

ÉMILE ZOLA

THE DREAM

ЭМИЛЬ ЗОЛЯ

The Dream

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Émile Zola

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CHAPTER I

During the severe winter of 1860 the river Oise was frozen over and the plains of Lower Picardy were covered with deep snow. On Christmas Day, especially, a heavy squall from the north-east had almost buried the little city of Beaumont. The snow, which began to fall early in the morning, increased towards evening and accumulated during the night; in the upper town, in the Rue des Orfevres, at the end of which, as if enclosed therein, is the northern front of the cathedral transept, this was blown with great force by the wind against the portal of Saint Agnes, the old Romanesque portal, where traces of Early Gothic could be seen, contrasting its florid ornamentation with the bare simplicity of the transept gable.

The inhabitants still slept, wearied by the festive rejoicings of the previous day. The town-clock struck six. In the darkness, which was slightly lightened by the slow, persistent fall of flakes, a vague living form alone was visible: that of a little girl, nine years of age, who, having taken refuge under the archway of the portal, had passed the night there, shivering, and sheltering herself as well as possible. She wore a thin woollen dress, ragged from long use, her head was covered with a torn silk handkerchief, and on her bare feet were heavy shoes much too large for her. Without doubt she had only gone there after having well wandered through the town, for she had fallen down from sheer exhaustion. For her it was the end of the world; there was no longer anything to interest her. It was the last surrender; the hunger that gnaws, the cold which kills; and in her weakness, stifled by the heavy weight at her heart, she ceased to struggle, and nothing was left to her but the instinctive movement of preservation, the desire of changing place, of sinking still deeper into these old stones, whenever a sudden gust made the snow whirl about her.

Hour after hour passed. For a long time, between the divisions of this double door, she leaned her back against the abutting pier, on whose column was a statue of Saint Agnes, the martyr of but thirteen years of age, a little girl like herself, who carried a branch of palm, and at whose feet was a lamb. And in the tympanum, above the lintel, the whole legend of the Virgin Child betrothed to Jesus could be seen in high relief, set forth with a charming simplicity of faith. Her hair, which grew long and covered her like a garment when the Governor, whose son she had refused to marry, gave her up to the soldiers; the flames of the funeral pile, destined to destroy her, turning aside and burning her executioners as soon as they lighted the wood; the miracles performed by her relics; Constance, daughter of the Emperor, cured of leprosy; and the quaint story of one of her painted images, which, when the priest Paulinus offered it a very valuable emerald ring, held out its finger, then withdrew it, keeping the ring, which can be seen at this present day. At the top of the tympanum, in a halo of glory, Agnes is at last received into heaven, where her betrothed, Jesus, marries her, so young and so little, giving her the kiss of eternal happiness.

But when the wind rushed through the street, the snow was blown in the child's face, and the threshold was almost barred by the white masses; then she moved away to the side, against the virgins placed above the base of the arch. These are the companions of Agnes, the saints who served as her escort: three at her right – Dorothea, who was fed in prison by miraculous bread; Barbe, who lived in a tower; and Genevieve, whose heroism saved Paris: and three at her left – Agatha, whose breast was torn; Christina, who was put to torture by her father; and Cecilia, beloved by the angels. Above these were statues and statues; three close ranks mounting with the curves of the arches, decorating them with chaste triumphant figures, who, after the suffering and martyrdom of their earthly life, were welcomed by a host of winged cherubim, transported with ecstasy into the Celestial Kingdom.

There had been no shelter for the little waif for a long time, when at last the clock struck eight and daylight came. The snow, had she not trampled it down, would have come up to her shoulders. The old door behind her was covered with it, as if hung with ermine, and it looked as white as an altar, beneath the grey front of the church, so bare and smooth that not even a single flake had clung to it. The great saints, those of the sloping surface especially, were clothed in it, and were glistening in purity from their feet to their white beards. Still higher, in the scenes of the tympanum, the outlines of the little saints of the arches were designed most clearly on a dark background, and this magic sect continued until the final rapture at the marriage of Agnes, which the archangels appeared to be celebrating under a shower of white roses. Standing upon her pillar, with her white branch of palm and her white lamp, the Virgin Child had such purity in the lines of her body of immaculate snow, that the motionless stiffness of cold seemed to congeal around her the mystic transports of victorious youth. And at her feet the other child, so miserable, white with snow – she also grew so stiff and pale that it seemed as if she were turning to stone, and could scarcely be distinguished from the great images above her.

At last, in one of the long line of houses in which all seemed to be sleeping, the noise from the drawing up of a blind made her raise her eyes. It was at her right hand, in the second story of a house at the side of the Cathedral. A very handsome woman, a brunette about forty years of age, with a placid expression of serenity, was just looking out from there, and in spite of the terrible frost she kept her uncovered arm in the air for a moment, having seen the child move. Her calm face grew sad with pity and astonishment. Then, shivering, she hastily closed the window. She carried with her the rapid vision of a fair little creature with violet-coloured eyes under a head-covering of an old silk handkerchief. The face was oval, the neck long and slender as a lily, and the shoulders drooping; but she was blue from cold, her little hands and feet were half dead, and the only thing about her that still showed life was the slight vapour of her breath.

The child remained with her eyes upturned, looking at the house mechanically. It was a narrow one, two stories in height, very old, and evidently built towards the end of the fifteenth century. It was almost sealed to the side of the Cathedral, between two buttresses, like a wart which had pushed itself between the two toes of a Colossus. And thus supported on each side, it was admirably preserved, with its stone basement, its second story in wooden panels, ornamented with bricks, its roof, of which the framework advanced at least three feet beyond the gable, its turret for the projecting stairway at the left corner, where could still be seen in the little window the leaden setting of long ago. At times repairs had been made on account of its age. The tile-roofing dated from the reign of Louis XIV, for one easily recognised the work of that epoch; a dormer window pierced in the side of the turret, little wooden frames replacing everywhere those of the primitive panes; the three united openings of the second story had been reduced to two, that of the middle being closed up with bricks, thus giving to the front the symmetry of the other buildings on the street of a more recent date.

In the basement the changes were equally visible, an oaken door with mouldings having taken the place of the old one with iron trimmings that was under the stairway; and the great central arcade, of which the lower part, the sides, and the point had been plastered over, so as to leave only one rectangular opening, was now a species of large window, instead of the triple-pointed one which formerly came out on to the street.

Without thinking, the child still looked at this venerable dwelling of a master-builder, so well preserved, and as she read upon a little yellow plate nailed at the left of the door these words, "Hubert, chasuble maker," printed in black letters, she was again attracted by the sound of the opening of a shutter. This time it was the blind of the square window of the ground floor. A man in his turn looked out; his face was full, his nose aquiline, his forehead projecting, and his thick short hair already white, although he was scarcely yet five-and-forty. He, too, forgot the air for a moment as he examined her with a sad wrinkle on his great tender mouth. Then she saw him, as he remained standing behind

the little greenish-looking panes. He turned, beckoned to someone, and his wife reappeared. How handsome she was! They both stood side by side, looking at her earnestly and sadly.

For four hundred years, the line of Huberts, embroiderers from father to son, had lived in this house. A noted maker of chasubles had built it under Louis XI, another had repaired it under Louis XIV, and the Hubert who now occupied it still embroidered church vestments, as his ancestors had always done. At twenty years of age he had fallen in love with a young girl of sixteen, Hubertine, and so deep was their affection for each other, that when her mother, widow of a magistrate, refused to give her consent to their union, they ran away together and were married. She was remarkably beautiful, and that was their whole romance, their joy, and their misfortune.

When, a year later, she went to the deathbed of her mother, the latter disinherited her and gave her her curse. So affected was she by the terrible scene, that her infant, born soon after, died, and since then it seemed as if, even in her coffin in the cemetery, the willful woman had never pardoned her daughter, for it was, alas! a childless household. After twenty-four years they still mourned the little one they had lost.

Disturbed by their looks, the stranger tried to hide herself behind the pillar of Saint Agnes. She was also annoyed by the movement which now commenced in the street, as the shops were being opened and people began to go out. The Rue des Orfevres, which terminates at the side front of the church, would be almost impassable, blocked in as it is on one side by the house of the Huberts, if the Rue du Soleil, a narrow lane, did not relieve it on the other side by running the whole length of the Cathedral to the great front on the Place du Cloître. At this hour there were few passers, excepting one or two persons who were on their way to early service, and they looked with surprise at the poor little girl, whom they did not recognise as ever having seen at Beaumont. The slow, persistent fall of snow continued. The cold seemed to increase with the wan daylight, and in the dull thickness of the great white shroud which covered the town one heard, as if from a distance, the sound of voices. But timid, ashamed of her abandonment, as if it were a fault, the child drew still farther back, when suddenly she recognised before her Hubertine, who, having no servant, had gone out to buy bread.

“What are you doing there, little one? Who are you?”

She did not answer, but hid her face. Then she was no longer conscious of suffering; her whole being seemed to have faded away, as if her heart, turned to ice, had stopped beating. When the good lady turned away with a pitying look, she sank down upon her knees completely exhausted, and slipped listlessly into the snow, whose flakes quickly covered her.

And the woman, as she returned with her fresh rolls, seeing that she had fallen, again approached her.

“Look up, my child! You cannot remain here on this doorstep.”

Then Hubert, who had also come out, and was standing near the threshold, took the bread from his wife, and said:

“Take her up and bring her into the house.”

Hubertine did not reply, but, stooping, lifted her in her strong arms. And the child shrank back no longer, but was carried as if inanimate; her teeth closely set, her eyes shut, chilled through and through, and with the lightness of a little bird that had just fallen from its nest.

They went in. Hubert shut the door, while Hubertine, bearing her burden, passed through the front room, which served as a parlour, and where some embroidered bands were spread out for show before the great square window. Then she went into the kitchen, the old servants' hall, preserved almost intact, with its heavy beams, its flagstone floor mended in a dozen places, and its great fireplace with its stone mantelpiece. On shelves were the utensils, the pots, kettles, and saucepans, that dated back one or two centuries; and the dishes were of old stone, or earthenware, and of pewter. But on the middle of the hearth was a modern cooking-stove, a large cast-iron one, whose copper trimmings were wondrously bright. It was red from heat, and the water was bubbling away in its boiler. A large porringer, filled with coffee-and-milk, was on one corner of it.

“Oh! how much more comfortable it is here than outside,” said Hubert, as he put the bread down on a heavy table of the style of Louis XIII, which was in the centre of the room. “Now, seat this poor little creature near the stove that she may be thawed out!”

Hubertine had already placed the child close to the fire, and they both looked at her as she slowly regained consciousness. As the snow that covered her clothes melted it fell in heavy drops. Through the holes of her great shoes they could see her little bruised feet, whilst the thin woollen dress designed the rigidity of her limbs and her poor body, worn by misery and pain. She had a long attack of nervous trembling, and then opened her frightened eyes with the start of an animal which suddenly awakes from sleep to find itself caught in a snare. Her face seemed to sink away under the silken rag which was tied under her chin. Her right arm appeared to be helpless, for she pressed it so closely to her breast.

“Do not be alarmed, for we will not hurt you. Where did you come from? Who are you?”

But the more she was spoken to the more frightened she became, turning her head as if someone were behind her who would beat her. She examined the kitchen furtively, the flaggings, the beams, and the shining utensils; then her glance passed through the irregular windows which were left in the ancient opening, and she saw the garden clear to the trees by the Bishop’s house, whose white shadows towered above the wall at the end, while at the left, as if astonished at finding itself there, stretched along the whole length of the alley the Cathedral, with its Romanesque windows in the chapels of its apses. And again, from the heat of the stove which began to penetrate her, she had a long attack of shivering, after which she turned her eyes to the floor and remained quiet.

“Do you belong to Beaumont? Who is your father?”

She was so entirely silent that Hubert thought her throat must be too dry to allow her to speak.

