Жорж Санд

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George Sand
Mauprat

GEORGE SAND

Napoleon in exile declared that were he again on the throne he should make a point of spending two hours a day in conversation with women, from whom there was much to be learnt. He had, no doubt, several types of women in mind, but it is more than probable that the banishment of Madame de Stael rose before him as one of the mistakes in his career. It was not that he showed lack of judgment merely by the persecution of a rare talent, but by failing to see that the rare talent was pointing out truths very valuable to his own safety. This is what happened in France when George Sand – the greatest woman writer the world has known, or is ever likely to know – was attacked by the orthodox critics of her time. They feared her warnings; they detested her sincerity – a sincerity displayed as much in her life as in her works (the hypocrite's Paradise was precisely her idea of Hell); they resented bitterly an independence of spirit which in a man would have been in the highest degree distinguished, which remained, under every test, untamable. With a kind of *bonhomie* which one can only compare with Fielding's, with a passion as great as Montaigne's for acknowledging the truths of experience, with an absence of self-consciousness truly amazing in the artistic temperament of either sex, she wrote exactly as she thought, saw and felt. Humour was not her strong point. She had an exultant joy in living, but laughter, whether genial or sardonic, is not in her work. Irony she seldom, if ever, employed; satire she never attempted. It was on the maternal, the sympathetic side that her femininity, and therefore her creative genius, was most strongly developed. She was masculine only in the deliberate libertinism of certain episodes in her own life. This was a characteristic – one on no account to be overlooked or denied or disguised, but it was not her character. The character was womanly, tender, exquisitely patient and good-natured. She would take cross humanity in her arms, and carry it out into the sunshine of the fields; she would show it flowers and birds, sing songs to it, tell it stories, recall its original beauty. Even in her moods of depression and revolt, one recognises the fatigue of the strong. It is never for a moment the lassitude of the feeble, the weary spite of a sick and ill-used soul. As she was free from personal vanity, she was also free from hysteria. On marriage – the one subject which drove her to a certain though always disciplined violence – she clearly felt more for others than they felt for themselves; and in observing certain households and life partnerships, she may have been afflicted with a dismay which the unreflecting sufferers did not share. No writer who was carried away by egoistic anger or disappointment could have told these stories of unhappiness, infidelity, and luckless love with such dispassionate lucidity.

With the artist's dislike of all that is positive and arbitrary, she was, nevertheless, subject rather to her intellect than her emotions. An insult to her intelligence was the one thing she found it hard to pardon, and she allowed no external interference to disturb her relations with her own reasoning faculty. She followed caprices, no doubt, but she was never under any apprehension with regard to their true nature, displaying in this respect a detachment which is usually considered exclusively virile. *Elle et Lui*, which, perhaps because it is short and associated with actual facts, is the most frequently discussed in general conversation on her work, remains probably the sanest account of a sentimental experiment which was ever written. How far it may have seemed accurate to De Musset is not to the point. Her version of her grievance is at least convincing. Without fear and without hope, she makes her statement, and it stands, therefore, unique of its kind among indictments. It has been said that her fault was an excess of emotionalism; that is to say, she attached too much importance to mere feeling and described it, in French of marvellous ease and beauty, with a good deal of something else which one can almost condemn as the high-flown. Not that the high-flown is of necessity unnatural, but it

is misleading; it places the passing mood, the lyrical note, dependent on so many accidents, above the essential temperament and the dominant chord which depend on life only. Where she falls short of the very greatest masters is in this all but deliberate confusion of things which must change or can be changed with things which are unchangeable, incurable, and permanent. Shakespeare, it is true, makes all his villains talk poetry, but it is the poetry which a villain, were he a poet, would inevitably write. George Sand glorifies every mind with her own peculiar fire and tears. The fire is, fortunately, so much stronger than the tears that her passion never degenerates into the maudlin. All the same, she makes too universal a use of her own strongest gifts, and this is why she cannot be said to excel as a portrait painter. One merit, however, is certain: if her earliest writings were dangerous, it was because of her wonderful power of idealization, not because she filled her pages with the revolting and epicene sensuality of the new Italian, French, and English schools. Intellectual viciousness was not her failing, and she never made the modern mistake of confusing indecency with vigour. She loved nature, air, and light too well and too truly to go very far wrong in her imaginations. It may indeed be impossible for many of us to accept all her social and political views; they have no bearing, fortunately, on the quality of her literary art; they have to be considered under a different aspect. In politics, her judgment, as displayed in the letters to Mazzini, was profound. Her correspondence with Flaubert shows us a capacity for stanch, unblemished friendship unequalled, probably, in the biographies, whether published or unpublished, of the remarkable.

With regard to her impiety – for such it should be called – it did not arise from arrogance, nor was it based in any way upon the higher learning of her period. Simply she did not possess the religious instinct. She understood it sympathetically – in *Spiridion*, for instance, she describes an ascetic nature as it has never been done in any other work of fiction. Newman himself has not written passages of deeper or purer mysticism, of more sincere spirituality. Balzac, in *Seraphita*, attempted something of the kind, but the result was never more than a *tour de force*. He could invent, he could describe, but George Sand felt; and as she felt, she composed, living with and loving with an understanding love all her creations. But it has to be remembered always that she repudiated all religious restraint, that she believed in the human heart, that she acknowledged no higher law than its own impulses, that she saw love where others see only a cruel struggle for existence, that she found beauty where ordinary visions can detect little besides a selfishness worse than brutal and a squalor more pitiful than death. Everywhere she insists upon the purifying influence of affection, no matter how degraded in its circumstances or how illegal in its manifestation. No writer – not excepting the Brontes – has shown a deeper sympathy with uncommon temperaments, misunderstood aims, consciences with flickering lights, the discontented, the abnormal, or the unhappy. The great modern specialist for nervous diseases has not improved on her analysis of the neuropathic and hysterical. There is scarcely a novel of hers in which some character does not appear who is, in the usual phrase, out of the common run. Yet, with this perfect understanding of the exceptional case, she never permits any science of cause and effect to obscure the rules and principles which in the main control life for the majority. It was, no doubt, this balance which made her a popular writer, even while she never ceased to keep in touch with the most acute minds of France.

She possessed, in addition to creative genius of an order especially individual and charming, a capacity for the invention of ideas. There are in many of her chapters more ideas, more suggestions than one would find in a whole volume of Flaubert. It is not possible that these surprising, admirable, and usually sound thoughts were the result of long hours of reflection. They belonged to her nature and a quality of judgment which, even in her most extravagant romances, is never for a moment swayed from that sane impartiality described by the unobservant as common sense.

Her fairness to women was not the least astounding of her gifts. She is kind to the beautiful, the yielding, above all to the very young, and in none of her stories has she introduced any violently disagreeable female characters. Her villains are mostly men, and even these she invests with a picturesque fatality which drives them to errors, crimes, and scoundrelism with a certain plaintive,

if relentless, grace. The inconstant lover is invariably pursued by the furies of remorse; the brutal has always some mitigating influence in his career; the libertine retains through many vicissitudes a seraphic love for some faithful Solveig.

Humanity meant far more to her than art: she began her literary career by describing facts as she knew them: critics drove her to examine their causes, and so she gradually changed from the chronicler with strong sympathies to the interpreter with a reasoned philosophy. She discovered that a great deal of the suffering in this world is due not so much to original sin, but to a kind of original stupidity, an unimaginative, stubborn stupidity. People were dishonest because they believed, wrongly, that dishonesty was somehow successful. They were cruel because they supposed that repulsive exhibitions of power inspired a prolonged fear. They were treacherous because they had never been taught the greater strength of candour. George Sand tried to point out the advantage of plain dealing, and the natural goodness of mankind when uncorrupted by a false education. She loved the wayward and the desolate: pretentiousness in any disguise was the one thing she suspected and could not tolerate. It may be questioned whether she ever deceived herself; but it must be said, that on the whole she flattered weakness – and excused, by enchanting eloquence, much which cannot always be justified merely on the ground that it is explicable. But to explain was something – all but everything at the time of her appearance in literature. Every novel she wrote made for charity – for a better acquaintance with our neighbour's woes and our own egoism. Such an attitude of mind is only possible to an absolutely frank, even Arcadian, nature. She did what she wished to do: she said what she had to say, not because she wanted to provoke excitement or astonish the multitude, but because she had succeeded eminently in leading her own life according to her own lights. The terror of appearing inconsistent excited her scorn. Appearances never troubled that unashamed soul. This is the magic, the peculiar fascination of her books. We find ourselves in the presence of a freshness, a primeval vigour which produces actually the effect of seeing new scenes, of facing a fresh climate. Her love of the soil, of flowers, and the sky, for whatever was young and unspoilt, seems to animate every page – even in her passages of rhetorical sentiment we never suspect the burning pastille, the gauze tea-gown, or the depressed pink light. Rhetoric it may be, but it is the rhetoric of the sea and the wheat field. It can be spoken in the open air and read by the light of day.

George Sand never confined herself to any especial manner in her literary work. Her spontaneity of feeling and the actual fecundity, as it were, of her imaginative gift, could not be restrained, concentrated, and formally arranged as it was in the case of the two first masters of modern French novel-writing. Her work in this respect may be compared to a gold mine, while theirs is rather the goldsmith's craft. It must not be supposed, however, that she was a writer without very strong views with regard to the construction of a plot and the development of character. Her literary essays and reviews show a knowledge of technique which could be accepted at any time as a text-book for the critics and the criticised. She knew exactly how artistic effects were obtained, how and why certain things were done, why realism, so-called, could never be anything but caricature, and why over-elaboration of small matters can never be otherwise than disproportionate. Nothing could be more just than her saying about Balzac that he was such a logician that he invented things more truthful than the truth itself. No one knew better than she that the truth, as it is commonly understood, does not exist; that it cannot be logical because of its mystery; and that it is the knowledge of its contradictions which shows the real expert in psychology.

