

the trey, there is the miracle, you see, you greenhorns, blockheads, and dolts! Now then, put the true character of this virtuous woman on the tablets of your memory, go your ways, and let me go mine.

The good Madame Petit was not one of those ladies who are always on the move, running hither and thither, can't keep still a moment, but trot about, worrying, hurrying, chattering, and clattering, and had nothing in them to keep them steady, but are so light that they run after a gastric zephyr as after their quintessence. No; on the contrary, she was a good housewife, always sitting in her chair or sleeping in her bed, ready as a candlestick, waiting for her lover when her husband went out, receiving the husband when the lover had gone. This dear woman never thought of dressing herself only to annoy and make other wives jealous. Pish! She had found a better use for the merry time of youth, and put life into her joints in order to make the best use of it. Now you know the provost and his good wife.

The provost's lieutenant in duties matrimonial, duties which are so heavy that it takes two men to execute them, was a noble lord, a landowner, who disliked the king exceedingly. You must bear this in mind, because it is one of the principal points of the story. The Constable, who was a thorough Scotch gentleman, had seen by chance Petit's wife, and wished to have a little conversation with her comfortably, towards the morning, just the time to tell his beads, which was Christianly honest, or honestly Christian, in order to argue with her concerning the things of science or the science of things. Thinking herself quite learned enough, Madame Petit, who was, as has been stated, a virtuous, wise, and honest wife, refused to listen to the said constable. After certain arguments, reasonings, tricks and messages, which were of no avail, he swore by his great black *coquedouille* that he would rip up the gallant although he was a man of mark. But he swore nothing about the lady. This denotes a good Frenchman, for in such a dilemma there are certain offended persons who would upset the whole business of three persons by killing four. The constable wagered his big black *coquedouille* before the king and the lady of Sorel, who were playing cards before supper; and his majesty was well pleased, because he would be relieved of this noble, that displeased him, and that without costing him a Thank You.

"And how will you manage the affair?" said Madame de Sorel to him, with a smile.

"Oh, oh!" replied the constable. "You may be sure, madame, I do not wish to lose my big black coquedouille."

"What was, then, this great coquedouille?"

"Ha, ha! This point is shrouded in darkness to a degree that would make you ruin your eyes in ancient books; but it was certainly something of great importance. Nevertheless, let us put on our spectacles, and search it out. *Douille* signifies in Brittany, a girl, and *coque* means a cook's frying pan. From this word has come into France that of *coquin*— a knave who eats, licks, laps, sucks, and fritters his money away, and gets into stews; is always in hot water, and eats up everything, leads an idle life, and doing this, becomes wicked, becomes poor, and that incites him to steal or beg. From this it may be concluded by the learned that the great coquedouille was a household utensil in the shape of a kettle used for cooking things."

"Well," continued the constable, who was the Sieur of Richmond, "I will have the husband ordered to go into the country for a day and a night, to arrest certain peasants suspected of plotting treacherously with the English. Thereupon my two pigeons, believing their man absent, will be as merry as soldiers off duty; and, if a certain thing takes place, I will let loose the provost, sending him, in the king's name, to search the house where the couple will be, in order that he may slay our friend, who pretends to have this good cordelier all to himself."

"What does this mean?" said the Lady of Beaute.

"Friar.. fryer.. an *equivoque*," answered the king, smiling.

"Come to supper," said Madame Agnes. "You are bad men, who with one word insult both the citizens' wives and a holy order."

Now, for a long time, Madame Petit had longed to have a night of liberty, during which she might visit the house of the said noble, where she could make as much noise as she liked, without waking the neighbours, because at the provost's house she was afraid of being overheard, and had to content herself well with the pilferings of love, little tastes, and nibbles, daring at the most only to trot, while what she desired was a smart gallop. On the morrow, therefore, the lady's-maid went off about midday to the young lord's house, and told the lover — from whom she received many presents, and therefore in no way disliked him — that he might make his preparations for pleasure, and for supper, for that he might rely upon the provost's better half being with him in the evening both hungry and thirsty.

"Good!" said he. "Tell your mistress I will not stint her in anything she desires."

The pages of the cunning constable, who were watching the house, seeing the gallant prepare for his gallantries, and set out the flagons and the meats, went and informed their master that everything had happened as he wished. Hearing this, the good constable rubbed his hands thinking how nicely the provost would catch the pair. He instantly sent word to him, that by the king's express commands he was to return to town, in order that he might seize at the said lord's house an English nobleman, with whom he was vehemently suspected to be arranging a plot of diabolical darkness. But before he put this order into execution, he was to come to the king's hotel, in order that he might understand the courtesy to be exercised in this case. The provost, joyous at the chance of speaking to the king, used such diligence that he was in town just at that time when the two lovers were singing the first note of their evening hymn. The lord of cuckoldom and its surrounding lands, who is a strange lord, managed things so well, that madame was only conversing with her lord lover at the time that her lord spouse was talking to the constable and the king; at which he was pleased, and so was his wife — a case of concord rare in matrimony.