Instead of questioning her he said: “We would do much better to give her a cup of coffee as hot as she can drink it.”

That was so reasonable that Hubertine immediately handed her the cup she herself held. Whilst she cut two large slices of bread and buttered them, the child, still mistrustful, continued to shrink back; but her hunger was too great, and soon she ate and drank ravenously. That there need not be a restraint upon her, the husband and wife were silent, and were touched to tears on seeing her little hand tremble to such a degree that at times it was difficult for her to reach her mouth. She made use only of her left hand, for her right arm seemed to be fastened to her chest. When she had finished, she almost broke the cup, which she caught again by an awkward movement of her elbow.

“Have you hurt your arm badly?” Hubertine asked. “Do not be afraid, my dear, but show it to me.”

But as she was about to touch it the child rose up hastily, trying to prevent her, and as in the struggle she moved her arm, a little pasteboard-covered book, which she had hidden under her dress, slipped through a large tear in her waist. She tried to take it, and when she saw her unknown hosts open and begin to read it, she clenched her fist in anger.

It was an official certificate, given by the Administration des Enfants Assistés in the Department of the Seine. On the first page, under a medallion containing a likeness of Saint Vincent de Paul, were the printed prescribed forms. For the family name, a simple black line filled the allotted space. Then for the Christian names were those of Angelique Marie; for the dates, born January 22, 1851, admitted the 23rd of the same month under the registered number of 1,634. So there was neither father nor mother; there were no papers; not even a statement of where she was born; nothing but this little book of official coldness, with its cover of pale red pasteboard. No relative in the world! and even her abandonment numbered and classed!

“Oh! then she is a foundling!” exclaimed Hubertine.

In a paroxysm of rage the child replied: “I am much better than all the others – yes – yes! I am better, better, better. I have never taken anything that did not belong to me, and yet they stole all I had. Give me back, now, that which you also have stolen from me!”

Such powerless passion, such pride to be above the others in goodness, so shook the body of the little girl, that the Huberts were startled. They no longer recognised the blonde creature, with violet eyes and graceful figure. Now her eyes were black, her face dark, and her neck seemed swollen by a rush of blood to it. Since she had become warm, she raised her head and hissed like a serpent that had been picked up on the snow.

“Are you then really so naughty?” asked Hubert gently. “If we wish to know all about you, it is because we wish to help you.”

And looking over the shoulders of his wife he read as the latter turned the leaves of the little book. On the second page was the name of the nurse. “The child, Angelique Marie, had been given, on January 25, 1851, to the nurse, Francoise, sister of Mr. Hamelin, a farmer by profession, living in the parish of Soulanges, an arrondissement of Nevers. The aforesaid nurse had received on her departure the pay for the first month of her care, in addition to her clothing.” Then there was a certificate of her baptism, signed by the chaplain of the Asylum for Abandoned Children; also that of the physician on the arrival and on the departure of the infant. The monthly accounts, paid in quarterly installments, filled farther on the columns of four pages, and each time there was the illegible signature of the receiver or collector.

“What! Nevers!” asked Hubertine. “You were brought up near Nevers?”

Angelique, red with anger that she could not prevent them from reading, had fallen into a sullen silence. But at last she opened her mouth to speak of her nurse.

“Ah! you may be sure that Maman Nini would have beaten you. She always took my part against others, she did, although sometimes she struck me herself. Ah! it is true I was not so unhappy over there, with the cattle and all!”

Her voice choked her and she continued, in broken, incoherent sentences, to speak of the meadow where she drove the great red cow, of the broad road where she played, of the cakes they cooked, and of a pet house-dog that had once bitten her.

Hubert interrupted her as he read aloud: “In case of illness, or of bad treatment, the superintendent is authorised to change the nurses of the children.” Below it was written that the child Angelique Marie had been given on June 20 to the care of Theresa, wife of Louis Franchomme, both of them makers of artificial flowers in Paris.

“Ah! I understand,” said Hubertine. “You were ill, and so they took you back to Paris.”

But no, that was not the case, and the Huberts did not know the whole history until they had drawn it, little by little from Angelique. Louis Franchomme, who was a cousin of Maman Nini, went to pass a month in his native village when recovering from a fever. It was then that his wife, Theresa, became very fond of the child, and obtained permission to take her to Paris, where she could be taught the trade of making flowers. Three months later her husband died, and she herself, being delicate in health, was obliged to leave the city and to go to her brother’s, the tanner Rabier, who was settled at Beaumont. She, alas! died in the early days of December, and confided to her sister-in-law the little girl, who since that time had been injured, beaten, and, in short, suffered martyrdom.

“The Rabiers?” said Hubert. “The Rabiers? Yes, yes! They are tanners on the banks of the Ligneul, in the lower town. The husband is lame, and the wife is a noted scold.”

“They treated me as if I came from the gutter,” continued Angelique, revolted and enraged in her mortified pride. “They said the river was the best place for me. After she had beaten me nearly to death, the woman would put something on the floor for me to eat, as if I were a cat, and many a time I went to bed suffering from hunger. Oh! I could have killed myself, at last!” She made a gesture of furious despair.

“Yesterday, Christmas morning, they had been drinking, and, to amuse themselves, they threatened to put out my eyes. Then, after a while, they began to fight with each other, and dealt such heavy blows that I thought they were dead, as they both fell on the floor of their room. For a long time I had determined to run away. But I was anxious to have my book. Maman Nini had often

said, in showing it to me: 'Look, this is all that you own, and if you do not keep this you will not even have a name.' And I know that since the death of Maman Theresa they had hid it in one of the bureau drawers. So stepping over them as quietly as possible, while they were lying on the floor, I got the book, hid it under my dress-waist, pressing it against me with my arm. It seemed so large that I fancied everyone must see it, and that it would be taken from me. Oh! I ran, and ran, and ran, and when night came it was so dark! Oh! how cold I was under the poor shelter of that great door! Oh dear! I was so cold, it seemed as if I were dead. But never mind now, for I did not once let go of my book, and here it is." And with a sudden movement, as the Huberts closed it to give it back to her, she snatched it from them. Then, sitting down, she put her head on the table, sobbing deeply as she laid her cheek on the light red cover. Her pride seemed conquered by an intense humility. Her whole being appeared to be softened by the sight of these few leaves with their rumpled corners – her solitary possession, her one treasure, and the only tie which connected her with the life of this world. She could not relieve her heart of her great despair; her tears flowed continually, and under this complete surrender of herself she regained her delicate looks and became again a pretty child. Her slightly oval face was pure in its outlines, her violet eyes were made a little paler from emotion, and the curve of her neck and shoulders made her resemble a little virgin on a church window. At length she seized the hand of Hubertine, pressed it to her lips most caressingly, and kissed it passionately.

The Huberts were deeply touched, and could scarcely speak. They stammered: "Dear, dear child!"

She was not, then, in reality bad! Perhaps with affectionate care she could be corrected of this violence of temper which had so alarmed them.

In a tone of entreaty the poor child exclaimed: "Do not send me back to those dreadful people! Oh, do not send me back again!"

The husband and wife looked at each other for a few moments. In fact, since the autumn they had planned taking as an apprentice some young girl who would live with them, and thus bring a little brightness into their house, which seemed so dull without children. And their decision was soon made.

"Would you like it, my dear?" Hubert asked.

Hubertine replied quietly, in her calm voice: "I would indeed."

Immediately they occupied themselves with the necessary formalities. The husband went to the Justice of Peace of the northern district of Beaumont, who was cousin to his wife, the only relative with whom she had kept up an acquaintance, and told him all the facts of the case. He took charge of it, wrote to the Hospice of Abandoned Children – where, thanks to the registered number, Angelique was easily recognised – and obtained permission for her to remain as apprentice with the Huberts, who were well known for their honourable position.

The Sub-Inspector of the Hospice, on coming to verify the little book, signed the new contract as witness for Hubert, by which the latter promised to treat the child kindly, to keep her tidy, to send her to school and to church, and to give her a good bed to herself. On the other side, the Administration agreed to pay him all indemnities, and to give the child certain stipulated articles of clothing, as was their custom.

In ten days all was arranged. Angelique slept upstairs in a room under the roof, by the side of the garret, and the windows of which overlooked the garden. She had already taken her first lessons in embroidery. The first Sunday morning after she was in her new home, before going to mass, Hubertine opened before her the old chest in the working-room, where she kept the fine gold thread. She held up the little book, then, placing it in that back part of one of the drawers, said: "Look! I have put it here. I will not hide it, but leave it where you can take it if you ever wish to do so. It is best that you should see it, and remember where it is."

On entering the church that day, Angelique found herself again under the doorway of Saint Agnes. During the week there had been a partial thaw, then the cold weather had returned to so intense a degree that the snow which had half melted on the statues had congealed itself in large bunches

or in icicles. Now, the figures seemed dressed in transparent robes of ice, with lace trimmings like spun glass. Dorothea was holding a torch, the liquid droppings of which fell upon her hands. Cecilia wore a silver crown, in which glistened the most brilliant of pearls. Agatha's nude chest was protected by a crystal armour. And the scenes in the tympanum, the little virgins in the arches, looked as if they had been there for centuries, behind the glass and jewels of the shrine of a saint. Agnes herself let trail behind her her court mantle, threaded with light and embroidered with stars. Her lamb had a fleece of diamonds, and her palm-branch had become the colour of heaven. The whole door was resplendent in the purity of intense cold.

Angelique recollected the night she had passed there under the protection of these saints. She raised her head and smiled upon them.

CHAPTER II

Beaumont is composed of two villages, completely separated and quite distinct one from the other – Beaumont-l’Eglise, on the hill with its old Cathedral of the twelfth century, its Bishop’s Palace which dates only from the seventeenth century, its inhabitants, scarcely one thousand in number, who are crowded together in an almost stifling way in its narrow streets; and Beaumont-la-Ville, at the foot of the hill, on the banks of the Ligneul, an ancient suburb, which the success of its manufactories of lace and fine cambric has enriched and enlarged to such an extent that it has a population of nearly ten thousand persons, several public squares, and an elegant sub-prefecture built in the modern style. These two divisions, the northern district and the southern district, have thus no longer anything in common except in an administrative way. Although scarcely thirty leagues from Paris, where one can go by rail in two hours, Beaumont-l’Eglise seems to be still immured in its old ramparts, of which, however, only three gates remain. A stationary, peculiar class of people lead there a life similar to that which their ancestors had led from father to son during the past five hundred years.

The Cathedral explains everything, has given birth to and preserved everything. It is the mother, the queen, as it rises in all its majesty in the centre of, and above, the little collection of low houses, which, like shivering birds, are sheltered under her wings of stone. One lives there simply for it, and only by it. There is no movement of business activity, and the little tradesmen only sell the necessities of life, such as are absolutely required to feed, to clothe, and to maintain the church and its clergy; and if occasionally one meets some private individuals, they are merely the last representatives of a scattered crowd of worshippers. The church dominates all; each street is one of its veins; the town has no other breath than its own. On that account, this spirit of another age, this religious torpor from the past, makes the cloistered city which surrounds it redolent with a savoury perfume of peace and of faith.

And in all this mystic place, the house of the Huberts, where Angelique was to live in the future, was the one nearest to the Cathedral, and which clung to it as if in reality it were a part thereof. The permission to build there, between two of the great buttresses, must have been given by some vicar long ago, who was desirous of attaching to himself the ancestors of this line of embroiderers, as master chasuble-makers and furnishers for the Cathedral clergy. On the southern side, the narrow garden was barred by the colossal building; first, the circumference of the side chapels, whose windows overlooked the flower-beds, and then the slender, long nave, that the flying buttresses supported, and afterwards the high roof covered with the sheet lead.