Three of her stories – *La Petite Fadette*, *La Mare au Diable*, and *Les Maitres Mosaistes* – are as neat in their workmanship as a Dutch painting. Her brilliant powers of analysis, the intellectual atmosphere with which she surrounds the more complex characters in her longer romances, are entirely put aside, and we are given instead a series of pictures and dialogues in what has been called the purely objective style; so pure in its objectivity and detachment that it would be hard for any one to decide from internal evidence that they were in reality her own composition.

To those who seek for proportion and form there is, without doubt, much that is unsymmetrical in her designs. Interesting she always is, but to the trained eye scenes of minor importance are, strictly speaking, too long: descriptions in musical language sometimes distract the reader from the progress of the story. But this arose from her own joy in writing: much as she valued proportion, she liked expressing her mind better, not out of conceit or self-importance, but as the birds, whom she loved so well, sing.

Good nature is what we need above all in reading George Sand. It is there – infectious enough in her own pages, and with it the courage which can come only from a heart at peace with itself. This is why neither fashion nor new nor old criticism can affect the title of George Sand among the greatest influences of the last century and the present one. Much that she has said still seems untried and unexpected. Writers so opposite as Ibsen and Anatole France have expanded her themes. She is quoted unconsciously to-day by hundreds who are ignorant of their real source of inspiration. No woman ever wrote with such force before, and no woman since has even approached her supreme accomplishments.

PEARL MARY-TERESA CRAIGIE.

LIFE OF GEORGE SAND

George Sand, in whose life nothing was commonplace, was born in Paris, "in the midst of roses, to the sound of music," at a dance which her mother had somewhat rashly attended, on the 5th of July, 1804. Her maiden name was Armentine Lucile Aurore Dupin, and her ancestry was of a romantic character. She was, in fact, of royal blood, being the great-grand-daughter of the Marshal Maurice du Saxe and a Mlle. Verriere; her grandfather was M. Dupin de Francueil, the charming friend of Rousseau and Mme. d'Epinay; her father, Maurice Dupin, was a gay and brilliant soldier, who married the pretty daughter of a bird-fancier, and died early. She was a child of the people on her mother's side, an aristocrat on her father's. In 1807 she was taken by her father, who was on Murat's staff, into Spain, from which she returned to the house of her grandmother, at Nohant in Berry. This old lady adopted Aurore at the death of her father, in 1808. Of her childhood George Sand has given a most picturesque account in her "Histoire de ma Vie." In 1817 the girl was sent to the Convent of the English Augustinians in Paris, where she passed through a state of religious mysticism. She returned to Nohant in 1820, and soon threw off her pietism in the outdoor exercises of a wholesome country life. Within a few months, Mme. Dupin de Francueil died at a great age, and Aurore was tempted to return to Paris. Her relatives, however, were anxious that she should not do this, and they introduced to her the natural son of a retired colonel, the Baron Dudevant, whom, in September, 1822, she married. She brought him to live with her at Nohant, and she bore him two sons, Maurice and Solange, and a daughter. She quickly perceived, as her own intellectual nature developed, that her boorish husband was unsuited to her, but their early years of married life were not absolutely intolerable. In 1831, however, she could endure him no longer, and an amicable separation was agreed upon. She left M. Dudevant at Nohant, resigning her fortune, and proceeded to Paris, where she was hard pressed to find a living. She endeavoured, without success, to paint the lids of cigar-boxes, and in final desperation, under the influence of Jules Sandeau – who became her lover, and who invented the pseudonym of George Sand for her – she turned her attention to literature. Her earliest work was to help Sandeau in the composition of his novel, "Rose et Blanche" Her first independent novel, "Indiana," appeared at the close of 1831, and her second, "Valentine," two months later. These books produced a great and immediate sensation, and she felt that she had found her vocation. In 1833 she produced "Lebia"; in 1834 the "Lettres d'un Voyageur" and "Jacques"; in 1835 "Andre" and "Leone Leoni." After this her works become too numerous and were produced with too monotonous a regularity to be chronicled here. But it should be said that "Mauprat" was written in

1836 at Nohant, while she was pleading for a legal separation from her husband, which was given her by the tribunal of Bourges, with full authority over the education of her children. These early novels all reflect in measure the personal sorrows of the author, although George Sand never ceased to protest against too strict a biographical interpretation of their incidents. "Spiridion" (1839), composed under the influence of Lamennais, deals with questions of free thought in religion. But the novels of the first period of her literary activity, which came to a close in 1840, are mainly occupied with a lyrical individualism, and are inspired by the wrongs and disillusions of the author's personal adventures.

The years 1833 and 1834 were marked by her too-celebrated relations with Alfred de Musset, with whom she lived in Paris and at Venice, and with whom she quarrelled at last in circumstances deplorably infelicitous. Neither of these great creatures had the reticence to exclude the world from a narrative of their misfortunes and adventures; of the two it was fairly certainly the woman who came the less injured out of the furnace. In "Elle et Lui" (1859) she gave long afterward her version of the unhappy and undignified story. Her stay in Venice appears to have impressed her genius more deeply than any other section of her numerous foreign sojournings.

The writings of George Sand's second period, which extended from 1840 to 1848, are of a more general character, and are tinged with a generous but not very enlightened ardour for social emancipation. Of these novels, the earliest is "Le Compagnon du Tour de France" (1840), which is scarcely a masterpiece. In the pursuit of foreign modes of thought, and impelled by experiences of travel, George Sand rose to far greater heights in "Jeanne" (1842), in "Consuelo" (1842-'43), and in "La Comtesse de Rudolstade" (1844). All these books were composed in her retirement at Nohant, where she definitely settled in 1839, after having travelled for several months in Switzerland with Liszt and Mme. d'Agoult, and having lived in the island of Majorca for some time with the dying Chopin, an episode which is enshrined in her "Lucrezia Floriani" (1847).

The Revolution of 1848 appeared to George Sand a realization of her Utopian dreams, and plunged her thoughts into a painful disorder. She soon, however, became dissatisfied with the result of her republican theories, and she turned to two new sources of success, the country story and the stage. Her delicious romance of "Francois le Champi" (1850) attracted a new and enthusiastic audience to her, and her entire emancipation from "problems" was marked in the pages of "La Petite Fadette" and of "La Mare au Diable." To the same period belong "Les Visions de la Nuit des les Campagnes," "Les Maitres Sonneurs," and "Cosina." From 1850 to 1864 she gave a great deal of attention to the theatre, and of her numerous pieces several enjoyed a wide and considerable success, although it cannot be said that any of her plays have possessed the vitality of her best novels. The most solid of the former was her dramatization of her story, "Le Marquis de Villemer" (1864), which was one of the latest, and next to it "Le Mariage de Victorine" (1851), which was one of the earliest. Her successes on the stage, such as they are, appear mainly due to collaboration with others.

In her latest period, from 1860 to 1876, George Sand returned to her first lyrical manner, although with more reticence and a wider experience of life. Of the very abundant fruitage of these last years, not many rank with the masterpieces of her earlier periods, although such novels as "Tamaris" (1862), "La Confession d'une Jeune Fille" (1865), and "Cadio," seemed to her admirers to show no decline of force or fire. Still finer, perhaps, were "Le Marquis de Villemer" (1861) and "Jean de la Roche" (1860). Her latest production, which appeared after her death, was the "Contes d'une Grand'mere," a collection full of humanity and beauty. George Sand died at Nohant on the 8th of June, 1876. She had great qualities of soul, and in spite of the naive irregularities of her conduct in early middle life, she cannot be regarded otherwise than as an excellent woman. She was brave, courageous, heroically industrious, a loyal friend, a tender and wise mother. Her principle fault has been wittily defined by Mr. Henry James, who has remarked that in affairs of the heart George Sand never "behaved like a gentleman."

E. G.

PREFACE

When I wrote my novel *Mauprat* at Nohant – in 1846, if I remember rightly – I had just been suing for a separation. Hitherto I had written much against the abuses of marriage, and perhaps, though insufficiently explaining my views, had induced a belief that I failed to appreciate its essence; but it was at this time that marriage itself stood before me in all the moral beauty of its principle.

Misfortune is not without its uses to the thoughtful mind. The more clearly I had realized the pain and pity of having to break a sacred bond, the more profoundly I felt that where marriage is wanting, is in certain elements of happiness and justice of too lofty a nature to appeal to our actual society. Nay, more; society strives to take from the sanctity of the institution by treating it as a contract of material interests, attacking it on all sides at once, by the spirit of its manners, by its prejudices, by its hypocritical incredulity.

While writing a novel as an occupation and distraction for my mind, I conceived the idea of portraying an exclusive and undying love, before, during, and after marriage. Thus I drew the hero of my book proclaiming, at the age of eighty, his fidelity to the one woman he had ever loved.

The ideal of love is assuredly eternal fidelity. Moral and religious laws have aimed at consecrating this ideal. Material facts obscure it. Civil laws are so framed as to make it impossible or illusory. Here, however, is not the place to prove this. Nor has *Mauprat* been burdened with a proof of the theory; only, the sentiment by which I was specially penetrated at the time of writing it is embodied in the words of *Mauprat* towards the end of the book: “She was the only woman I loved in all my life; none other ever won a glance from me, or knew the pressure of my hand.”