"I was saying to monseigneur," said the constable to the provost, as he entered the king's apartment, "that every man in the kingdom has a right to kill his wife and her lover if he finds them in an act of infidelity. But his majesty, who is clement, argues that he has only a right to kill the man, and not the woman. Now what would you do, Mr. Provost, if by chance you found a gentleman taking a stroll in that fair meadow of which laws, human and divine, enjoin you alone to cultivate the verdure?"

"I would kill everything," said the provost; "I would scrunch the five hundred thousand devils of nature, flower and seed, and send them flying, the pips and apples, the grass and the meadow, the woman and the man."

"You would be in the wrong," said the king. "That is contrary to the laws of the Church and of the State; of the State, because you might deprive me of a subject; of the Church, because you would be sending an innocent to limbo unshriven."

"Sire, I admire your profound wisdom, and I clearly perceive you to be the centre of all justice."

"We can then only kill the knight — Amen," said constable, "Kill the horseman. Now go quickly to the house of the suspected lord, but without letting yourself be bamboozled, do not forget what is due to his position."

The provost, believing he would certainly be Chancellor of France if he properly acquitted himself of the task, went from the castle into the town, took his men, arrived at the nobleman's residence, arranged his people outside, placed guards at all the doors, opened noiselessly by order of the king, climbs the stairs, asks the servants in which room their master is, puts them under arrest, goes up alone, and knocks at the door of the room where the two lovers are tilting in love's tournament, and says to them —

"Open, in the name of our lord the king!"

The lady recognised her husband's voice, and could not repress a smile, thinking that she had not waited for the king's orders to do what she had done. But after laughter came terror. Her lover took his cloak, threw it over him, and came to the door. There, not knowing that his life was in peril, he declared that he belonged to the court and to the king's household.

"Bah!" said the provost. "I have a strict order from the king; and under pain of being treated as a rebel, you are bound instantly to receive me."

Then the lord went out to him, still holding the door.

"What do you want here?"

"An enemy of our lord the king, whom we command you to deliver into our hands, otherwise you must follow me with him to the castle."

This, thought the lover, is a piece of treachery on the part of the constable, whose proposition my dear mistress treated with scorn. We must get out of this scrape in some way. Then turning towards the provost, he went double or quits on the risk, reasoning thus with the cuckold: —

"My friend, you know that I consider you but as gallant a man as it is possible for a provost to be in the discharge of his duty. Now, can I have confidence in you? I have here with me the fairest lady of the court. As for Englishmen, I have not sufficient of one to make the breakfast of the constable, M. de Richmond, who sends you here. This is (to be candid with you) the result of a bet made between myself and the constable, who shares it with the King. Both have wagered that they know who is the lady of my heart; and I have wagered to the contrary. No one more than myself hates the English, who took my estates in Piccadilly. Is it not a knavish trick to put justice in motion against me? Ho! Ho! my lord constable, a chamberlain is worth two of you, and I will beat you yet. My dear Petit, I give you permission to search by night and by day, every nook and cranny of my house. But come in here alone, search my room, turn the bed over, do what you like. Only allow me to cover with a cloth or a handkerchief this fair lady, who is at present in the costume of an archangel, in order that you may not know to what husband she belongs."

"Willingly," said the provost. "But I am an old bird, not easily caught with chaff, and would like to be sure that it is really a lady of the court, and not an Englishman, for these English have flesh as white and soft as women, and I know it well, because I've hanged so many of them."

"Well then," said the lord, "seeing of what crime I am suspected, from which I am bound to free myself, I will go and ask my lady-love to consent for a moment to abandon her modesty. She is too fond of me to refuse to save me from reproach. I will beg her to turn herself over and show you a physiognomy, which will in no way compromise her, and will be sufficient to enable you to recognise a noble woman, although she will be in a sense upside down."

"All right," said the provost.

The lady having heard every word, had folded up all her clothes, and put them under the bolster, had taken off her chemise, that her husband should not recognise it, had twisted her head up in a sheet, and had brought to light the carnal convexities which commenced where her spine finished.

"Come in, my friend," said the lord.

The provost looked up the chimney, opened the cupboard, the clothes' chest, felt under the bed, in the sheets, and everywhere. Then he began to study what was on the bed.