The sun never penetrated to the lower part of this garden, where ivy and box alone grew luxuriantly; yet the eternal shadow there was very soft and pleasant as it fell from the gigantic brow of the apse – a religious shadow, sepulchral and pure, which had a good odour about it. In the greenish half-light of its calm freshness, the two towers let fall only the sound of their chimes. But the entire house kept the quivering therefrom, sealed as it was to these old stones, melted into them and supported by them. It trembled at the least of the ceremonies; at the High Mass, the rumbling of the organ, the voices of the choristers, even the oppressed sighs of the worshippers, murmured through each one of its rooms, lulled it as if with a holy breath from the Invisible, and at times through the half-cool walls seemed to come the vapours from the burning incense.

For five years Angelique lived and grew there, as if in a cloister, far away from the world. She only went out to attend the seven-o’clock Mass on Sunday mornings, as Hubertine had obtained permission for her to study at home, fearing that, if sent to school, she might not always have the best of associates. This old dwelling, so shut in, with its garden of a dead quiet, was her world. She occupied as her chamber a little whitewashed room under the roof; she went down in the morning to her breakfast in the kitchen, she went up again to the working-room in the second story to her embroidery. And these places, with the turning stone stairway of the turret, were the only corners

in which she passed her time; for she never went into the Huberts' apartments, and only crossed the parlour on the first floor, and they were the two rooms which had been rejuvenated and modernised. In the parlour, the beams were plastered over, and the ceiling had been decorated with a palm-leaf cornice, accompanied by a rose centre; the wall-paper dated from the First Empire, as well as the white marble chimney-piece and the mahogany furniture, which consisted of a sofa and four armchairs covered with Utrecht velvet, a centre table, and a cabinet.

On the rare occasions when she went there, to add to the articles exposed for sale some new bands of embroidery, if she cast her eyes without, she saw through the window the same unchanging vista, the narrow street ending at the portal of Saint Agnes; a parishioner pushing open the little lower door, which shut itself without any noise, and the shops of the plate-worker and wax-candle-maker opposite, which appeared to be always empty, but where was a display of holy sacramental vessels, and long lines of great church tapers. And the cloistral calm of all Beaumont-l'Eglise – of the Rue Magloire, back of the Bishop's Palace, of the Grande Rue, where the Rue de Orfevres began, and of the Place du Cloitre, where rose up the two towers, was felt in the drowsy air, and seemed to fall gently with the pale daylight on the deserted pavement.

Hubertine had taken upon herself the charge of the education of Angelique. Moreover, she was very old-fashioned in her ideas, and maintained that a woman knew enough if she could read well, write correctly, and had studied thoroughly the first four rules of arithmetic. But even for this limited instruction she had constantly to contend with an unwillingness on the part of her pupil, who, instead of giving her attention to her books, preferred looking out of the windows, although the recreation was very limited, as she could see nothing but the garden from them. In reality, Angelique cared only for reading; notwithstanding in her dictations, chosen from some classic writer, she never succeeded in spelling a page correctly, yet her handwriting was exceedingly pretty, graceful, and bold, one of those irregular styles which were quite the fashion long ago. As for other studies, of geography and history and cyphering, she was almost completely ignorant of them. What good would knowledge ever do her? It was really useless, she thought. Later on, when it was time for her to be Confirmed, she learned her Catechism word for word, and with so fervent an ardour that she astonished everyone by the exactitude of her memory.

Notwithstanding their gentleness, during the first year the Huberts were often discouraged. Angelique, who promised to be skilful in embroidering, disconcerted them by sudden changes to inexplicable idleness after days of praiseworthy application. She was capricious, seemed to lose her strength, became greedy, would steal sugar to eat when alone, and her cheeks were flushed and her eyes looked wearied under their reddened lids. If reprov'd, she would reply with a flood of injurious words. Some days, when they wished to try to subdue her, her foolish pride at being interfered with would throw her into such serious attacks that she would strike her feet and her hands together, and seemed ready to tear her clothing, or to bite anyone who approached her. At such moments they drew away from her, for she was like a little monster ruled by the evil spirit within her.

Who could she be? Where did she come from? Almost always these abandoned children are the offspring of vice. Twice they had resolved to give her up and send her back to the Asylum, so discouraged were they and so deeply did they regret having taken her. But each time these frightful scenes, which almost made the house tremble, ended in the same deluge of tears, and the same excited expressions and acts of penitence, when the child would throw herself on the floor, begging them so earnestly to punish her that they were obliged to forgive her.

Little by little, Hubertine gained great authority over her. She was peculiarly adapted for such a task, with her kind heart, her gentle firmness, her common-sense and her uniform temper. She taught her the duty of obedience and the sin of pride and of passion. To obey was to live. We must obey God, our parents, and our superiors. There was a whole hierarchy of respect, outside of which existence was unrestrained and disorderly. So, after each fit of passion, that she might learn humility, some menial labour was imposed upon her as a penance, such as washing the cooking-utensils, or

wiping up the kitchen floor; and, until it was finished, she would remain stooping over her work, enraged at first, but conquered at last.

With the little girl excess seemed to be a marked characteristic in everything, even in her caresses. Many times Hubertine had seen her kissing her hands with vehemence. She would often be in a fever of ecstasy before the little pictures of saints and of the Child Jesus, which she had collected; and one evening she was found in a half-fainting state, with her head upon the table, and her lips pressed to those of the images. When Hubertine confiscated them there was a terrible scene of tears and cries, as if she herself were being tortured. After that she was held very strictly, was made to obey, and her freaks were at once checked by keeping her busy at her work; as soon as her cheeks grew very red, her eyes dark, and she had nervous tremblings, everything was immediately made quiet about her.

Moreover, Hubertine had found an unexpected aid in the book given by the Society for the Protection of Abandoned Children. Every three months, when the collector signed it, Angelique was very low-spirited for the rest of the day. If by chance she saw it when she went to the drawer for a ball of gold thread, her heart seemed pierced with agony. And one day, when in a fit of uncontrollable fury, which nothing had been able to conquer, she turned over the contents of the drawer, she suddenly appeared as if thunderstruck before the red-covered book. Her sobs stifled her. She threw herself at the feet of the Huberts in great humility, stammering that they had made a mistake in giving her shelter, and that she was not worthy of all their kindness. From that time her anger was frequently restrained by the sight or the mention of the book.

In this way Angelique lived until she was twelve years of age and ready to be Confirmed. The calm life of the household, the little old-fashioned building sleeping under the shadow of the Cathedral, perfumed with incense, and penetrated with religious music, favoured the slow amelioration of this untutored nature, this wild flower, taken from no one knew where, and transplanted in the mystic soil of the narrow garden. Added to this was the regularity of her daily work and the utter ignorance of what was going on in the world, without even an echo from a sleepy quarter penetrating therein.

But, above all, the gentlest influence came from the great love of the Huberts for each other, which seemed to be enlarged by some unknown, incurable remorse. He passed the days in endeavouring to make his wife forget the injury he had done her in marrying her in spite of the opposition of her mother. He had realised at the death of their child that she half accused him of this punishment, and he wished to be forgiven. She had done so years ago, and now she idolised him. Sometimes he was not sure of it, and this doubt saddened his life. He wished they might have had another infant, and so feel assured that the obstinate mother had been softened after death, and had withdrawn her malediction. That, in fact, was their united desire – a child of pardon; and he worshipped his wife with a tender love, ardent and pure as that of a betrothed. If before the apprentice he did not even kiss her hand, he never entered their chamber, even after twenty years of marriage, without an emotion of gratitude for all the happiness that had been given him. This was their true home, this room with its tinted paintings, its blue wall-paper, its pretty hangings, and its walnut furniture. Never was an angry word uttered therein, and, as if from a sanctuary, a sentiment of tenderness went out from its occupants, and filled the house. It was thus for Angelique an atmosphere of affection and love, in which she grew and thrived.

An unexpected event finished the work of forming her character. As she was rummaging one morning in a corner of the working-room, she found on a shelf, among implements of embroidery which were no longer used, a very old copy of the “Golden Legend,” by Jacques de Voragine. This French translation, dating from 1549, must have been bought in the long ago by some master-workman in church vestments, on account of the pictures, full of useful information upon the Saints. It was a great while since Angelique had given any attention to the little old carved images, showing such childlike faith, which had once delighted her. But now, as soon as she was allowed to go out

and play in the garden, she took the book with her. It had been rebound in yellow calf, and was in a good condition. She slowly turned over some of the leaves, then looked at the title-page, in red and black, with the address of the bookseller: "a Paris, en la rue Neufre Nostre-Dame, a l'enseigne Saint Jehan Baptiste;" and decorated with medallions of the four Evangelists, framed at the bottom by the Adoration of the Three Magi, and at the top by the Triumph of Jesus Christ, and His resurrection. And then picture after picture followed; there were ornamented letters, large and small, engravings in the text and at the heading of the chapters; "The Annunciation," an immense angel inundating with rays of light a slight, delicate-looking Mary; "The Massacre of the Innocents," where a cruel Herod was seen surrounded by dead bodies of dear little children; "The Nativity," where Saint Joseph is holding a candle, the light of which falls upon the face of the Infant Jesus, Who sleeps in His mother's arms; Saint John the Almoner, giving to the poor; Saint Matthias, breaking an idol; Saint Nicholas as a bishop, having at his right hand a little bucket filled with babies. And then, a little farther on, came the female saints: Agnes, with her neck pierced by a sword; Christina, torn by pincers; Genevieve, followed by her lambs; Juliana, being whipped; Anastasia, burnt; Maria the Egyptian, repenting in the desert, Mary of Magdalene, carrying the vase of precious ointment; and others and still others followed. There was an increasing terror and a piety in each one of them, making it a history which weighs upon the heart and fills the eyes with tears.

But, little by little, Angelique was curious to know exactly what these engravings represented. The two columns of closely-printed text, the impression of which remained very black upon the papers yellowed by time, frightened her by the strange, almost barbaric look of the Gothic letters. Still, she accustomed herself to it, deciphered these characters, learned the abbreviations and the contractions, and soon knew how to explain the turning of the phrases and the old-fashioned words. At last she could read it easily, and was as enchanted as if she were penetrating a mystery, and she triumphed over each new difficulty that she conquered.

Under these laborious shades a whole world of light revealed itself. She entered, as it were, into a celestial splendour. For now the few classic books they owned, so cold and dry, existed no longer. The Legend alone interested her. She bent over it, with her forehead resting on her hands, studying it so intently, that she no longer lived in the real life, but, unconscious of time, she seemed to see, mounting from the depths of the unknown, the broad expansion of a dream.

How wonderful it all was! These saints and virgins! They are born predestined; solemn voices announce their coming, and their mothers have marvellous dreams about them. All are beautiful, strong, and victorious. Great lights surround them, and their countenances are resplendent. Dominic has a star on his forehead. They read the minds of men and repeat their thoughts aloud. They have the gift of prophecy, and their predictions are always realised. Their number is infinite. Among them are bishops and monks, virgins and fallen women, beggars and nobles of a royal race, unclothed hermits who live on roots, and old men who inhabit caverns with goats. Their history is always the same. They grow up for Christ, believe fervently in Him, refuse to sacrifice to false gods, are tortured, and die filled with glory. Emperors were at last weary of persecuting them. Andrew, after being attached to the cross, preached during two days to twenty thousand persons. Conversions were made in masses, forty thousand men being baptised at one time. When the multitudes were not converted by the miracles, they fled terrified. The saints were accused of sorcery; enigmas were proposed to them, which they solved at once; they were obliged to dispute questions with learned men, who remained speechless before them. As soon as they entered the temples of sacrifice the idols were overthrown with a breath, and were broken to pieces. A virgin tied her sash around the neck of a statue of Venus, which at once fell in powder. The earth trembled. The Temple of Diana was struck by lightning and destroyed; and the people revolting, civil wars ensued. Then often the executioners asked to be baptised; kings knelt at the feet of saints in rags who had devoted themselves to poverty. Sabina flees from the paternal roof. Paula abandons her five children. Mortifications of the flesh and fasts purify, not oil or water. Germanus covers his food with ashes. Bernard cares not to eat, but delights only in

the taste of fresh water. Agatha keeps for three years a pebble in her mouth. Augustinus is in despair for the sin he has committed in turning to look after a dog who was running. Prosperity and health are despised, and joy begins with privations which kill the body. And it is thus that, subduing all things, they live at last in gardens where the flowers are stars, and where the leaves of the trees sing. They exterminate dragons, they raise and appease tempests, they seem in their ecstatic visions to be borne above the earth. Their wants are provided for while living, and after their death friends are advised by dreams to go and bury them. Extraordinary things happen to them, and adventures far more marvellous than those in a work of fiction. And when their tombs are opened after hundreds of years, sweet odours escape therefrom.