GEORGE SAND.
June 5, 1857.
TO GUSTAVE PAPET

Though fashion may proscribe the patriarchal fashion of dedications, I would ask you, brother and friend, to accept this of a tale which is not new to you. I have drawn my materials in part from the cottages of our Noire valley. May we live and die there, repeating every evening our beloved invocation:

SANCTA SIMPLICITAS! GEORGE SAND.

On the borders of La Marche and Berry, in the district known as Varenne, which is naught but a vast moor studded with forests of oak and chestnut, and in the most thickly wooded and wildest part of the country, may be found, crouching within a ravine, a little ruined chateau. The dilapidated turrets would not catch your eye until you were about a hundred yards from the principal portcullis. The venerable trees around and the scattered rocks above, bury it in everlasting obscurity; and you would experience the greatest difficulty, even in broad daylight, in crossing the deserted path leading to it, without stumbling against the gnarled trunks and rubbish that bar every step. The name given to this dark ravine and gloomy castle is Roche-Mauprat.

It was not so long ago that the last of the Mauprats, the heir to this property, had the roofing taken away and all the woodwork sold. Then, as if to give a kick to the memory of his ancestors, he ordered the entrance gate to be thrown down, the north tower to be gutted, and a breach to be made in the surrounding wall. This done, he departed with his workmen, shaking the dust from off his feet, and abandoning his domain to foxes, and cormorants, and vipers. Since then, whenever the wood-cutters and charcoal-burners from the huts in the neighbourhood pass along the top of the Roche-Mauprat ravine, if it is in daytime they whistle with a defiant air or hurl a hearty curse at the ruins; but when day falls and the goat-sucker begins to screech from the top of the loopholes, wood-cutter

and charcoal-burner pass by silently, with quickened step, and cross themselves from time to time to ward off the evil spirits that hold sway among the ruins.

For myself, I own that I have never skirted the ravine at night without feeling a certain uneasiness; and I would not like to swear that on some stormy nights I have not given my horse a touch of the spur, in order to escape the more quickly from the disagreeable impression this neighbourhood made on me.

The reason is that in childhood I classed the name of Mauprat with those of Cartouche and Bluebeard; and in the course of horrible dreams I often used to mix up the ancient legends of the Ogre and the Bogey with the quite recent events which in our province had given such a sinister lustre to this Mauprat family.

Frequently, out shooting, when my companions and I have left our posts to go and warm ourselves at the charcoal fires which the workmen keep up all night, I have heard this name dying away on their lips at our approach. But when they had recognised us and thoroughly satisfied themselves that the ghosts of none of these robbers were hiding in our midst, they would tell us in a whisper such stories as might make one’s hair stand on end, stories which I shall take good care not to pass on to you, grieved as I am that they should ever have darkened and pained my own memory.

Not that the story I am about to tell is altogether pleasant and cheerful. On the contrary, I must ask your pardon for unfolding so sombre a tale. Yet, in the impression which it has made on myself there is something so consoling and, if I may venture the phrase, so healthful to the soul, that you will excuse me, I hope, for the sake of the result. Besides this is a story which has just been told to me. And now you ask me for one. The opportunity is too good to be missed for one of my laziness or lack of invention.

It was only last week that I met Bernard Mauprat, the last of the line, the man who, having long before severed himself from his infamous connections, determined to demolish his manor as a sign of the horror aroused in him by the recollections of childhood. This Bernard is one of the most respected men in the province. He lives in a pretty house near Chateauroux, in a flat country. Finding myself in the neighbourhood, with a friend of mine who knows him, I expressed a wish to be introduced; and my friend, promising me a hearty welcome, took me to his house then and there.

I already knew in outline the remarkable history of this old man; but I had always felt a keen desire to fill in the details, and above all to receive them from himself. For me, the strange destiny of the man was a philosophical problem to be solved. I therefore noticed his features, his manners, and his home with peculiar interest.

Bernard Mauprat must be fully eighty-four, though his robust health, his upright figure, his firm step, and the absence of any infirmity might indicate some fifteen or twenty years less. His face would have appeared to me extremely handsome, had not a certain harshness of expression brought before my eyes, in spite of myself, the shades of his fathers. I very much fear that, externally at all events, he must resemble them. This he alone could have told us; for neither my friend nor myself had known any other Mauprat. Naturally, however, we were very careful not to inquire.

It struck us that his servants waited on him with a promptitude and punctuality quite marvellous in Berrichon domestics. Nevertheless, at the least semblance of delay he raised his voice, knitted his eyebrows (which still showed very black under his white hair), and muttered a few expressions of impatience which lent wings even to the slowest. At first I was somewhat shocked at this habit; it appeared to savour rather too strongly of the Mauprats. But the kindly and almost paternal manner in which he spoke to them a moment later, and their zeal, which seemed so distinct from fear, soon reconciled me to him. Towards us, moreover, he showed an exquisite politeness, and expressed himself in the choicest terms. Unfortunately, at the end of dinner, a door which had been left open and through which a cold air found its way to his venerable skull, drew from him such a frightful oath that my friend and I exchanged a look of surprise. He noticed it.

“I beg your pardon, gentlemen,” he said. “I am afraid you find me an odd mixture. Ah, you see but a short distance. I am an old branch, happily torn from a vile trunk and transplanted into good soil, but still knotted and rough like the wild holly of the original stock. I have, believe me, had no little trouble in reaching the state of comparative gentleness and calm in which you behold me. Alas! if I dared, I should reproach Providence with a great injustice – that of having allotted me a life as short as other men’s. When one has to struggle for forty or fifty years to transform one’s self from a wolf into a man, one ought to live a hundred years longer to enjoy one’s victory. Yet what good would that do me?” he added in a tone of sadness. “The kind fairy who transformed me is here no more to take pleasure in her work. Bah! it is quite time to have done with it all.”

Then he turned towards me, and, looking at me with big dark eyes, still strangely animated, said:

“Come, my dear young man; I know what brings you to see me; you are curious to hear my history. Draw nearer the fire, then. Mauprat though I am, I will not make you do duty for a log. In listening you are giving me the greatest pleasure you could give. Your friend will tell you, however, that I do not willingly talk of myself. I am generally afraid of having to deal with blockheads, but you I have already heard of; I know your character and your profession; you are an observer and narrator – in other words, pardon me, inquisitive and a chatterbox.”

He began to laugh, and I made an effort to laugh too, though with a rising suspicion that he was making game of us. Nor could I help thinking of the nasty tricks that his grandfather took a delight in playing on the imprudent busybodies who called upon him. But he put his arm through mine in a friendly way, and making me sit down in front of a good fire, near a table covered with cups —

“Don’t be annoyed,” he said. “At my age I cannot get rid of hereditary sarcasm; but there is nothing spiteful in mine. To speak seriously, I am delighted to see you and to confide in you the story of my life. A man as unfortunate as I have been deserves to find a faithful biographer to clear his memory from all stain. Listen, then, and take some coffee.”

I offered him a cup in silence. He refused it with a wave of the arm and a smile which seemed to say, “That is rather for your effeminate generation.”

Then he began his narrative in these words:

I

You live not very far from Roche-Mauprat, and must have often passed by the ruins. Thus there is no need for me to describe them. All I can tell you is that the place has never been so attractive as it is now. On the day that I had the roof taken off, the sun for the first time brightened the damp walls within which my childhood was passed; and the lizards to which I have left them are much better housed there than I once was. They can at least behold the light of day and warm their cold limbs in the rays of the sun at noon.

There used to be an elder and a younger branch of the Mauprats. I belong to the elder. My grandfather was that old Tristan de Mauprat who ran through his fortune, dishonoured his name, and was such a blackguard that his memory is already surrounded by a halo of the marvelous. The peasants still believe that his ghost appears, either in the body of a wizard who shows malefactors the way to the dwellings of Varenne, or in that of an old white hare which reveals itself to people meditating some evil deed. When I came into the world the only living member of the younger branch was Monsieur Hubert de Mauprat, known as the chevalier, because he belonged to the Order of the Knights of Malta; a man just as good as his cousin was bad. Being the youngest son of his family, he had taken the vow of celibacy; but, when he found himself the sole survivor of several brothers and sisters, he obtained release from his vow, and took a wife the year before I was born. Rumour says that before changing his existence in this way he made strenuous efforts to find some descendant of the elder branch worthy to restore the tarnished family name, and preserve the fortune which had accumulated in the hands of the younger branch. He had endeavoured to put his cousin Tristan's affairs in order, and had frequently paid off the latter's creditors. Seeing, however, that the only effect of his kindness was to encourage the vices of the family, and that, instead of respect and gratitude, he received nothing but secret hatred and churlish jealousy, he abandoned all attempts at friendship, broke with his cousins, and in spite of his advanced age (he was over sixty), took a wife in order to have heirs of his own. He had one daughter, and there his hopes of posterity ended; for soon afterward his wife died of a violent illness which the doctors called iliac passion. He then left that part of the country and returned but rarely to his estates. These were situated about six leagues from Roche-Mauprat, on the borders of the Varenne du Fromental. He was a prudent man and a just, because he was cultured, because his father had moved with the spirit of his century, and had had him educated. None the less he had preserved a firm character and an enterprising mind, and, like his ancestors, he was proud of hearing as a sort of surname the knightly title of Headbreaker, hereditary in the original Mauprat stock. As for the elder branch, it had turned out so badly, or rather had preserved from the old feudal days such terrible habits of brigandage, that it had won for itself the distinctive title of Hamstringer. [I hazard "Headbreaker" and "Hamstringer" as poor equivalents for the "Casse-Tete" and "Coupe-Jarret" of the French. – TR.] Of the sons of Tristan, my father, the eldest, was the only one who married. I was his only child. Here it is necessary to mention a fact of which I was long ignorant. Hubert de Mauprat, on hearing of my birth, begged me of my parents, undertaking to make me his heir if he were allowed absolute control over my education. At a shooting-party about this time my father was killed by an accidental shot, and my grandfather refused the chevalier's offer, declaring that his children were the sole legitimate heirs of the younger branch, and that consequently he would resist with all his might any substitution in my favour. It was then that Hubert's daughter was born. But when, seven years later, his wife died leaving him this one child, the desire, so strong in the nobles of that time, to perpetuate their name, urged him to renew his request to my mother. What her answer was I do not know; she fell ill and died. The country doctors again brought in a verdict of iliac passion. My grandfather had spent the last two days she passed in this world with her.