"My lord," said he, regarding his legitimate appurtenances, "I have seen young English lads with backs like that. You must forgive me doing my duty, but I must see otherwise."

"What do you call otherwise?" said the lord.

"Well, the other physiognomy, or, if you prefer it, the physiognomy of the other."

"Then you will allow madame to cover herself and arrange only to show you sufficient to convince you," said the lover, knowing that the lady had a mark or two easy to recognise. "Turn your back a moment, so that my dear lady may satisfy propriety."

The wife smiled at her lover, kissed him for his dexterity, arranging herself cunningly; and the husband seeing in full that which the jade had never let him see before, was quite convinced that no English person could be thus fashioned without being a charming Englishwoman.

"Yes, my lord," he whispered in the ear of his lieutenant, "this is certainly a lady of the court, because the towns-women are neither so well formed nor so charming."

Then the house being thoroughly searched, and no Englishman found, the provost returned, as the constable had told him, to the king's residence.

"Is he slain?" said the constable.

"Who?"

"He who grafted horns upon your forehead."

"I only saw a lady in his couch, who seemed to be greatly enjoying herself with him."

"You, with your own eyes, saw this woman, cursed cuckold, and you did not kill your rival?"

"It was not a common woman, but a lady of the court."

"You saw her?"

"And verified her in both cases."

"What do you mean by those words?" cried the king, who was bursting with laughter.

"I say, with all the respect due to your Majesty, that I have verified the over and the under."

"You do not, then, know the physiognomies of your own wife, you old fool without memory! You deserve to be hanged."

"I hold those features of my wife in too great respect to gaze upon them. Besides she is so modest that she would die rather than expose an atom of her body."

"True," said the king; "it was not made to be shown."

"Old coquedouille! that was your wife," said the constable.

"My lord constable, she is asleep, poor girl!"

"Quick, quick, then! To horse! Let us be off, and if she be in your house I'll forgive you."

Then the constable, followed by the provost, went to the latter's house in less time than it would have taken a beggar to empty the poor-box.

"Hullo! there, hi!"

Hearing the noise made by the men, which threatened to bring the walls about their ears, the maid-servant opened the door, yawning and stretching her arms. The constable and the provost rushed into the room, where, with great difficulty, they succeeded in waking the lady, who pretended to be terrified, and was so soundly asleep that her eyes were full of gum. At this the provost was in great glee, saying to the constable that someone had certainly deceived him, that his wife was a virtuous woman, and was more astonished than any of them at these proceedings. The constable turned on his heel and departed. The good provost began directly to undress to get to bed early, since this adventure had brought his good wife to his memory. When he was harnessing himself, and was knocking off his nether garments, madame, still astonished, said to him —

"Oh, my dear husband, what is the meaning of all this uproar — this constable and his pages, and why did he come to see if I was asleep? Is it to be henceforward part of a constable's duty to look after our."

"I do not know," said the provost, interrupting her, to tell her what had happened to him.

"And you saw without my permission a lady of the court! Ha! ha! heu! heu! hein!"

Then she began to moan, to weep, and to cry in such a deplorable manner and so loudly, that her lord was quite aghast.

"What's the matter, my darling? What is it? What do you want?"

"Ah! You won't love me any more are after seeing how beautiful court ladies are!"

"Nonsense, my child! They are great ladies. I don't mind telling you in confidence; they are great ladies in every respect."

"Well," said she, "am I nicer?"

"Ah," said he, "in a great measure. Yes!"

"They have, then, great happiness," said she, sighing, "when I have so much with so little beauty."

Thereupon the provost tried a better argument to argue with his good wife, and argued so well that she finished by allowing herself to be convinced that Heaven has ordained that much pleasure may be obtained from small things.

This shows us that nothing here below can prevail against the Church of Cuckolds.

ABOUT THE MONK AMADOR, WHO WAS A GLORIOUS ABBOT OF TURPENAY

One day that it was drizzling with rain — a time when the ladies remain gleefully at home, because they love the damp, and can have at their apron strings the men who are not disagreeable to them — the queen was in her chamber, at the castle of Amboise, against the window curtains. There, seated in her chair, she was working at a piece of tapestry to amuse herself, but was using her needle heedlessly, watching the rain fall into the Loire, and was lost in thought, where her ladies were following her example. The king was arguing with those of his court who had accompanied him from the chapel — for it was a question of returning to dominical vespers. His arguments, statements, and reasonings finished, he looked at the queen, saw that she was melancholy, saw that the ladies were melancholy also, and noted the fact that they were all acquainted with the mysteries of matrimony.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.