Then, opposite the saints, behold the evil spirits!

“They often fly about us like insects, and fill the air without number. The air is also full of demons, as the rays of the sun are full of atoms. It is even like powder.” And the eternal contest begins. The saints are always victorious, and yet they are constantly obliged to renew the battle. The more the demons are driven away, the more they return. There were counted six thousand six hundred and sixty-six in the body of a woman whom Fortunatus delivered. They moved, they talked and cried, by the voice of the person possessed, whose body they shook as if by a tempest. At each corner of the highways an afflicted one is seen, and the first saint who passes contends with the evil spirits. They enter by the eyes, the ears, and by the mouth, and, after days of fearful struggling, they go out with loud groanings. Basilus, to save a young man, contends personally with the Evil One. Macarius was attacked when in a cemetery, and passed a whole night in defending himself. The angels, even at deathbeds, in order to secure the soul of the dying were obliged to beat the demons. At other times the contests are only of the intellect and the mind, but are equally remarkable. Satan, who prowls about, assumes many forms, sometimes disguising himself as a woman, and again, even as a saint. But, once overthrown, he appears in all his ugliness: “a black cat, larger than a dog, his huge eyes emitting flame, his tongue long, large, and bloody, his tail twisted and raised in the air, and his whole body disgusting to the last degree.” He is the one thing that is hated, and the only preoccupation. People fear him, yet ridicule him. One is not even honest with him. In reality, notwithstanding the ferocious appearance of his furnaces, he is the eternal dupe. All the treaties he makes are forced from him by violence or cunning. Feeble women throw him down: Margaret crushes his head with her feet, and Juliana beats him with her chain. From all this a serenity disengages itself, a disdain of evil, since it is powerless, and a certainty of good, since virtue triumphs. It is only necessary to cross one’s self, and the Devil can do no harm, but yells and disappears, while the infernal regions tremble.

Then, in this combat of legions of saints against Satan are developed the fearful sufferings from persecutions. The executioners expose to the flies the martyrs whose bodies are covered with honey; they make them walk with bare feet over broken glass or red-hot coals, put them in ditches with reptiles; chastise them with whips, whose thongs are weighted with leaden balls; nail them when alive in coffins, which they throw into the sea; hang them by their hair, and then set fire to them; moisten their wounds with quicklime, boiling pitch, or molten lead; make them sit on red-hot iron stools; burn their sides with torches; break their bones on wheels, and torture them in every conceivable way. And, with all this, physical pain counts for nothing; indeed, it seems to be desired. Moreover, a continual miracle protects them. John drinks poison but is unharmed. Sebastian smiles although pierced with arrows; sometimes they remain in the air at the right or left of the martyr, or, launched by the archer, they return upon himself and put out his eyes. Molten lead is swallowed as if it were ice-water. Lions prostrate themselves, and lick their hands as gently as lambs. The gridiron of Saint Lawrence is of an agreeable freshness to him. He cries, “Unhappy man, you have roasted one side, turn the other and then eat, for it is sufficiently cooked.” Cecilia, placed in a boiling bath, is refreshed by it. Christina exhorts those who would torture her. Her father had her whipped by twelve men, who at last drop from fatigue; she is then attached to a wheel, under which a fire is kindled, and the flame, turning to one side, devours fifteen hundred persons. She is then thrown into the sea, but the angels support

her; Jesus comes to baptise her in person, then gives her to the charge of Saint Michael, that he may conduct her back to the earth; after that she is placed for five days in a heated oven, where she suffers not, but sings constantly. Vincent, who was exposed to still greater tortures, feels them not. His limbs are broken, he is covered with red-hot irons, he is pricked with needles, he is placed on a brazier of live coals, and then taken back to prison, where his feet are nailed to a post. Yet he still lives, and his pains are changed into a sweetness of flowers, a great light fills his dungeon, and angels sing with him, giving him rest as if he were on a bed of roses. The sweet sound of singing, and the fresh odour of flowers spread without in the room, and when the guards saw the miracle they were converted to the faith, and when Dacian heard of it, he was greatly enraged, and said, "Do nothing more to him, for we are conquered." Such was the excitement among the persecutors, it could only end either by their conversion or by their death. Their hands are paralysed; they perish violently; they are choked by fish-bones; they are struck by lightning, and their chariots are broken. In the meanwhile, the cells of the martyrs are resplendent. Mary and the Apostles enter them at will, although the doors are bolted. Constant aid is given, apparitions descend from the skies, where angels are waiting, holding crowns of precious stones. Since death seems joyous, it is not feared, and their friends are glad when they succumb to it. On Mount Ararat ten thousand are crucified, and at Cologne eleven thousand virgins are massacred by the Huns. In the circuses they are devoured by wild beasts. Quirique, who, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, taught like a man, suffered martyrdom when but three years of age. Nursing-children reprov'd the executioners. The hope for celestial happiness deadened the physical senses and softened pain. Were they torn to pieces, or burnt, they minded it not. They never yielded, and they called for the sword, which alone could kill them. Eulalia, when at the stake, breathes the flame that she may die the more quickly. Her prayer is granted, and a white dove flies from her mouth and bears her soul to heaven.

Angelique marvelled greatly at all these accounts. So many abominations and such triumphant joy delighted her and carried her out of herself.

But other points in the Legend, of quite a different nature, also interested her; the animals, for instance, of which there were enough to fill an Ark of Noah. She liked the ravens and the eagles who fed the hermits.

Then what lovely stories there were about the lions. The serviceable one who found a resting-place in a field for Mary the Egyptian; the flaming lion who protected virgins or maidens in danger; and then the lion of Saint Jerome, to whose care an ass had been confided, and, when the animal was stolen, went in search of him and brought him back. There was also the penitent wolf, who had restored a little pig he had intended eating. Then there was Bernard, who excommunicates the flies, and they drop dead. Remi and Blaise feed birds at their table, bless them, and make them strong. Francis, "filled with a dove-like simplicity," preaches to them, and exhorts them to love God. A bird was on a branch of a fig-tree, and Francis, holding out his hand, beckoned to it, and soon it obeyed, and lighted on his hand. And he said to it, "Sing my sister, and praise the Lord." And immediately the bird began to sing, and did not go away until it was told to do so.

All this was a continual source of recreation to Angelique, and gave her the idea of calling to the swallows, and hoping they might come to her.

The good giant Christopher, who carried the Infant Christ on his shoulders, delighted her so much as to bring tears to her eyes.

She was very merry over the misadventures of a certain Governor with the three chambermaids of Anastasia, whom he hoped to have found in the kitchen, where he kissed the stove and the kettles, thinking he was embracing them. "He went out therefrom very black and ugly, and his clothes quite smutched. And when his servants, who were waiting, saw him in such a state, they thought he was the Devil. Then they beat him with birch-rods, and, running away, left him alone."

But that which convulsed her most with laughter, was the account of the blows given to the Evil One himself, especially when Juliana, having been tempted by him in her prison cell, administered

such an extraordinary chastisement with her chain. "Then the Provost commanded that Juliana should be brought before him; and when she came into his presence, she was drawing the Devil after her, and he cried out, saying, 'My good lady Juliana, do not hurt me any more!' She led him in this way around the public square, and afterwards threw him into a deep ditch."

Often Angelique would repeat to the Huberts, as they were all at work together, legends far more interesting than any fairy-tale. She had read them over so often that she knew them by heart, and she told in a charming way the story of the Seven Sleepers, who, to escape persecution, walled themselves up in a cavern, and whose awakening greatly astonished the Emperor Theodosius. Then the Legend of Saint Clement with its endless adventures, so unexpected and touching, where the whole family, father, mother, and three sons, separated by terrible misfortunes, are finally re-united in the midst of the most beautiful miracles.

Her tears would flow at these recitals. She dreamed of them at night, she lived, as it were, only in this tragic and triumphant world of prodigy, in a supernatural country where all virtues are recompensed by all imaginable joys.

When Angelique partook of her first Communion, it seemed as if she were walking, like the saints, a little above the earth. She was a young Christian of the primitive Church; she gave herself into the hands of God, having learned from her book that she could not be saved without grace.

The Huberts were simple in their profession of faith. They went every Sunday to Mass, and to Communion on all great fete-days, and this was done with the tranquil humility of true belief, aided a little by tradition, as the chasubliers had from father to son always observed the Church ceremonies, particularly those at Easter.

Hubert himself had a tendency to imaginative fancies. He would at times stop his work and let fall his frame to listen to the child as she read or repeated the legends, and, carried away for the moment by her enthusiasm, it seemed as if his hair were blown about by the light breath of some invisible power. He was so in sympathy with Angelique, and associated her to such a degree with the youthful saints of the past, that he wept when he saw her in her white dress and veil. This day at church was like a dream, and they returned home quite exhausted. Hubertine was obliged to scold them both, for, with her excellent common-sense, she disliked exaggeration even in good things.

From that time she had to restrain the zeal of Angelique, especially in her tendency to what she thought was charity, and to which she wished to devote herself. Saint Francis had wedded poverty; Julien the Chaplain had called the poor his superiors; Gervasius and Protais had washed the feet of the most indigent, and Martin had divided his cloak with them. So she, following the example of Lucy, wished to sell everything that she might give. At first she disposed of all her little private possessions, then she began to pillage the house. But at last she gave without judgment and foolishly. One evening, two days after her Confirmation, being reprimanded for having thrown from the window several articles of underwear to a drunken woman, she had a terrible attack of anger like those when she was young; then, overcome by shame, she was really ill and forced to keep her bed for a couple of days.

CHAPTER III

In the meanwhile, weeks and months went by. Two years had passed. Angelique was now fourteen years of age and quite womanly. When she read the "Golden Legend," she would have a humming in her ears, the blood circulated quickly through the blue veins near her temples, and she felt a deep tenderness towards all these virgin saints.

Maidenhood is the sister of the angels, the union of all good, the overthrow of evil, the domain of faith. It gives grace, it is perfection, which has only need to show itself to conquer. The action of the Holy Spirit rendered Lucy so heavy that a thousand men and five pair of oxen could not drag her away from her home. An officer who tried to kiss Anastasia was struck blind. Under torture, the purity of the virgins is always powerful; from their exquisite white limbs, torn by instruments, milk flows instead of blood. Ten different times the story is told of the young convert who, to escape from her family, who wish her to marry against her will, assumes the garb of a monk, is accused of some misdeed, suffers punishment without indicating herself, and at last triumphs by announcing her name. Eugenia is in this way brought before a judge, whom she recognises as her father and reveals herself to him. Externally the combat of chastity recommences; always the thorns reappear. Thus the wisest saints shrink from being tempted. As the world is filled with snares, hermits flee to the desert, where they scourge themselves, throw themselves on the snow, or in beds of prickly herbs. A solitary monk covers his fingers with his mantle, that he may aid his mother in crossing a creek. A martyr bound to a stake, being tempted by a young girl, bites off his tongue with his teeth and spits it at her. All glorify the state of single blessedness. Alexis, very wealthy and in a high position, marries, but leaves his wife at the church-door. One weds only to die. Justina, in love with Cyprianus, converts him, and they walk together to their punishment. Cecilia, beloved by an angel, reveals the secret to Valerian on their wedding-day, and he, that he may see the spirit, consents to be baptised. He found in his room Cecilia talking with the angel, who held in his hand two wreaths of roses, and, giving one to Cecilia, and one to Valerian, he said, "Keep these crowns, like your hearts, pure and unspotted." In many cases it was proved that death was stronger than love, and couples were united only as a challenge to existence. It was said that even the Virgin Mary at times prevented betrothals from ending in a marriage. A nobleman, a relative of the King of Hungary, renounced his claims to a young girl of marvellous beauty on this account. "Suddenly our Blessed Lady appeared, and said to him: 'If I am indeed so beautiful as you have called me, why do you leave me for another?' And he became a most devout man for the rest of his life."