Pour me out a glass of Spanish wine; for I feel a cold shiver running through my body. It is nothing serious – merely the effect that these early recollections have on me when I begin to narrate them. It will soon pass off.

He swallowed a large glass of wine, and we did the same; for a sensation of cold came upon us too as we gazed at his stern face and listened to his brief, abrupt sentences. He continued:

Thus at the age of seven I found myself an orphan. My grandfather searched my mother's house and seized all the money and valuables he could carry away. Then, leaving the rest, and declaring he would have nothing to do with lawyers, he did not even wait for the funeral, but took me by the collar and flung me on to the crupper of his horse, saying: "Now, my young ward, come home with me; and try to stop that crying soon, for I haven't much patience with brats." In fact, after a few seconds he gave me such hard cuts with his whip that I stopped crying, and, withdrawing myself like a tortoise into my shell, completed the journey without daring to breathe.

He was a tall old man, bony and cross-eyed. I fancy I see him now as he was then. The impression that evening made on me can never be effaced. It was a sudden realization of all the horrors which my mother had foreshadowed when speaking of her execrable father-in-law and his brigands of sons. The moon, I remember, was shining here and there through the dense foliage of the forest. My grandfather's horse was lean, hardy, and bad-tempered like himself. It kicked at every cut of the whip, and its master gave it plenty. Swift as an arrow it jumped the ravines and little torrents which everywhere intersect Varenne in all directions. At each jump I lost my balance, and clung in terror to the saddle or my grandfather's coat. As for him, he was so little concerned about me that, had I fallen, I doubt whether he would have taken the trouble to pick me up. Sometimes, noticing my terror, he would jeer at me, and, to make me still more afraid, set his horse plunging again. Twenty times, in a frenzy of despair, I was on the point of throwing myself off; but the instinctive love of life prevented me from giving way to the impulse. At last, about midnight, we suddenly stopped before a small pointed gate, and the drawbridge was soon lifted behind us. My grandfather took me, bathed in a cold sweat as I was, and threw me over to a great fellow, lame and horribly ugly, who carried me into the house. This was my Uncle John, and I was at Roche-Mauprat.

At that time my grandfather, along with his eight sons, formed the last relic in our province of that race of petty feudal tyrants by which France had been overrun and harassed for so many centuries. Civilization, already advancing rapidly towards the great convulsion of the Revolution, was gradually stamping out the systematic extortions of these robbers. The light of education, a species of good taste reflected, however dimly, from a polished court, and perhaps a presentiment of the impending terrible awakening of the people, were spreading through the castles and even through the half-rustic manors of the lordlings. Ever in our midland provinces, the most backward by reason of their situation, the sentiment of social equality was already driving out the customs of a barbarous age. More than one vile scapegrace had been forced to reform, in spite of his privileges; and in certain places where the peasants, driven to desperation, had rid themselves of their overlord, the law had not dreamt of interfering, nor had the relatives dared to demand redress.

In spite of the prevailing tone of mind, my grandfather had long maintained his position in the country without experiencing any opposition. But, having had a large family, endowed like himself with a goodly number of vices, he finally found himself pestered and besieged by creditors who, instead of being frightened by his threats, as of old, were themselves threatening to make him suffer. He was obliged to devise some means of avoiding the bailiffs on the one hand, and, on the other, the fights which were continually taking place. In these fights the Mauprats no longer shone, despite their numbers, their complete union, and their herculean strength; since the whole population of the district sided with their opponents and took upon itself the duty of stoning them. So, rallying his progeny around him, as the wild boar gathers together its young after a hunt, Tristan withdrew into his castle and ordered the drawbridge to be raised. Shut up with him were ten or twelve peasants, his servants, all of them poachers or refugees, who like himself had some interest in "retiring from the

world" (his own expression), and in finding a place of safety behind good stout walls. An enormous pile of hunting weapons, duck-guns, carbines, blunderbusses, spears, and cutlasses, were raised on the platform, and the porter received orders never to let more than two persons at a time approach within range of his gun.

From that day Mauprat and his sons broke with all civil laws as they had already broken with all moral laws. They formed themselves into a band of adventurers. While their well-beloved and trusty poachers supplied the house with game, they levied illegal taxes on the small farms in the neighbourhood. Now, without being cowards (and they are far from that), the peasants of our province, as you know, are meek and timid, partly from listlessness, partly from distrust of the law, which they have never understood, and of which even to this day they have but a scanty knowledge. No province of France has preserved more old traditions or longer endured the abuses of feudalism. Nowhere else, perhaps, has the title of the lord of the manor been handed down, as hitherto with us, to the owners of certain estates; and nowhere is it so easy to frighten the people with reports of some absurd and impossible political event. At the time of which I speak the Mauprats, being the only powerful family in a district remote from towns and cut off from communication with the outside world, had little difficulty in persuading their vassals that serfdom was about to be re-established, and that it would go hard with all who resisted. The peasants hesitated, listened timorously to the few among themselves who preached independence, then thought the matter over and decided to submit. The Mauprats were clever enough not to demand money of them, for money is what the peasant in such a district obtains with the greatest difficulty, and parts from with the greatest reluctance. "Money is dear," is one of his proverbs, because in his eyes money stands for something different from manual labour. It means traffic with men and things outside his world, an effort of foresight or circumspection, a bargain, a sort of intellectual struggle, which lifts him out of his ordinary heedless habits; it means, in a word, mental labour, and this for him is the most painful and the most wearing.

The Mauprats, knowing how the ground lay, and having no particular need of money any longer, since they had repudiated their debts, demanded payments in kind only. They ruled that one man should contribute capons, another calves, a third corn, a fourth fodder, and so on. They were careful, too, to tax judiciously, to demand from each the commodity he could provide with least inconvenience to himself. In return they promised help and protection to all; and up to a certain point they kept their word. They cleared the land of wolves and foxes, gave a welcome and a hiding-place to all deserters, and helped to defraud the state by intimidating the excise officers and tax-collectors.

They took advantage of their power to give the poor man a false notion of his real interests, and to corrupt the simple folk by undermining all sense of their dignity and natural liberty. They made the whole district combine in a sort of secession from the law, and they so frightened the functionaries appointed to enforce respect for it, that after a few years it fell into a veritable desuetude. Thus it happened that, while France at a short distance from this region was advancing with rapid strides towards the enfranchisement of the poorer classes, Varenne was executing a retrograde march and returning at full speed to the ancient tyranny of the country squires. It was easy enough for the Mauprats to pervert these poor folk; they feigned a friendly interest in them to mark their difference from the other nobles in the province whose manners still retained some of the haughtiness of their ancient power. Above all, my grandfather lost no opportunity of making the peasants share his own hatred of his own cousin, Hubert de Mauprat. The latter, whenever he interviewed his vassals, would remain seated in his arm-chair, while they stood before him bareheaded; whereas Tristan de Mauprat would make them sit down at his table, and drink some of the wine they had brought him as a sign of voluntary homage. He would then have them led home by his men in the middle of the night, all dead drunk, torches in hand, and making the forest resound with ribald songs. Libertinism completed the demoralization of the peasantry. In every family the Mauprats soon had their mistresses. This was tolerated, partly because it was profitable, and partly (alas! that it should have to be said) because it gratified vanity. The very isolation of the houses was favourable to the evil.

No scandal, no denunciation were to be feared. The tiniest village would have been sufficient for the creation and maintenance of a public opinion. There, however, there were only scattered cottages and isolated farms; wastes and woods so separated the families from one another that the exercise of any mutual control was impossible. Shame is stronger than conscience. I need not tell you of all the bonds of infamy that united masters and slaves. Debauchery, extortion, and fraud were both precept and example for my youth, and life went on merrily. All notions of justice were scoffed at; creditors were defrauded of both interest and capital; any law officer who ventured to serve a summons received a sound thrashing, and the mounted police were fired on if they approached too near the turrets. A plague on parliament; starvation to all imbued with the new philosophy; and death to the younger branch of the Mauprats – such were the watchwords of these men who, to crown all, gave themselves the airs of knights-errant of the twelfth century. My grandfather talked of nothing but his pedigree and the prowess of his ancestors. He regretted the good old days when every lordling had instruments of torture in his manor, and dungeons, and, best, of all cannon. In ours we only had pitchforks and sticks, and a second-rate culverin which my Uncle John used to point – and point very well, in fact – and which was sufficient to keep at a respectful distance the military force of the district.

II

Old Mauprat was a treacherous animal of the carnivorous order, a cross between a lynx and a fox. Along with a copious and easy flow of language, he had a veneer of education which helped his cunning. He made a point of excessive politeness, and had great powers of persuasion, even with the objects of his vengeance. He knew how to entice them to his castle, where he would make them undergo frightful ill-treatment, for which, however, having no witnesses, they were unable to obtain redress by law. All his villainies bore the stamp of such consummate skill that the country came to view them with a sort of awe akin to respect. No one could ever catch him out of his den, though he issued forth often enough, and apparently without taking many precautions. In truth, he was a man with a genius for evil; and his sons, bound to him by no ties of affection, of which, indeed, they were incapable, yet acknowledged the sway of this superior evil genius, and gave him a uniform and ready obedience, in which there was something almost fanatic. He was their deliverer in all desperate cases; and when the weariness of confinement under our chilly vaults began to fill them with *ennui*, his mind, brutal even in jest, would cure them by arranging for their pleasure shows worthy of a den of thieves. Sometimes poor mendicant monks collecting alms would be terrified or tortured for their benefit; their beards would be burned off, or they would be lowered into a well and kept hanging between life and death until they had sung some foul song or uttered some blasphemy. Everybody knows the story of the notary who was allowed to enter in company with his four clerks, and whom they received with all the assiduity of pompous hospitality. My grandfather pretended to agree with a good grace to the execution of their warrant, and politely helped them to make an inventory of his furniture, of which the sale had been decreed. After this, when dinner was served and the king's men had taken their places at table, he said to the notary:

"Ah, mon Dieu! I was forgetting a poor hack of mine in the stable. It's a small matter. Still, you might be reprimanded for omitting it; and as I see that you are a worthy fellow I should be sorry to mislead you. Come with me and see it; it won't take us a moment."

The notary followed Mauprat unsuspectingly. Just as they were about to enter the stable together, Mauprat, who was leading the way, told him to put in his head only. The notary, anxious to show great consideration in the performance of his duties, and not to pry into things too closely, did as he was told. Then Mauprat suddenly pushed the door to and squeezed his neck so violently between it and the wall that the wretched man could not breathe. Deeming him sufficiently punished, Tristan opened the door again, and, asking pardon for his carelessness, with great civility offered the man his arm to take him back to dinner. This the notary did not consider it wise to refuse; but as soon as he re-entered the room where his colleagues were, he threw himself into a chair, and pointing to his livid face and mangled neck, demanded justice for the trap into which he had just been led. It was then that my grandfather, revelling in his rascally wit, went through a comedy scene of sublime audacity. He gravely reproached the notary with accusing him unjustly, and always addressing him kindly and with studied politeness, called the others to bear witness to his conduct, begging them to make allowances if his precarious position had forced him to give them such a poor reception, all the while doing the honours of the table in splendid style. The poor notary did not dare to press the matter and was compelled to dine, although half dead. His companions were so completely duped by Mauprat's assurance that they ate and drank merrily, treating the notary as a lunatic and a boor. They left Roche-Mauprat all drunk, singing the praises of their host, and laughing at the notary, who fell down dead upon the threshold of his house on dismounting from his horse.

The eight sons, the pride and strength of old Mauprat, all resembled him in physical vigour, brutality of manners, and, to some extent, in craftiness and jesting ill-nature. The truth is they were veritable brutes, capable of any evil, and completely dead to any noble thought or generous sentiment. Nevertheless, they were endowed with a sort of reckless, dashing courage which now and then seemed

to have in it an element of grandeur. But it is time that I told you about myself, and gave you some idea of the development of my character in the thick of this filthy mire into which it had pleased God to plunge me, on leaving my cradle.

I should be wrong if, in order to gain your sympathy in these early years of my life, I asserted that I was born with a noble nature, a pure and incorruptible soul. As to this, I know nothing. Maybe there are no incorruptible souls. Maybe there are. That is what neither you nor any one will ever know. The great questions awaiting an answer are these: “Are our innate tendencies invincible? If not, can they be modified merely or wholly destroyed by education?” For myself, I would not dare to affirm. I am neither a metaphysician, nor a psychologist, nor a philosopher; but I have had a terrible life, gentlemen, and if I were a legislator, I would order that man to have his tongue torn out, or his head cut off, who dared to preach or write that the nature of individuals is unchangeable, and that it is no more possible to reform the character of a man than the appetite of a tiger. God has preserved me from believing this.

All I can tell you is that my mother instilled into me good principles, though, perhaps, I was not endowed by nature with her good qualities. Even with her I was of a violent disposition, but my violence was sullen and suppressed. I was blind and brutal in anger, nervous even to cowardice at the approach of danger, daring almost to foolhardiness when hand to hand with it – that is to say, at once timid and brave from my love of life. My obstinacy was revolting; yet my mother alone could conquer me; and without attempting to reason, for my mind developed very slowly, I used to obey her as if by a sort of magnetic necessity. This one guiding hand which I remember, and another woman’s which I felt later, were and have been sufficient to lead me towards good. But I lost my mother before she had been able to teach me anything seriously; and when I was transplanted to Roche-Mauprat, my feeling for the evil done there was merely an instinctive aversion, feeble enough, perhaps, if fear had not been mingled with it.

But I thank Heaven from the bottom of my heart for the cruelties heaped upon me there, and above all for the hatred which my Uncle John conceived for me. My ill-fortune preserved me from indifference in the presence of evil, and my sufferings helped me to detest those who wrought it.

This John was certainly the most detestable of his race. Ever since a fall from his horse had maimed him, his evil temper had developed in proportion to his inability to do as much harm as his companions. Compelled to remain at home when the others set out on their expeditions, for he could not bestride a horse, he found his only chance of pleasure in those fruitless little attacks which the mounted police sometimes made on the castle, as if to ease their conscience. Then, intrenched behind a rampart of freestone which he had had built to suit himself, John, calmly seated near his culverin, would pick off a gentleman from time to time, and at once regain, as he said, his sleeping and eating power, which want of exercise had taken from him. And he would even climb up to his beloved platform without waiting for the excuse of an attack, and there, crouching down like a cat ready to spring, as soon as he saw any one appear in the distance without giving the signal, he would try his skill upon the target, and make the man retrace his steps. This he called sweeping the path clean.

As I was too young to accompany my uncles on their hunting and plundering expeditions, John naturally became my guardian and tutor – that is to say, my jailor and tormentor. I will not give you all the details of that infernal existence. For nearly ten years I endured cold, hunger, insults, the dungeon, and blows, according to the more or less savage caprices of this monster. His fierce hatred of me arose from the fact that he could not succeed in depraving me; my rugged, headstrong, and unsociable nature preserved me from his vile seductions. It is possible that I had not any strong tendencies to virtue; to hatred I luckily had. Rather than do the bidding of my tyrant I would have suffered a thousand deaths. And so I grew up without conceiving any affection for vice. However, my notions about society were so strange that my uncles’ mode of life did not in itself cause me any repugnance. Seeing that I was brought up behind the walls of Roche-Mauprat, and that I lived in a state of perpetual siege, you will understand that I had precisely such ideas as any armed retainer in

the barbarous ages of feudalism might have had. What, outside our den, was termed by other men assassinating, plundering, and torturing, I was taught to call fighting, conquering, and subduing. My sole knowledge of history consisted of an acquaintance with certain legends and ballads of chivalry which my grandfather used to repeat to me of an evening, when he had time to think of what he was pleased to call my education. Whenever I asked him any question about the present time, he used to answer that times had sadly changed, that all Frenchmen had become traitors and felons, that they had frightened their kings, and that these, like cravens, had deserted the nobles, who in their turn had been cowardly enough to renounce their privileges and let laws be made for them by clodhoppers. I listened with surprise, almost with indignation, to this account of the age in which I lived, for me an age of shadows and mysteries. My grandfather had but vague ideas of chronology; not a book of any kind was to be found at Roche-Mauprat, except, I should say, the History of the Sons of Aymon, and a few chronicles of the same class brought by our servants from country fairs. Three names, and only three, stood clear in the chaos of my ignorance – Charlemagne, Louis XI, and Louis XIV; because my grandfather would frequently introduce these into dissertations on the unrecognised rights of the nobles. In truth, I was so ignorant that I scarcely knew the difference between a reign and a race; and I was by no means sure that my grandfather had not seen Charlemagne, for he spoke of him more frequently and more gladly than of any other man.

But, while my native energy led me to admire the exploits of my uncles, and filled me with a longing to share in them, the cold-blooded cruelty they perpetrated on returning from their expeditions, and the perfidious artifices by which they lured their dupes to the castle, in order to torture them to extort ransom, roused in me strange and painful emotions, which, now that I am speaking in all sincerity, it would be difficult for me to account for exactly. In the absence of all ordinary moral principles it might have been natural for me to accept the theory which I daily saw carried into practice, that makes it right; but the humiliation and suffering which my Uncle John inflicted on me in virtue of this theory, taught me to be dissatisfied with it. I could appreciate the right of the bravest, and I genuinely despised those who, with death in their power, yet chose life at the price of such ignominy as they had to bear at Roche-Mauprat. But I could only explain these insults and horrors heaped on prisoners, some of them women and mere children, as manifestations of bloodthirsty appetites. I do not know if I was sufficiently susceptible of a noble sentiment to be inspired with pity for the victim; but certain it is that I experienced that feeling of selfish commiseration which is common to all natures, and which, purified and ennobled, has become charity among civilized peoples. Under my coarse exterior my heart no doubt merely felt passing shocks of fear and disgust at the sight of punishments which I myself might have to endure any day at the caprice of my oppressors; especially as John, when he saw me turn pale at these frightful spectacles, had a habit of saying, in a mocking tone:

“That’s what I’ll do to you when you are disobedient.”