Among all this saintly company, Angelique had her preferences, and there were those whose experiences touched her to the heart, and helped her to correct her failings. Thus the learned Catherine, of high birth, enchanted her by her great scientific knowledge, when, only eighteen years of age, she was called by the Emperor Maximus to discuss certain questions with fifty rhetoricians and grammarians. She astonished and convinced them. "They were amazed and knew not what to say, but they remained quiet. And the Emperor blamed them for their weakness in allowing themselves to be so easily conquered by a young girl." The fifty professors then declared that they were converted. "And as soon as the tyrant heard that, he had so terrible a fit of anger, that he commanded they should all be burned to death in the public square." In her eyes Catherine was the invincible learned woman, as proud and dazzling in intellect as in beauty, just as she would have liked to be, that she might convert men, and be fed in prison by a dove, before having her head cut off. But Saint Elizabeth, the daughter of the King of Hungary, was for her a constant teacher and guide. Whenever she was inclined to yield to her violent temper, she thought of this model of gentleness and simplicity, who was at five years of age very devout, refusing to join her playmates in their sports, and sleeping on the ground, that, in abasing herself, she might all the better render homage to God. Later, she was the faithful, obedient wife of the Landgrave of Thuringia, always showing to her husband a smiling

face, although she passed her nights in tears. When she became a widow she was driven from her estates, but was happy to lead the life of poverty. Her dress was so thin from use, that she wore a grey mantle, lengthened out by cloth of a different shade. The sleeves of her jacket had been torn, and were mended with a material of another colour. The king, her father, wishing her to come to him, sent for her by a Count. And when the Count saw her clothed in such a way and spinning, overcome with surprise and grief, he exclaimed: "Never before did one see the daughter of a Royal House in so miserable a garb, and never was one known to spin wool until now." So Christian and sincere was her humility, that she ate black bread with the poorest peasants, nursed them when ill, dressed their sores without repugnance, put on coarse garments like theirs, and followed them in the church processions with bare feet. She was once washing the porringers and the utensils of the kitchen, when the maids, seeing her so out of place, urged her to desist, but she replied, "Could I find another task more menial even than this, I would do it." Influenced by her example, Angelique, who was formerly angry when obliged to do any cleaning in the kitchen, now tried to invent some extremely disagreeable task when she felt nervous and in need of control.

But more than Catherine, more than Elizabeth, far nearer and dearer to her than all the other saints, was Agnes, the child-martyr; and her heart leaped with joy on refinding in the "Golden Legend" this virgin, clothed with her own hair, who had protected her under the Cathedral portal. What ardour of pure love, as she repelled the son of the Governor when he accosted her on her way from school! "Go – leave me, minister of death, commencement of sin, and child of treason!" How exquisitely she described her beloved! "I love the One whose Mother was a Virgin, and whose father was faithful to her, at whose beauty the sun and moon marvelled, and at whose touch the dead were made alive." And when Aspasien commanded that "her throat should be cut by the sword," she ascended into Paradise to be united to her "betrothed, whiter and purer than silver-gilt."

Always, when weary or disturbed, Angelique called upon and implored her, and it seemed as if peace came to her at once. She saw her constantly near her, and often she regretted having done or thought of things which would have displeased her.

One evening as she was kissing her hands, a habit which she still at times indulged in, she suddenly blushed and turned away, although she was quite alone, for it seemed as if the little saint must have seen her. Agnes was her guardian angel.

Thus, at fifteen Angelique was an adorable child. Certainly, neither the quiet, laborious life, nor the soothing shadows of the Cathedral, nor the legends of the beautiful saints, had made her an angel, a creature of absolute perfection. She was often angry, and certain weaknesses of character showed themselves, which had never been sufficiently guarded against; but she was always ashamed and penitent if she had done wrong, for she wished so much to be perfect. And she was so human, so full of life, so ignorant, and withal so pure in reality.

One day, on returning from a long excursion which the Huberts allowed her to take twice a year, on Pentecost Monday and on Assumption Day, she took home with her a sweetbriar bush, and then amused herself by replanting it in the narrow garden. She trimmed it and watered it well: it grew and sent out long branches, filled with odour. With her usual intensity, she watched it daily, but was unwilling to have it grafted, as she wished to see if, by some miracle, it could not be made to bear roses. She danced around it, she repeated constantly: "This bush is like me; it is like me!" And if one joked her upon her great wild-rose bush, she joined them in their laughter, although a little pale, and with tears almost ready to fall. Her violet-coloured eyes were softer than ever, her half-opened lips revealed little white teeth, and her oval face had a golden aureole from her light wavy hair. She had grown tall without being too slight; her neck and shoulders were exquisitely graceful; her chest was full, her waist flexible; and gay, healthy, of a rare beauty, she had an infinite charm, arising from the innocence and purity of her soul.

Every day the affection of the Huberts for her increased. They often talked together of their mutual wish to adopt her. Yet they took no active measures in that way, lest they might have cause to

regret it. One morning, when the husband announced his final decision, his wife suddenly began to weep bitterly. To adopt a child? Was not that the same as giving up all hope of having one of their own? Yet it was useless for them to expect one now, after so many years of waiting, and she gave her consent, in reality delighted that she could call her her daughter. When Angelique was spoken to on the subject, she threw her arms around their necks, kissed them both, and was almost choked with tears of joy.

So it was agreed upon that she was always to remain with them in this house, which now seemed to be filled with her presence, rejuvenated by her youth, and penetrated by her laughter. But an unexpected obstacle was met with at the first step. The Justice of the Peace, Monsieur Grandsire, on being consulted, explained to them the radical impossibility of adoption, since by law the adopted must be "of age." Then, seeing their disappointment, he suggested the expedient of a legal guardianship: any individual over fifty years of age can attach himself to a minor of fifteen years or less by a legal claim, on becoming their official protector. The ages were all right, so they were delighted, and accepted. It was even arranged that they should afterwards confer the title of adoption upon their ward by way of their united last will and testament, as such a thing would be permitted by the Code. Monsieur Grandsire, furnished with the demand of the husband and the authorisation of the wife, then put himself in communication with the Director of Public Aid, the general guardian for all abandoned children, whose consent it was necessary to have. Great inquiries were made, and at last the necessary papers were placed in Paris, with a certain Justice of the Peace chosen for the purpose. And all was ready except the official report which constitutes the legality of guardianship, when the Huberts suddenly were taken with certain scruples.

Before receiving Angelique into their family, ought not they to ascertain if she had any relatives on her side? Was her mother still alive? Had they the right to dispose of the daughter without being absolutely sure that she had willingly been given up and deserted? Then, in reality, the unknown origin of the child, which had troubled them long ago, came back to them now and made them hesitate. They were so tormented by this anxiety that they could not sleep.

Without any more talk, Hubert unexpectedly announced that he was going to Paris. Such a journey seemed like a catastrophe in his calm existence. He explained the necessity of it to Angelique, by speaking of the guardianship. He hoped to arrange everything in twenty-four hours. But once in the city, days passed; obstacles arose on every side. He spent a week there, sent from one to another, really doing nothing, and quite discouraged. In the first place, he was received very coldly at the Office of Public Assistance. The rule of the Administration is that children shall not be told of their parents until they are of age. So for two mornings in succession he was sent away from the office. He persisted, however, explained the matter to three secretaries, made himself hoarse in talking to an under-officer, who wished to counsel him that he had not official papers. The Administration were quite ignorant. A nurse had left the child there, "Angelique Marie," without naming the mother. In despair he was about to return to Beaumont, when a new idea impelled him to return for the fourth time to the office, to see the book in which the arrival of the infant had been noted down, and in that way to have the address of the nurse. That proved quite an undertaking. But at last he succeeded, and found it was a Madame Foucart, and that in 1850 she lived on the Rue des Deux-Ecus.

Then he recommenced his hunting up and down. The end of the Rue des Deux-Ecus had been demolished, and no shopkeeper in the neighbourhood recollected ever having heard of Madame Foucart. He consulted the directory, but there was no such name. Looking at every sign as he walked along, he called on one after another, and at last, in this way, he had the good fortune to find an old woman, who exclaimed, in answer to his questions, "What! Do I know Madame Foucart? A most honourable person, but one who has had many misfortunes. She lives on the Rue de Censier, quite at the other end of Paris." He hastened there at once.

Warned by experience, he determined now to be diplomatic. But Madame Foucart, an enormous woman, would not allow him to ask questions in the good order he had arranged them

before going there. As soon as he mentioned the two names of the child, she seemed to be eager to talk, and she related its whole history in a most spiteful way. "Ah! the child was alive! Very well; she might flatter herself that she had for a mother a most famous hussy. Yes, Madame Sidonie, as she was called since she became a widow, was a woman of a good family, having, it is said, a brother who was a minister, but that did not prevent her from being very bad." And she explained that she had made her acquaintance when she kept, on the Rue Saint-Honore, a little shop where they dealt in fruit and oil from Provence, she and her husband, when they came from Plassans, hoping to make their fortune in the city. The husband died and was buried, and soon after Madame Sidonie had a little daughter, which she sent at once to the hospital, and never after even inquired for her, as she was "a heartless woman, cold as a protest and brutal as a sheriff's aid." A fault can be pardoned, but not ingratitude! Was not it true that, obliged to leave her shop as she was so heavily in debt, she had been received and cared for by Madame Foucart? And when in her turn she herself had fallen into difficulties, she had never been able to obtain from Madame Sidonie, even the month's board she owed her, nor the fifteen francs she had once lent her. To-day the "hateful thing" lived on the Rue de Faubourg-Poissonniere, where she had a little apartment of three rooms. She pretended to be a cleaner and mender of lace, but she sold a good many other things. Ah! yes! such a mother as that it was best to know nothing about!

An hour later, Hubert was walking round the house where Madame Sidonie lived. He saw through the window a woman, thin, pale, coarse-looking, wearing an old black gown, stained and greased. Never could the heart of such a person be touched by the recollection of a daughter whom she had only seen on the day of its birth. He concluded it would be best not to repeat, even to his wife, many things that he had just learned. Still he hesitated. Once more he passed by the place, and looked again. Ought not he to go in, to introduce himself, and to ask the consent of the unnatural parent? As an honest man, it was for him to judge if he had the right of cutting the tie there and for ever. Brusquely he turned his back, hurried away, and returned that evening to Beaumont.

Hubertine had just learned that the *proces-verbal* at Monsieur Grandsire's, for the guardianship of the child, had been signed. And when Angelique threw herself into Hubert's arms, he saw clearly by the look of supplication in her eyes, that she had understood the true reason of his journey.

Then he said quietly: "My child, your mother is not living." Angelique wept, as she kissed him most affectionately. After this the subject was not referred to. She was their daughter.

At Whitsuntide, this year, the Huberts had taken Angelique with them to lunch at the ruins of the Chateau d'Hauteceur, which overlooks the Ligneul, two leagues below Beaumont; and, after the day spent in running and laughing in the open air, the young girl still slept when, the next morning, the old house-clock struck eight.

Hubertine was obliged to go up and rap at her door.

"Ah, well! Little lazy child! We have already had our breakfast, and it is late."