All I know is that in presence of such iniquitous acts I experienced a horrible uneasiness; my blood curdled in my veins, my throat began to close, and I had to rush away, so as not to repeat the cries which pierced my ears. In time, however, I became somewhat hardened to these terrible impressions. The fibres of feeling grew tougher, and habit gave me power to hide what they termed my cowardice. I even felt ashamed of the signs of weakness I showed, and forced my face into the hyena smile which I saw on the faces of my kinsmen. But I could never prevent convulsive shudders from running through my limbs, and the coldness as of death from falling on my heart, at the recollection of these scenes of agony. The women, dragged half-willingly, half by force, under the roof of Roche-Mauprat, caused me inconceivable agitation. I began to feel the fires of youth kindling within me, and even to look with envy on this part of my uncles’ spoil; but with these new-born desires were mingled inexpressible pangs. To all around me women were merely objects of contempt, and vainly did I try to separate this idea from that of the pleasure which was luring me. My mind was bewildered, and my irritated nerves imparted a violent and sickly strain to all my temptations. In other matters, I had

as vile a disposition as my companions; if my heart was better than theirs, my manners were no less arrogant, and my jokes in no better taste. And here it may be well to give you an illustration of my youthful malice, especially as the results of these events have had an influence on the rest of my life.

III

Some three leagues from Roche-Mauprat, on your way to Fromental, you must have noticed an old tower standing by itself in the middle of the woods. It is famous for the tragic death of a prisoner about a century ago. The executioner, on his rounds, thought good to hang him without any further formality, merely to gratify an old Mauprat, his overlord.

At the time of which I am speaking Gazeau Tower was already deserted and falling into ruins. It was state property, and, more from negligence than kindness, the authorities had allowed a poor old fellow to take up his abode there. He was quite a character, used to live completely alone, and was known in the district as Gaffer Patience.

“Yes,” I interrupted; “I have heard my nurse’s grandmother speak of him; she believed he was a sorcerer.”

Exactly so; and while we are at this point let me tell you what sort of a man this Patience really was, for I shall have to speak of him more than once in the course of my story. I had opportunities of studying him thoroughly.

Patience, then, was a rustic philosopher. Heaven had endowed him with a keen intellect, but he had had little education. By a sort of strange fatality, his brain had doggedly resisted the little instruction he might have received. For instance, he had been to the Carmelite’s school at – , and instead of showing any aptitude for work, he had played truant with a keener delight than any of his school-fellows. His was an eminently contemplative nature, kindly and indolent, but proud and almost savage in its love of independence; religious, yet opposed to all authority; somewhat captious, very suspicious, and inexorable with hypocrites. The observances of the cloister inspired him with but little awe; and as a result of once or twice speaking his mind too freely to the monks he was expelled from the school. From that time forth he was the sworn foe of what he called monkism, and declared openly for the cure of the Briantes, who was accused of being a Jansenist. In the instruction of Patience, however, the cure succeeded no better than the monks. The young peasant, endowed though he was with herculean strength and a great desire for knowledge, displayed an unconquerable aversion for every kind of work, whether physical or mental. He professed a sort of artless philosophy which the cure found it very difficult to argue against. There was, he said, no need for a man to work as long as he did not want money; and he was in no need of money as long as his wants were moderate. Patience practised what he preached: during the years when passions are so powerful he lived a life of austerity, drank nothing but water, never entered a tavern, and never joined in a dance. He was always very awkward and shy with women, who, it must be owned, found little to please in his eccentric character, stern face, and somewhat sarcastic wit. As if to avenge himself for this by showing his contempt, or to console himself by displaying his wisdom, he took a pleasure, like Diogenes of old, in decrying the vain pleasures of others; and if at times he was to be seen passing under the branches in the middle of the fetes, it was merely to throw out some shaft of scorn, a flash from his inexorable good sense. Sometimes, too, his uncompromising morality found expression in biting words, which left clouds of sadness or fear hanging over agitated consciences. This naturally gained him violent enemies; and the efforts of impotent hatred, helped by the feeling of awe which his eccentric behaviour produced, fastened upon him the reputation of a sorcerer.

When I said that Patience was lacking in education, I expressed myself badly. Longing for a knowledge of the sublime mysteries of Nature, his mind wished to soar to heaven on its first flight. From the very beginning, the Jansenist vicar was so perplexed and startled by the audacity of his pupil, he had to say so much to calm him into submission, he was obliged to sustain such assaults of bold questions and proud objections, that he had no leisure to teach him the alphabet; and at the end of ten years of studies, broken off and taken up at the bidding of a whim or on compulsion, Patience could not even read. It was only with great difficulty, after poring over a book for some

two hours, that he deciphered a single page, and even then he did not grasp the meaning of most of the words expressing abstract ideas. Yet these abstract ideas were undoubtedly in him; you felt their presence while watching and listening to him; and the way in which he managed to embody them in homely phrase enlivened with a rude poetry was so marvellous, that one scarcely knew whether to feel astounded or amused.

Always serious, always positive himself, he scorned dalliance with any dialectic. A Stoic by nature and on principle, enthusiastic in the propagation of his doctrine of severance from false ideas, but resolute in the practice of resignation, he made many a breach in the poor cure's defences; and it was in these discussions, as he often told me in his last years, that he acquired his knowledge of philosophy. In order to make a stand against the battering-ram of natural logic, the worthy Jansenist was obliged to invoke the testimony of all the Fathers of the Church, and to oppose these, often even to corroborate them, with the teaching of all the sages and scholars of antiquity. Then Patience, his round eyes starting from his head (this was his own expression), lapsed into silence, and, delighted to learn without having the bother of studying, would ask for long explanations of the doctrines of these men, and for an account of their lives. Noticing this attention and this silence, his adversary would exult; but just as he thought he had convinced this rebellious soul, Patience, hearing the village clock strike midnight, would rise, take an affectionate leave of his host, and on the very threshold of the vicarage, would dismay the good man with some laconic and cutting comment that confounded Saint Jerome and Plato alike, Eusebius equally with Seneca, Tertullian no less than Aristotle.

The cure was not too ready to acknowledge the superiority of this untutored intellect. Still, he was quite astonished at passing so many winter evenings by his fireside with this peasant without feeling either bored or tired; and he would wonder how it was that the village schoolmaster, and even the prior of the convent, in spite of their Greek and Latin, appeared to him, the one a bore, the other a sophist, in all their discussions. Knowing the perfect purity of the peasant's life, he attributed the ascendency of his mind to the power of virtue and the charm it spreads over all things. Then, each evening, he would humbly accuse himself before God of not having disputed with his pupil from a sufficiently Christian point of view; he would confess to his guardian angel that pride in his own learning and joy at being listened to so devoutly had carried him somewhat beyond the bounds of religious instruction; that he had quoted profane writers too complacently; that he had even experienced a dangerous pleasure in roaming with his disciple through the fields of the past, plucking pagan flowers unsprinkled by the waters of baptism, flowers in whose fragrance a priest should not have found such delight.

On his side, Patience loved the cure dearly. He was his only friend, his only bond of union with society, his only bond of union, through the light of knowledge, with God. The peasant largely over-estimated his pastor's learning. He did not know that even the most enlightened men often draw wrong conclusions, or no conclusions at all, from the course of progress. Patience would have been spared great distress of mind if he could have seen for certain that his master was frequently mistaken and that it was the man, not the truth, that was at fault. Not knowing this, and finding the experience of the ages at variance with his innate sense of justice, he was continually a prey to agonizing reveries; and, living by himself, and wandering through the country at all hours of the day and night, wrapped in thoughts undreamed of by his fellows, he gave more and more credit to the tales of sorcery reported against him.

The convent did not like the pastor. A few monks whom Patience had unmasked hated Patience. Hence, both pastor and pupil were persecuted. The ignorant monks did not scruple to accuse the cure to his bishop of devoting himself to the occult sciences in concert with the magician Patience. A sort of religious war broke out in the village and neighbourhood. All who were not for the convent were for the cure, and *vice versa*. Patience scorned to take part in this struggle. One morning he went to see his friend, with tears in his eyes, and said to him:

“You are the one man in all the world that I love, and I will not have you persecuted on my account. Since, after you, I neither know nor care for a soul, I am going off to live in the woods, like the men of primitive times. I have inherited a field which brings me in fifty francs a year. It is the only land I have ever stirred with these hands, and half its wretched rent has gone to pay the tithe of labour I owe the seignior. I trust to die without ever doing duty as a beast of burden for others. And yet, should they remove you from your office, or rob you of your income, if you have a field that needs ploughing, only send me word, and you will see that these arms have not grown altogether stiff in their idleness.”

It was in vain that the pastor opposed this resolve. Patience departed, carrying with him as his only belonging the coat he had on his back, and an abridgment of the teachings of Epictetus. For this book he had a great affection, and, thanks to much study of it, could read as many as three of its pages a day without unduly tiring himself. The rustic anchorite went into the desert to live. At first he built himself a hut of branches in a wood. Then, as wolves attacked him, he took refuge in one of the lower halls of Gazeau Tower, which he furnished luxuriously with a bed of moss, and some stumps of trees; wild roots, wild fruit, and goat’s milk constituted a daily fare very little inferior to what he had had in the village. This is no exaggeration. You have to see the peasants in certain parts of Varenne to form an idea of the frugal diet on which a man can live and keep in good health. In the midst of these men of stoical habits all round him, Patience was still exceptional. Never had wine reddened his lips, and bread had seemed to him a superfluity. Besides, the doctrine of Pythagoras was not wholly displeasing to him; and in the rare interviews which he henceforth had with his friend he would declare that, without exactly believing in metempsychosis, and without making it a rule to eat vegetables only, he felt a secret joy at being able to live thus, and at having no further occasion to see death dealt out every day to innocent animals.

Patience had formed this curious resolution at the age of forty. He was sixty when I saw him for the first time, and he was then possessed of extraordinary physical vigour. In truth, he was in the habit of roaming about the country every year. However, in proportion as I tell you about my own life, I shall give you details of the hermit life of Patience.

At the time of which I am about to speak, the forest rangers, more from fear of his casting a spell over them than out of compassion, had finally ceased their persecutions, and given him full permission to live in Gazeau Tower, not, however, without warning him that it would probably fall about his head during the first gale of wind. To this Patience had replied philosophically that if he was destined to be crushed to death, the first tree in the forest would do the work quite as well as the walls of Gazeau Tower.

Before putting my actor Patience on the stage, and with many apologies for inflicting on you such a long preliminary biography, I have still to mention that during the twenty years of which I have spoken the cure’s mind had bowed to a new power. He loved philosophy, and in spite of himself, dear man, could not prevent this love from embracing the philosophers too, even the least orthodox. The works of Jean Jacques Rousseau carried him away into new regions, in spite of all his efforts at resistance; and when one morning, when returning from a visit to some sick folk, he came across Patience gathering his dinner of herbs from the rocks of Crevant, he sat down near him on one of the druidical stones and made, without knowing it, the profession of faith of the Savoyard vicar. Patience drank more willingly of this poetic religion than of the ancient orthodoxy. The pleasure with which he listened to a summary of the new doctrines led the cure to arrange secret meetings with him in isolated parts of Varenne, where they agreed to come upon each other as if by chance. At these mysterious interviews the imagination of Patience, fresh and ardent from long solitude, was fired with all the magic of the thoughts and hopes which were then fermenting in France, from the court of Versailles to the most uninhabitable heath. He became enamoured of Jean Jacques, and made the cure read as much of him as he possibly could without neglecting his duties. Then he begged a copy of the *Contrat Social*, and hastened to Gazeau Tower to spell his way through it feverishly. At first

the cure had given him of this manna only with a sparing hand, and while making him admire the lofty thoughts and noble sentiments of the philosopher, had thought to put him on his guard against the poison of anarchy. But all the old learning, all the happy texts of bygone days – in a word, all the theology of the worthy priest – was swept away like a fragile bridge by the torrent of wild eloquence and ungovernable enthusiasm which Patience had accumulated in his desert. The vicar had to give way and fall back terrified upon himself. There he discovered that the shrine of his own science was everywhere cracking and crumbling to ruin. The new sun which was rising on the political horizon and making havoc in so many minds, melted his own like a light snow under the first breath of spring. The sublime enthusiasm of Patience; the strange poetic life of the man which seemed to reveal him as one inspired; the romantic turn which their mysterious relations were taking (the ignoble persecutions of the convent making it noble to revolt) – all this so worked upon the priest that by 1770 he had already travelled far from Jansenism, and was vainly searching all the religious heresies for some spot on which he might rest before falling into the abyss of philosophy so often opened at his feet by Patience, so often hidden in vain by the exorcisms of Roman theology.

IV

After this account of the philosophical life of Patience, set forth by me now in manhood (continued Bernard, after a pause), it is not altogether easy to return to the very different impressions I received in boyhood on meeting the wizard of Gazeau Tower. I will make an effort, however, to reproduce my recollections faithfully.

It was one summer evening, as I was returning from bird-snaring with several peasant-boys, that I passed Gazeau Tower for the first time. My age was about thirteen, and I was bigger and stronger than any of my comrades; besides, I exercised over them, sternly enough, the authority I drew from my noble birth. In fact, the mixture of familiarity and etiquette in our intercourse was rather fantastic. Sometimes, when the excitement of sport or the fatigue of the day had greater powers over them than I, they used to have their own way; and I already knew how to yield at the right moment, as tyrants do, so as always to avoid the appearance of being compelled. However, I generally found a chance for revenge, and soon saw them trembling before the hated name of my family.

Well, night was coming on, and we were walking along gaily, whistling, knocking down crab-apples with stones, imitating the notes of birds, when the boy who was ahead suddenly stopped, and, coming back to us, declared that he was not going by the Gazeau Tower path, but would rather cut across the wood. This idea was favoured by two others. A third objected that we ran the risk of losing ourselves if we left the path, that night was near, and that there were plenty of wolves about.

"Come on, you funks!" I cried in a princely tone, pushing forward the guide; "follow the path, and have done with this nonsense."

"Not me," said the youngster. "I've just seen the sorcerer at his door saying magic words, and I don't want to have a fever all the year."

"Bah!" said another; "he doesn't do harm to everybody. He never hurts children; and, besides, we have only to pass by very quietly without saying anything to him. What do you suppose he'll do to us?"

"Oh, it would be all right if we were alone," answered the first; "but M. Bernard is here; we're sure to have a spell cast on us."

"What do you say, you fool?" I cried, doubling my fist.

"It's not my fault, my lord," replied the boy. "That old wretch doesn't like the gentry, and he has said he would be glad to see M. Tristan and all his sons hanging from the same bough."

"He said that, did he? Good!" I answered. "Come on, and you shall see. All who are my friends will follow; any one that leaves me is a coward."

Two of my companions, out of vanity, let themselves be drawn on. The others pretended to imitate them; but, after a few steps, they had all taken flight and disappeared into the copse. However, I went on proudly, escorted by my two acolytes. Little Sylvain, who was in front, took off his hat as soon as he saw Patience in the distance; and when we arrived opposite him, though the man was looking on the ground without appearing to notice us, he was seized with terror, and said, in a trembling voice:

"Good evening, Master Patience; a good night's rest to you."

The sorcerer, roused out of his reverie, started like a man waked from sleep; and I saw, not without a certain emotion, his weather-beaten face half covered with a thick gray beard. His big head was quite bald, and the bareness of his forehead only served to make his bushy eyebrows more prominent. Behind these his round deepset eyes seemed to flash like lightning at the end of summer behind the fading foliage. He was of small stature, but very broad-shouldered; in fact, built like a gladiator. The rags in which he was clad were defiantly filthy. His face was short and of a vulgar type, like that of Socrates; and if the fire of genius glowed in his strongly marked features, I certainly could not perceive it. He appeared to me a wild beast, an unclean animal. Filled with a sense of loathing,

and determined to avenge the insult he had offered to my name, I put a stone in my sling, and without further ado hurled it at him with all my might.

At the moment the stone flew out, Patience was in the act of replying to the boy's greeting.

"Good evening, lads; God be with you!" he was saying when the stone whistled past his ear and struck a tame owl of which Patience had made a pet, and which at the approach of night was beginning to rouse itself in the ivy above the door.

The owl gave a piercing cry and fell bleeding at the feet of its master, who answered it with a roar of anger. For a few seconds he stood motionless with surprise and fury. Then suddenly, taking the palpitating victim by the feet, he lifted it up, and, coming towards us, cried in a voice of thunder:

"Which of you wretches threw that stone?"

The boy who had been walking behind, flew with the swiftness of the wind; but Sylvain, seized by the great hand of the sorcerer, fell upon his knees, swearing by the Holy Virgin and by Saint Solange, the patroness of Berry, that he was innocent of the death of the bird. I felt, I confess, a strong inclination to let him get out of the scrape as best he could, and make my escape into the thicket. I had expected to see a decrepit old juggler, not to fall into the hands of a robust enemy; but pride held me back.

"If you did this," said Patience to my trembling comrade, "I pity you; for you are a wicked child, and you will grow into a dishonest man. You have done a bad deed; you have made it your pleasure to cause pain to an old man who never did you any harm; and you have done this treacherously, like a coward, while feigning politeness and bidding him good-evening. You are a liar, a miscreant; you have robbed me of my only society, my only riches; you have taken delight in evil. God preserve you from living if you are going on in this way."

"Oh, Monsieur Patience!" cried the boy, clasping his hands; "do not curse me; do not bewitch me; do not give me any illness; it wasn't I! May God strike me dead if it was!"

"If it wasn't you, it was this one, then!" said Patience, seizing me by the coat-collar and shaking me like a young tree to be uprooted.

"Yes, I did it," I replied, haughtily; "and if you wish to know my name, learn that I am called Bernard Mauprat, and that a peasant who lays a hand on a nobleman deserves death."

"Death! You! You would put me to death, Mauprat!" cried the old man, petrified with surprise and indignation. "And what would God be, then, if a brat like you had a right to threaten a man of my age? Death! Ah, you are a genuine Mauprat, and you bite like your breed, cursed whelp! Such things as they talk of putting to death the very moment they are born! Death, my wolf-cub! Do you know it is yourself who deserves death, not for what you have just done, but for being the son of your father, and the nephew of your uncles? Ah! I am glad to hold a Mauprat in the hollow of my hand, and see whether a cur of a nobleman weighs as much as a Christian."

As he spoke he lifted me from the ground as he would have lifted a hare.

"Little one," he said to my comrade, "you can run home; you needn't be afraid. Patience rarely gets angry with his equals; and he always pardons his brothers, because his brothers are ignorant like himself, and know not what they do; but a Mauprat, look you, is a thing that knows how to read and write, and is only the viler for it all. Run away, then. But no; stay; I should like you once in your life to see a nobleman receive a thrashing from the hand of a peasant. And that is what you are going to see; and I ask you not to forget it, little one, and to tell your parents about it."

Livid, and gnashing my teeth with rage, I made desperate efforts to resist. Patience, with hideous calmness, bound me to a tree with an osier shoot. At the touch of his great horny hand I bent like a reed; and yet I was remarkably strong for my age. He fixed the owl to a branch above my head, and the bird's blood, as it fell on me drop by drop, caused me unspeakable horror; for though this was only the correction we administer to sporting dogs that worry game, my brain, bewildered by rage, despair, and my comrades' cries, began to imagine some frightful witchcraft. However, I really think I would rather have been metamorphosed into an owl at once than undergo the punishment he

inflicted on me. In vain did I fling threats at him; in vain did I take terrible vows of vengeance; in vain did the peasant child throw himself on his knees again and supplicate:

“Monsieur Patience, for God’s sake, for your own sake, don’t harm him; the Mauprats will kill you.”