Angelique dressed herself quickly and went down to the kitchen, where she took her rolls and coffee alone. Then, when she entered the workroom, where Hubert and his wife had just seated themselves, after having arranged their frames for embroidery, she said:

"Oh! how soundly I did sleep! I had quite forgotten that we had promised to finish this chasuble for next Sunday."

This workroom, the windows of which opened upon the garden, was a large apartment, preserved almost entirely in its original state. The two principal beams of the ceiling, and the three visible cross-beams of support, had not even been whitewashed, and they were blackened by smoke and worm-eaten, while, through the openings of the broken plaster, here and there, the laths of the inner joists could be seen. On one of the stone corbels, which supported the beams, was the date 1463, without doubt the date of the construction of the building. The chimney-piece, also in stone, broken and disjointed, had traces of its original elegance, with its slender uprights, its brackets, its frieze with a cornice, and its basket-shaped funnel terminating in a crown. On the frieze could be seen

even now, as if softened by age, an ingenious attempt at sculpture, in the way of a likeness of Saint Clair, the patron of embroiderers. But this chimney was no longer used, and the fireplace had been turned into an open closet by putting shelves therein, on which were piles of designs and patterns. The room was now heated by a great bell-shaped cast-iron stove, the pipe of which, after going the whole length of the ceiling, entered an opening made expressly for it in the wall. The doors, already shaky, were of the time of Louis XIV. The original tiles of the floor were nearly all gone, and had been replaced, one by one, by those of a later style. It was nearly a hundred years since the yellow walls had been coloured, and at the top of the room they were almost of a greyish white, and, lower down, were scratched and spotted with saltpetre. Each year there was talk of repainting them, but nothing had yet been done, from a dislike of making any change.

Hubertine, busy at her work, raised her head as Angelique spoke and said:

“You know that if our work is done on Sunday, I have promised to give you a basket of pansies for your garden.”

The young girl exclaimed gaily: “Oh, yes! that is true. Ah, well! I will do my best then! But where is my thimble? It seems as if all working implements take to themselves wings and fly away, if not in constant use.”

She flipped the old *doigtier* of ivory on the second joint of her little finger, and took her place on the other side of the frame, opposite to the window.

Since the middle of the last century there had not been the slightest modification in the fittings and arrangements of the workroom. Fashions changed, the art of the embroiderer was transformed, but there was still seen fastened to the wall the chantlate, the great piece of wood where was placed one end of the frame or work, while the other end was supported by a moving trestle. In the corners were many ancient tools – a little machine called a “diligent,” with its wheels and its long pins, to wind the gold thread on the reels without touching it; a hand spinning-wheel; a species of pulley to twist the threads which were attached to the wall; rollers of various sizes covered with silks and threads used in the crochet embroidery. Upon a shelf was spread out an old collection of punches for the spangles, and there was also to be seen a valuable relic, in the shape of the classic chandelier in hammered brass which belonged to some ancient master-workman. On the rings of a rack made of a nailed leather strap were hung awls, mallets, hammers, irons to cut the vellum, and roughing chisels of bogwood, which were used to smooth the threads as fast as they were employed. And yet again, at the foot of the heavy oaken table on which the cutting-out was done, was a great winder, whose two movable reels of wicker held the skeins. Long chains of spools of bright-coloured silks strung on cords were hung near that case of drawers. On the floor was a large basket filled with empty bobbins. A pair of great shears rested on the straw seat of one of the chairs, and a ball of cord had just fallen on the floor, half unwound.

“Oh! what lovely weather! What perfect weather!” continued Angelique. “It is a pleasure simply to live and to breathe.”

And before stooping to apply herself to her work, she delayed another moment before the open window, through which entered all the beauty of a radiant May morning.

CHAPTER IV

The sun shone brightly on the roof of the Cathedral, a fresh odour of lilacs came up from the bushes in the garden of the Bishop. Angelique smiled, as she stood there, dazzled, and as if bathed in the springtide. Then, starting as if suddenly awakened from sleep, she said:

“Father, I have no more gold thread for my work.”

Hubert, who had just finished pricking the tracing of the pattern of a cope, went to get a skein from the case of drawers, cut it, tapered off the two ends by scratching the gold which covered the silk, and he brought it to her rolled up in parchment.

“Is that all you need?”

“Yes, thanks.”

With a quick glance she had assured herself that nothing more was wanting; the needles were supplied with the different golds, the red, the green, and the blue; there were spools of every shade of silk; the spangles were ready; and the twisted wires for the gold lace were in the crown of a hat which served as a box, with the long fine needles, the steel pincers, the thimbles, the scissors, and the ball of wax. All these were on the frame even, or on the material stretched therein, which was protected by a thick brown paper.

She had threaded a needle with the gold thread. But at the first stitch it broke, and she was obliged to thread it again, breaking off tiny bits of the gold, which she threw immediately into the pasteboard waste-basket which was near her.

“Now at last I am ready,” she said, as she finished her first stitch.

Perfect silence followed. Hubert was preparing to stretch some material on another frame. He had placed the two heavy ends on the chantlate and the trestle directly opposite in such a way as to take lengthwise the red silk of the cope, the breadths of which Hubertine had just stitched together, and fitting the laths into the mortice of the beams, he fastened them with four little nails. Then, after smoothing the material many times from right to left, he finished stretching it and tacked on the nails. To assure himself that it was thoroughly tight and firm, he tapped on the cloth with his fingers and it sounded like a drum.

Angelique had become a most skilful worker, and the Huberts were astonished at her cleverness and taste. In addition to what they had taught her, she carried into all she did her personal enthusiasm, which gave life to flowers and faith to symbols. Under her hands, silk and gold seemed animated; the smaller ornaments were full of mystic meaning; she gave herself up to it entirely, with her imagination constantly active and her firm belief in the infinitude of the invisible world.

The Diocese of Beaumont had been so charmed with certain pieces of her embroidery, that a clergyman who was an archaeologist, and another who was an admirer of pictures, had come to see her, and were in raptures before her Virgins, which they compared to the simple gracious figures of the earliest masters. There was the same sincerity, the same sentiment of the beyond, as if encircled in the minutest perfection of detail. She had the real gift of design, a miraculous one indeed, which, without a teacher, with nothing but her evening studies by lamplight, enabled her often to correct her models, to deviate entirely from them, and to follow her own fancies, creating beautiful things with the point of her needle. So the Huberts, who had always insisted that a thorough knowledge of the science of drawing was necessary to make a good embroiderer, were obliged to yield before her, notwithstanding their long experience. And, little by little, they modestly withdrew into the background, becoming simply her aids, surrendering to her all the most elaborate work, the under part of which they prepared for her.

From one end of the year to the other, what brilliant and sacred marvels passed through her hands! She was always occupied with silks, satins, velvets, or cloths of gold or silver. She embroidered chasubles, stoles, maniples, copes, dalmatics, mitres, banners, and veils for the chalice and the pyx.

But, above all, their orders for chasubles never failed, and they worked constantly at those vestments, with their five colours: the white, for Confessors and Virgins; the red, for Apostles and Martyrs; the black, for the days of fasting and for the dead; the violet, for the Innocents; and the green for fete-days. Gold was also often used in place of white or of green. The same symbols were always in the centre of the Cross: the monograms of Jesus and of the Virgin Mary, the triangle surrounded with rays, the lamb, the pelican, the dove, a chalice, a monstrance, and a bleeding heart pierced with thorns; while higher up and on the arms were designs, or flowers, all the ornamentation being in the ancient style, and all the flora in large blossoms, like anemones, tulips, peonies, pomegranates, or hortensias. No season passed in which she did not remake the grapes and thorns symbolic, putting silver on black, and gold on red. For the most costly vestments, she varied the pictures of the heads of saints, having, as a central design, the Annunciation, the Last Supper, or the Crucifixion. Sometimes the orfrees were worked on the original material itself; at others, she applied bands of silk or satin on brocades of gold cloth, or of velvet. And all this efflorescence of sacred splendour was created, little by little, by her deft fingers. At this moment the vestment on which Angelique was at work was a chasuble of white satin, the cross of which was made by a sheaf of golden lilies intertwined with bright roses, in various shades of silk. In the centre, in a wreath of little roses of dead gold, was the monogram of the Blessed Virgin, in red and green gold, with a great variety of ornaments.

For an hour, during which she skilfully finished the little roses, the silence had not been broken even by a single word. But her thread broke again, and she re-threaded her needle by feeling carefully under the frame, as only an adroit person can do. Then, as she raised her head, she again inhaled with satisfaction the pure, fresh air that came in from the garden.

“Ah!” she said softly, “how beautiful it was yesterday! The sunshine is always perfect.”

Hubertine shook her head as she stopped to wax her thread.

“As for me, I am so wearied, it seems as if I had no arms, and it tires me to work. But that is not strange, for I so seldom go out, and am no longer young and strong, as you are at sixteen.”

Angelique had reseated herself and resumed her work. She prepared the lilies by sewing bits of vellum on certain places that had been marked, so as to give them relief, but the flowers themselves were not to be made until later, for fear the gold be tarnished were the hands moved much over it.

Hubert, who, having finished arranging the material in its frame, was about drawing with pumice the pattern of the cope, joined in the conversation and said: “These first warm days of spring are sure to give me a terrible headache.”

Angelique’s eyes seemed to be vaguely lost in the rays which now fell upon one of the flying buttresses of the church, as she dreamily added: “Oh no, father, I do not think so. One day in the lively air, like yesterday, does me a world of good.”

Having finished the little golden leaves, she began one of the large roses, near the lilies. Already she had threaded several needles with the silks required, and she embroidered in stitches varying in length, according to the natural position and movement of the petals, and notwithstanding the extreme delicacy and absorbing nature of this work, the recollections of the previous day, which she lived over again in thought and in silence, now came to her lips, and crowded so closely upon each other that she no longer tried to keep them back. So she talked of their setting out upon their expedition, of the beautiful fields they crossed, of their lunch over there in the ruins of Hauteceur, upon the flagstones of a little room whose tumble-down walls towered far above the Ligneul, which rolled gently among the willows fifty yards below them.

She was enthusiastic over these crumbling ruins, and the scattered blocks of stone among the brambles, which showed how enormous the colossal structure must have been as, when first built, it commanded the two valleys. The donjon remained, nearly two hundred feet in height, discoloured, cracked, but nevertheless firm, upon its foundation pillars fifteen feet thick. Two of its towers had also resisted the attacks of Time – that of Charlemagne and that of David – united by a heavy wall almost intact. In the interior, the chapel, the court-room, and certain chambers were still easily recognised;

and all this appeared to have been built by giants, for the steps of the stairways, the sills of the windows, and the branches on the terraces, were all on a scale far out of proportion for the generation of to-day. It was, in fact, quite a little fortified city. Five hundred men could have sustained there a siege of thirty months without suffering from want of ammunition or of provisions. For two centuries the bricks of the lowest story had been disjunct by the wild roses; lilacs and laburnums covered with blossoms the rubbish of the fallen ceilings; a plane-tree had even grown up in the fireplace of the guardroom. But when, at sunset, the outline of the donjon cast its long shadow over three leagues of cultivated ground, and the colossal Chateau seemed to be rebuilt in the evening mists, one still felt the great strength, and the old sovereignty, which had made of it so impregnable a fortress that even the kings of France trembled before it.

“And I am sure,” continued Angelique, “that it is inhabited by the souls of the dead, who return at night. All kinds of noises are heard there; in every direction are monsters who look at you, and when I turned round as we were coming away, I saw great white figures fluttering above the wall. But, mother, you know all the history of the castle, do you not?”

Hubertine replied, as she smiled in an amused way: “Oh! as for ghosts, I have never seen any of them myself.”

But in reality, she remembered perfectly the history, which she had read long ago, and to satisfy the eager questionings of the young girl, she was obliged to relate it over again.

The land belonged to the Bishopric of Rheims, since the days of Saint Remi, who had received it from Clovis.

An archbishop, Severin, in the early years of the tenth century, had erected at Hauteceur a fortress to defend the country against the Normans, who were coming up the river Oise, into which the Ligneul flows.

In the following century a successor of Severin gave it in fief to Norbert, a younger son of the house of Normandy, in consideration of an annual quit-rent of sixty sous, and on the condition that the city of Beaumont and its church should remain free and unincumbered. It was in this way that Norbert I became the head of the Marquesses of Hauteceur, whose famous line from that date became so well known in history. Herve IV, excommunicated twice for his robbery of ecclesiastical property, became a noted highwayman, who killed, on a certain occasion, with his own hands, thirty citizens, and his tower was razed to the ground by Louis le Gros, against whom he had dared to declare war. Raoul I, who went to the Crusades with Philip Augustus, perished before Saint Jean d’Acre, having been pierced through the heart by a lance. But the most illustrious of the race was John V, the Great, who, in 1225, rebuilt the fortress, finishing in less than five years this formidable Chateau of Hauteceur, under whose shelter he, for a moment, dreamed of aspiring to the throne of France, and after having escaped from being killed in twenty battles, he at last died quietly in his bed, brother-in-law to the King of Scotland. Then came Felician III, who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem barefooted; Herve VII, who asserted his claims to the throne of Scotland; and still many others, noble and powerful in their day and generation, down to Jean IX, who, under Mazarin, had the grief of assisting at the dismantling of the castle. After a desperate siege, the vaults of the towers and of the donjon were blown up with powder, and the different constructions were set on fire; where Charles VI had been sent to rest, and to turn his attention from his vagaries, and where, nearly two hundred years later, Henri IV had passed a week as Gabrielle D’Estress. Thenceforth, all these royal souvenirs had passed into oblivion.

Angelique, without stopping the movement of her needle, listened eagerly, as if the vision of these past grandeurs rose up from her frame, in proportion as the rose grew there in its delicate life of colour. Her ignorance of general history enlarged facts, and she received them as if they were the basis of a marvellous legend. She trembled with delight, and, transported by her faith, it seemed as if the reconstructed Chateau mounted to the very gates of heaven, and the Hauteceurs were cousins to the Virgin Mary.

When there was a pause in the recital she asked, "Is not our new Bishop Monseigneur d'Hauteceur, a descendant of this noted family?"

Hubertine replied that Monseigneur must belong to the younger branch of the family, as the elder branch had been extinct for a very long time. It was, indeed, a most singular return, as for centuries the Marquesses of Hauteceur and the clergy of Beaumont had been hostile to each other. Towards 1150 an abbot undertook to build a church, with no other resources than those of his Order; so his funds soon gave out, when the edifice was no higher than the arches of the side chapels, and they were obliged to cover the nave with a wooden roof. Eighty years passed, and Jean V came to rebuild the Chateau, when he gave three hundred thousand pounds, which, added to other sums, enabled the work on the church to be continued. The nave was finished, but the two towers and the great front were terminated much later, towards 1430, in the full fifteenth century. To recompense Jean V for his liberality, the clergy accorded to him, for himself and his descendants, the right of burial in a chapel of the apse, consecrated to St. George, and which, since that time, had been called the Chapel Hauteceur. But these good terms were not of long duration. The freedom of Beaumont was put in constant peril by the Chateau, and there were continual hostilities on the questions of tribute and of precedence. One especially, the right of paying toll, which the nobles demanded for the navigation of the Ligneul, perpetuated the quarrels. Then it was that the great prosperity of the lower town began, with its manufacturing of fine linen and lace, and from this epoch the fortune of Beaumont increased daily, while that of Hauteceur diminished, until the time when the castle was dismantled and the church triumphed. Louis XIV made of it a cathedral, a bishop's palace was built in the old enclosure of the monks, and, by a singular chain of circumstances, to-day a member of the family of Hauteceur had returned as a bishop to command the clergy, who, always powerful, had conquered his ancestors, after a contest of four hundred years.

"But," said Angelique, "Monseigneur has been married, and has not he a son at least twenty years of age?"

Hubertine had taken up the shears to remodel one of the pieces of vellum.

"Yes," she replied, "the Abbot Cornille told me the whole story, and it is a very sad history. When but twenty years of age, Monseigneur was a captain under Charles X. In 1830, when only four-and-twenty, he resigned his position in the army, and it is said that from that time until he was forty years of age he led an adventurous life, travelling everywhere and having many strange experiences. At last, one evening, he met, at the house of a friend in the country, the daughter of the Count de Valencay, Mademoiselle Pauline, very wealthy, marvellously beautiful, and scarcely nineteen years of age, twenty-two years younger than himself. He fell violently in love with her, and, as she returned his affection, there was no reason why the marriage should not take place at once. He then bought the ruins of Hauteceur for a mere song – ten thousand francs, I believe – with the intention of repairing the Chateau and installing his wife therein when all would be in order and in readiness to receive her. In the meanwhile they went to live on one of his family estates in Anjou, scarcely seeing any of their friends, and finding in their united happiness the days all too short. But, alas! at the end of a year Pauline had a son and died."

Hubert, who was still occupied with marking out his pattern, raised his head, showing a very pale face as he said in a low voice: "Oh! the unhappy man!"

"It was said that he himself almost died from his great grief," continued Hubertine. "At all events, a fortnight later he entered into Holy Orders, and soon became a priest. That was twenty years ago, and now he is a bishop. But I have also been told that during all this time he has refused to see his son, the child whose birth cost the life of its mother. He had placed him with an uncle of his wife's, an old abbot, not wishing even to hear of him, and trying to forget his existence. One day a picture of the boy was sent him, but in looking at it he found so strong a resemblance to his beloved dead that he fell on the floor unconscious and stiff, as if he had received a blow from a hammer..."

Now age and prayer have helped to soften his deep grief, for yesterday the good Father Cornille told me that Monseigneur had just decided to send for his son to come to him.”

Angelique, having finished her rose, so fresh and natural that perfume seemed to be exhaled from it, looked again through the window into the sunny garden, and, as if in a reverie, she said in a low voice: “The son of Monseigneur!”

Hubertine continued her story.

“It seems that the young man is handsome as a god, and his father wished him to be educated for the priesthood. But the old abbot would not consent to that, saying that the youth had not the slightest inclination in that direction. And then, to crown all, his wealth, it is said, is enormous. Two million pounds sterling! Yes, indeed! His mother left him a tenth of that sum, which was invested in land in Paris, where the increase in the price of real estate has been so great, that to-day it represents fifty millions of francs. In short, rich as a king!”

“Rich as a king, beautiful as a god!” repeated Angelique unconsciously, in her dreamy voice.

And with one hand she mechanically took from the frame a bobbin wound with gold thread, in order to make the open-work centre of one of the large lilies. After having loosened the end from the point of the reel, she fastened it with a double stitch of silk to the edge of the vellum which was to give a thickness to the embroidery. Then, continuing her work, she said again, without finishing her thought, which seemed lost in the vagueness of its desire, “Oh! as for me, what I would like, that which I would like above all else – ”

The silence fell again, deep and profound, broken only by the dull sound of chanting which came from the church. Hubert arranged his design by repassing with a little brush all the perforated lines of the drawing, and thus the ornamentation of the cope appeared in white on the red silk. It was he who first resumed speaking.

“Ah! those ancient days were magnificent! Noblemen then wore costumes weighted with embroidery. At Lyons, material was sometimes sold for as much as six hundred francs an ell. One ought to read the by-laws and regulations of the Guild of Master Workmen, where it is laid down that ‘The embroiderers of the King have always the right to summon, by armed force if necessary, the workmen of other masters.’.. And then we had coats of arms, too! Azure, a fesso engrailed or, between three fleurs-de-lys of the same, two of them being near the top and the third in the point. Ah! it was indeed beautiful in the days of long ago!”

He stopped a moment, tapping the frame with his fingers to shake off the dust. Then he continued:

“At Beaumont they still have a legend about the Hautecoeurs, which my mother often related to me when I was a child... A frightful plague ravaged the town, and half of the inhabitants had already fallen victims to it, when Jean V, he who had rebuilt the fortress, perceived that God had given him the power to contend against the scourge. Then he went on foot to the houses of the sick, fell on his knees, kissed them, and as soon as his lips had touched them, while he said, ‘If God is willing, I wish it,’ the sufferers were healed. And lo! that is why these words have remained the device of the Hautecoeurs, who all have since that day been able to cure the plague... Ah! what a proud race of men! A noble dynasty! Monseigneur himself is called Jean XII, and the first name of his son must also be followed by a number, like that of a prince.”

He stopped. Each one of his words lulled and prolonged the reverie of Angelique. She continued, in a half-singing tone: “Oh! what I wish for myself! That which I would like above all else – ”

Holding the bobbin, without touching the thread, she twisted the gold by moving it from left to right alternately on the vellum, fastening it at each turn with a stitch in silk. Little by little the great golden lily blossomed out.

Soon she continued: “Yes, what I would like above all would be to marry a prince – a prince whom I had never seen; who would come towards sunset, just before the waning daylight, and would

take me by the hand and lead me to his palace. And I should wish him to be very handsome, as well as very rich! Yes, the most beautiful and the wealthiest man that had ever been seen on the earth! He should have superb horses that I could hear neighing under my windows, and jewels which he would pour in streams into my lap, and gold that would fall from my hands in a deluge when I opened them. And what I wish still further is, that this prince of mine should love me to distraction, so that I might also love him desperately. We would then remain very young, very good, and very noble, for ever!”

Hubert, leaving his work, had approached her smilingly; whilst Hubertine, in a friendly way, shook her finger at the young girl.

“Oh, what a vain little creature! Ah! ambitious child, you are quite incorrigible. Now, you are quite beside yourself with your need of being a queen. At all events such a dream is much better than to steal sugar and to be impertinent. But really, you must not indulge in such fancies. It is the Evil One who prompts them, and it is pride that speaks, as well as passion.”

Gay and candid, Angelique looked her in the face as she said: “But mother, mother mine, what are you saying? Is it, then, a sin to love that which is rich and beautiful? I love it because it is rich and beautiful, and so cheers my heart and soul. A beautiful object brightens everything that is near it, and helps one to live, as the sun does. You know very well that I am not selfish. Money? Oh! you would see what a good use I would make of it, if only I had it in abundance! I would rain it over the town; it should be scattered among the miserable. Think what a blessing it would be to have no more poverty! In the first place, as for you and my father, I would give you everything. You should be dressed in robes and garments of brocades, like the lords and ladies of the olden time.”

Hubertine shrugged her shoulders and smiled. “It is ridiculous,” she said. “But, my dear child, you must remember that you are poor, and that you have not a penny for your marriage-portion. How can you, then, for a moment dream of a prince? Are you, then, so desirous to marry a prince?”

“Why should not I wish to marry such a man?” And she looked quite amazed, as she continued: “Marry him? Of course I would do so. Since he would have plenty of money, what difference would it make if I had none? I should owe everything to him, and on that very account I should love him all the more deeply.”

This victorious reasoning enchanted Hubert, who seemed carried above the earth by Angelique’s enthusiasm. He would willingly have accompanied her on the wings of a cloud to the regions of fancy.

“She is right,” he exclaimed.

But his wife glanced at him reprovingly. She became quite stern.

“My child, you will think differently later on, when you know life better.”

“Life? – but I know it already.”

“How is it possible for you to know it? You are too young; you are ignorant of evil. Yet evil exists and is very powerful.”

“Evil – evil?”

Angelique repeated the word very slowly, as if to penetrate its meaning. And in her pure eyes was a look of innocent surprise. Evil? She knew all about it, for she had read of it in the “Golden Legend.” Was not evil Satan himself? And had not she seen how, although he constantly reappeared, he was always overthrown? After every battle he remained crushed to earth, thoroughly conquered, and in a most pitiable state.

“Evil? Ah, mother mine, if you knew how little I fear it! It is only necessary once to conquer it and afterwards life is all happiness.”

Hubertine appeared troubled and looked anxious.

“You will make me almost regret having brought you up in this house, alone with us two, and away from the world as it were. I am really afraid that some day we shall regret having kept you in such complete ignorance of the realities of life. What Paradise are you looking for? What is your idea of the world?”

A look of hope brightened the face of the young girl, while, bending forward, she still moved the bobbin back and forth with a continuous, even motion.

“You then really think, mother, that I am very foolish, do you not? This world is full of brave people. When one is honest and industrious, one is always rewarded. I know also that there are some bad people, but they do not count. We do not associate with them, and they are soon punished for their misdeeds. And then, you see, as for the world, it produces on me, from a distance, the effect of a great garden; yes, of an immense park, all filled with flowers and with sunshine. It is such a blessing to live, and life is so sweet that it cannot be bad.”

She grew excited, as if intoxicated by the brightness of the silks and the gold threads she manipulated so well with her skilful fingers.

“Happiness is a very simple thing. We are happy, are we not? All three of us? And why? Simply because we love each other. Then, after all, it is no more difficult than that; it is only necessary to love and to be loved. So, you see, when the one I expect really comes, we shall recognise each other immediately. It is true I have not yet seen him, but I know exactly what he ought to be. He will enter here and will say: ‘I have come in search of you.’ And I shall reply: ‘I expected you, and will go with you.’ He will take me with him, and our future will be at once decided upon. He will go into a palace, where all the furniture will be of gold, encrusted in diamonds. Oh, it is all very simple!”

“You are crazy; so do not talk any more,” interrupted Hubertine, coldly.

And seeing that the young girl was still excited, and ready to continue to indulge her fancies, she continued to reprove her.

“I beg you to say no more, for you absolutely make me tremble. Unhappy child! When we really marry you to some poor mortal you will be crushed, as you fall to earth from these heights of the imagination. Happiness, for the greater part of the world, consists in humility and obedience.”

Angelique continued to smile with an almost obstinate tranquillity.

“I expect him, and he will come.”

“But she is right,” exclaimed Hubert, again carried away by her enthusiasm. “Why need you scold her? She is certainly pretty, and dainty enough for a king. Stranger things than that have happened, and who knows what may come?”

Sadly Hubertine looked at him with her calm eyes.

“Do not encourage her to do wrong, my dear. You know, better than anyone, what it costs to follow too much the impulses of one’s heart.”

He turned deadly pale, and great tears came to the edge of his eyelids. She immediately repented of having reproved him, and rose to offer him her hands. But gently disengaging himself, he said, stammeringly:

“No, no, my dear; I was wrong. Angelique, do you understand me? You must always listen to your mother. She alone is wise, and we are both of us very foolish. I am wrong; yes, I acknowledge it.”

Too disturbed to sit down, leaving the cope upon which he had been working, he occupied himself in pasting a banner that was finished, although still in its frame. After having taken the pot of Flemish glue from the chest of drawers, he moistened with a brush the underside of the material, to make the embroidery firmer. His lips still trembled, and he remained quiet.

But if Angelique, in her obedience, was also still, she allowed her thoughts to follow their course, and her fancies mounted higher and still higher. She showed it in every feature – in her mouth, that ecstasy had half opened, as well as in her eyes, where the infinite depth of her visions seemed reflected. Now, this dream of a poor girl, she wove it into the golden embroidery. It was for this unknown hero that, little by little, there seemed to grow on the white satin the beautiful great lilies, and the roses, and the monogram of the Blessed Virgin. The stems of the lilies had all the gracious pointings of a jet of light, whilst the long slender leaves, made of spangles, each one being sewed on with gold twist, fell in a shower of stars. In the centre, the initials of Mary were like the dazzling of a relief in massive gold, a marvellous blending of lacework and of embossing, or goffering, which

burnt like the glory of a tabernacle in the mystic fire of its rays. And the roses of delicately-coloured silks seemed real, and the whole chasuble was resplendent in its whiteness of satin, which appeared covered almost miraculously with its golden blossoms.

After a long silence, Angelique, whose cheeks were flushed by the blood which mounted into them from her excitement, raised her head, and, looking at Hubertine, said again, a little maliciously: “I expect him, and he will come.”

It was absurd for her thus to give loose reins to her imagination. But she was willful. She was convinced in her own mind that everything would come to pass, eventually, as she wished it might. Nothing could weaken her happy conviction.

“Mother,” she added, “why do you not believe me, since I assure you it must be as I say?”

Hubertine shrugged her shoulders, and concluded the best thing for her to do was to tease her.

“But I thought, my child, that you never intended being married. Your saints, who seem to have turned your head, they led single lives. Rather than do otherwise they converted their lovers, ran away from their homes, and were put to death.”

The young girl listened and was confused. But soon she laughed merrily. Her perfect health, and all her love of life, rang out in this sonorous gaiety. “The histories of the saints! But that was ages ago! Times have entirely changed since then. God having so completely triumphed, no longer demands that anyone should die for Him.”

When reading the Legend, it was the marvels which fascinated her, not the contempt of the world and the desire for death. She added: “Most certainly I expect to be married; to love and to be loved, and thus be very happy.”

“Be careful, my dear,” said Hubertine, continuing to tease her. “You will make your guardian angel, Saint Agnes, weep. Do not you know that she refused the son of the Governor, and preferred to die, that she might be wedded to Jesus?”

The great clock of the belfry began to strike; numbers of sparrows flew down from an enormous ivy-plant which framed one of the windows of the apse. In the workroom, Hubert, still silent, had just hung up the banner, moist from the glue, that it might dry, on one of the great iron hooks fastened to the wall.

The sun in the course of the morning had lightened up different parts of the room, and now it shone brightly upon the old tools – the diligent, the wicker winder, and the brass chandelier – and as its rays fell upon the two workers, the frame at which they were seated seemed almost on fire, with its bands polished by use, and with the various objects placed upon it, the reels of gold cord, the spangles, and the bobbins of silk.

Then, in this soft, charming air of spring, Angelique looked at the beautiful symbolic lily she had just finished. Opening wide her ingenuous eyes, she replied, with an air of confiding happiness, to Hubertine’s last remark in regard to the child-martyr, Saint Agnes:

“Ah, yes! But it was Jesus who wished it to be so.”

CHAPTER V

Notwithstanding her thoroughly cheerful nature, Angelique liked solitude; and it was to her the greatest of recreations to be alone in her room, morning and evening. There she gave herself up to her thoughts; there she indulged to the full scope in her most joyous fancies. Sometimes even during the day, when she could go there for a moment, she was as happy as if, in full freedom, she had committed some childish prank.

The chamber was very large, taking in at least half of the upper story, the other half being the garret. It was whitewashed everywhere; not only the walls and the beams, but the joists, even to the visible copings of the mansard part of the roof; and in this bare whiteness, the old oaken furniture seemed almost as black as ebony. At the time of the decoration of the sleeping-room below, and the improvements made in the parlour, the ancient furniture, which had been bought at various epochs, had been carried upstairs. There was a great carved chest of the Renaissance period, a table and chairs which dated from the reign of Louis XIII, an enormous bedstead, style Louis XIV, and a very handsome wardrobe, Louis XV. In the middle of these venerable old things a white porcelain stove, and the little toilet-table, covered with a pretty oilcloth, seemed out of place and to mar the dull harmony. Curtained with an old-fashioned rose-coloured chintz, on which were bouquets of heather, so faded that the colour had become a scarcely perceptible pink, the enormous bedstead preserved above all the majesty of its great age.

But what pleased Angelique more than anything else was the little balcony on which the window opened. Of the two original windows, one of them, that at the left, had been closed by simply fastening it with nails, and the balcony, which formerly extended across the front of the building, was now only before the window at the right. As the lower beams were still strong, a new floor had been made, and above it an iron railing was firmly attached in place of the old worm-eaten wooden balustrade. This made a charming little corner, a quiet nook under the gable point, the leaden laths of which had been renewed at the beginning of the century. By bending over a little, the whole garden-front of the house could be seen in a very dilapidated state, with its sub-basement of little cut stones, its panels ornamented with imitation bricks, and its large bay window, which to-day had been made somewhat smaller. The roof of the great porch of the kitchen-door was covered with zinc. And above, the interduces of the top, which projected three feet or more, were strengthened by large, upright pieces of wood, the ends of which rested on the string-course of the first floor. All this gave to the balcony an appearance of being in a perfect vegetation of timber, as if in the midst of a forest of old wood, which was green with wallflowers and moss.

Since she occupied the chamber, Angelique had spent many hours there, leaning over the balustrade and simply looking. At first, directly under her was the garden, darkened by the eternal shade of the evergreen box-trees; in the corner nearest the church, a cluster of small lilac-bushes surrounded an old granite bench; while in the opposite corner, half hidden by a beautiful ivy which covered the whole wall at the end as if with a mantle, was a little door opening upon the Clos-Marie, a vast, uncultivated field. This Clos-Marie was the old orchard of the monks. A rivulet of purest spring-water crossed it, the Chevrotte, where the women who occupied the houses in the neighbourhood had the privilege of washing their linen; certain poor people sheltered themselves in the ruins of an old tumble-down mill; and no other persons inhabited this field, which was connected with the Rue Magloire simply by the narrow lane of the Guerdaches, which passed between the high walls of the Bishop's Palace and those of the Hotel Voincourt. In summer, the centenarian elms of the two parks barred with their green-leaved tops the straight, limited horizon which in the centre was cut off by the gigantic brow of the Cathedral. Thus shut in on all sides, the Clos-Marie slept in the quiet peace of its abandonment, overrun with weeds and wild grass, planted with poplars and willows sown by

the wind. Among the great pebbles the Chevrotte leaped, singing as it went, and making a continuous music as if of crystal.

Angelique was never weary of this out-of-the-way nook. Yet for seven years she had seen there each morning only what she had looked at on the previous evening. The trees in the little park of the Hotel Voincourt, whose front was on the Grand Rue, were so tufted and bushy that it was only in the winter she could occasionally catch a glimpse of the daughter of the Countess, Mademoiselle Claire, a young girl of her own age.

In the garden of the Bishop was a still more dense thickness of branches, and she had often tried in vain to distinguish there the violet-coloured cassock of Monseigneur; and the old gate, with its Venetian slats above and at the sides, must have been fastened up for a very long time, for she never remembered to have seen it opened, not even for a gardener to pass through. Besides the washerwomen in the Clos, she always saw the same poor, ragged little children playing or sleeping in the grass.

The spring this year was unusually mild. She was just sixteen years of age, and until now she had been glad to welcome with her eyes alone the growing green again of the Clos-Marie under the April sunshine. The shooting out of the tender leaves, the transparency of the warm evenings, and all the reviving odours of the earth had simply amused her heretofore. But this year, at the first bud, her heart seemed to beat more quickly. As the grass grew higher and the wind brought to her all the strong perfumes of the fresh verdure, there was in her whole being an increasing agitation. Sudden inexplicable pain would at times seize her throat and almost choke her. One evening she threw herself, weeping, into Hubertine's arms, having no cause whatever for grief, but, on the contrary, overwhelmed with so great, unknown a happiness, that her heart was too full for restraint. In the night her dreams were delightful. Shadows seemed to pass before her, and she fell into such an ecstatic state that on awakening she did not dare to recall them, so confused was she by the angelic visions of bliss. Sometimes, in the middle of her great bed, she would rouse herself suddenly, her two hands joined and pressed against her breast as if a heavy burden were weighing her down and almost suffocating her. She would then jump up, rush across the room in her bare feet, and, opening the window wide, would stand there, trembling slightly, until at last the pure fresh air calmed her. She was continually surprised at this great change in herself, as if the knowledge of joys and griefs hitherto unknown had been revealed to her in the enchantment of dreams, and that her eyes had been opened to natural beauties which surrounded her.

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