He laughed, and shrugged his shoulders. Then, taking a handful of holly twigs, he flogged me in a manner, I must own, more humiliating than cruel; for no sooner did he see a few drops of my blood appear, than he stopped and threw down the rod. I even noticed a sudden softening of his features and voice, as if he were sorry for his severity.

“Mauprat,” he said, crossing his arms on his breast and looking at me fixedly, “you have now been punished; you have now been insulted, my fine gentleman; that is enough for me. As you see, I might easily prevent you from ever harming me by stopping your breath with a touch of my finger, and burying you under the stone at my door. Who would think of coming to Gaffer Patience to look for this fine child of noble blood? But, as you may also see, I am not fond of vengeance; at the first cry of pain that escaped you, I stopped. No; I don’t like to cause suffering; I’m not a Mauprat. Still, it was well for you to learn by experience what is to be a victim. May this disgust you of the hangman’s trade, which had been handed down from father to son in your family. Good-evening! You can go now; I no longer bear you malice; the justice of God is satisfied. You can tell your uncles to put me on their gridiron; they will have a tough morsel to eat; and they will swallow flesh that will come to life again in their gullets and choke them.”

Then he picked up the dead owl, and looking at it sadly:

“A peasant’s child would not have done this,” he said. “This is sport for gentle blood.”

As he retired to his door he gave utterance to an exclamation which escaped him only on solemn occasions, and from which he derived his curious surname:

“Patience, patience!” he cried.

This, according to the gossips, was a cabalistic formula of his; and whenever he had been heard to pronounce it, some misfortune had happened to the individual who had offended him. Sylvain crossed himself to ward off the evil spirit. The terrible words resounded through the tower into which Patience had just withdrawn, then the door closed behind him with a bang.

My comrade was so eager to be off that he was within an ace of leaving me there bound to the tree. As soon as he had released me, he exclaimed:

“A sign of the cross! For God’s sake, a sign of the cross! If you don’t cross yourself you are bewitched; we shall be devoured by wolves as we go, or else we shall meet the great monster.”

“Idiot!” I said; “I have something else to think about. Listen; if you are ever unlucky enough to tell a single soul of what has happened, I will strangle you.”

“Alas! sir, what am I to do?” he replied with a mixture of innocence and malice. “The sorcerer said I was to tell my parents.”

I raised my fist to strike him, but my strength failed. Choking with rage at the treatment I had just undergone, I fell down almost in a faint, and Sylvain seized the opportunity for flight.

When I came to I found myself alone. I did not know this part of Varenne; I had never been here before, and it was horribly wild. All through the day I had seen tracks of wolves and wild boars in the sand. And now night had come and I was still two leagues from Roche-Mauprat. The gate would be shut, the drawbridge up; and I should get a bullet through me if I tried to enter after nine o’clock. As I did not know the way, it was a hundred to one against my doing the two leagues in an hour. However, I would have preferred to die a thousand deaths rather than ask shelter of the man in Gazeau Tower, even had he granted it gracefully. My pride was bleeding more than my flesh.

I started off at a run, heedless of all risks. The path made a thousand turns; a thousand other paths kept crossing it. When I reached the plain I found myself in a pasture surrounded by hedges. There every trace of the path disappeared. I jumped the hedge at a venture, and fell into a field. The night was pitch-dark; even had it been day it would have been impossible to ascertain my way in the

midst of little properties buried between high banks bristling with thorns. Finally I reached a heath, then some woods; and my fears, which had been somewhat subdued, now grew intense. Yes, I own I was a prey to mortal terrors. Trained to bravery, as a dog is to sport, I bore myself well enough before others. Spurred by vanity, indeed, I was foolishly bold when I had spectators; but left to myself, in the middle of the night, exhausted by toil and hunger, though with no longing for food, unhinged by the emotions I had just experienced, certain that my uncles would beat me when I returned, yet as anxious to return as if I were going to find paradise on earth at Roche-Mauprat, I wandered about until daybreak, suffering indescribable agonies. The howls of wolves, happily far off, more than once reached my ears and froze the blood in my veins; and, as if my position had not been perilous enough in reality, my overwrought imagination must needs add to it a thousand extravagant fantasies. Patience had the reputation of being a wolf-rearer. This, as you know, is a cabalistic speciality accredited in all countries. I kept on fancying, therefore, that I saw this devilish little gray-beard, escorted by his ravening pack, and himself in the form of a demi-wolf, pursing me through the woods. Several times when rabbits got up at my feet I almost fell backwards from the shock. And now, as I was certain that nobody could see, I made many a sign of the cross; for, while affecting incredulity, I was, of course, at heart filled with all the superstitions born of fear.

At last, at daybreak, I reached Roche-Mauprat. I waited in a moat until the gates were opened, and then slipped up to my room without being seen by anybody. As it was not altogether an unfailing tenderness that watched over me at Roche-Mauprat, my absence had not been noticed during the night. Meeting my Uncle John on the stairs, I led him to believe that I had just got up; and, as the artifice proved successful, I went off to the hayloft and slept for the rest of the day.

V

As I had nothing further to fear for myself, it would have been easy to take vengeance on my enemy. Everything was favourable. The words he had uttered against my family would have been sufficient without any mention of the outrage done to my own person, which, in truth, I hardly cared to make known. I had only to say a word, and in a quarter of an hour seven Mauprats would have been in the saddle, delighted at the opportunity of making an example of a man who paid them no dues. Such a man would have seemed to them good for nothing but hanging as a warning to others.

But even if things had not been likely to reach this pitch, I somehow felt an unconquerable aversion to asking eight men to avenge me on a single one. Just as I was about to ask them (for, in my anger, I had firmly resolved to do so), I was held back by some instinct for fair dealing to which I had hitherto been a stranger, and whose presence in myself I could hardly explain. Perhaps, too, the words of Patience had, unknown to myself, aroused in me a healthy sense of shame. Perhaps his righteous maledictions on the nobles had given me glimpses of the idea of justice. Perhaps, in short, what I had hitherto despised in myself as impulses of weakness and compassion, henceforth began dimly to take a more solemn and less contemptible shape.

Be that as it may, I kept silent. I contented myself with thrashing Sylvain as a punishment for having deserted me, and to impress upon him that he was not to breathe a word about my unfortunate adventure. The bitterness of the recollection was intensified by an incident which happened toward the end of autumn when I was out with him beating the woods for game. The poor boy was genuinely attached to me; for, my brutality notwithstanding, he always used to be at my heels the instant I was outside the castle. When any of his companions spoke ill of me, he would take up my cause, and declare that I was merely somewhat hasty and not really bad at heart. Ah, it is the gentle, resigned souls of the humble that keep up the pride and roughness of the great. Well, we were trying to trap larks when my sabot-shot page, who always hunted about ahead of me, came back, saying in his rude dialect:

“I can see the wolf-driver with the mole-catcher.”

This announcement sent a shudder through all my limbs. However, the longing for revenge produced a reaction, and I marched straight on to meet the sorcerer. Perhaps, too, I felt somewhat reassured by the presence of his companion, who was a frequenter of Roche-Mauprat, and would be likely to show me respect and afford me assistance.

Marcasse, the mole-catcher, as he was called, professed to rid the dwellings and fields of the district of polecats, weasels, rats and other vermin. Nor did he confine his good offices to Berry; every year he went the round of La Marche, Nivernais, Limousin, and Saintonge, visiting, alone and on foot, all the places that had the good sense to appreciate his talents. He was well received everywhere, in the castle no less than in the cottage; for his was a trade that had been carried on successfully and honestly in his family for generations (indeed, his descendants still carry it on). Thus he had work and a home awaiting him for every day in the year. As regular in his round as the earth in her rotation, he would reappear on a given day at the very place where he had appeared the year before, and always with the same dog and with the same long sword.

This personage was as curious as the sorcerer Patience; perhaps more comic in his way than the sorcerer. He was a bilious, melancholy man, tall, lean, angular, full of languor, dignity, and deliberation in speech and action. So little did he like talking that he answered all questions in monosyllables; and yet he never failed to obey the laws of the most scrupulous politeness, and rarely said a word without raising his hand to the corner of his hat as a sign of respect and civility. Was he thus by nature, or, in his itinerant trade, had this wise reserve arisen from a fear of alienating some of his numerous clients by incautious chatter? No one knew. In all houses he was allowed a free hand; during the day he had the key of every granary; in the evening, a place at the fireside of every

kitchen. He knew everything that happened; for his dreamy, absorbed air led people to talk freely in his presence; yet he had never been known to inform any household of the doings of another.

If you wish to know how I had become struck by this strange character, I may tell you that I had been a witness of my uncle's and grandfather's efforts to make him talk. They hoped to draw from him some information about the chateau of Saint-Severe, the home of a man they hated and envied, M. Hubert de Mauprat. Although Don Marcasse (they called him Don because he seemed to have the bearing and pride of a ruined hidalgo), although Don Marcasse, I say, had shown himself as incompressible here as elsewhere, the Coupe-Jarret Mauprats never failed to squeeze him a little more in the hope of extracting some details about the Casse-Tete Mauprats.

Nobody, then, could discover Marcasse's opinions about anything; it would have been simplest to suppose that he did not take the trouble to have any. Yet the attraction which Patience seemed to feel towards him – so great that he would accompany him on his travels for several weeks altogether – led one to believe that there was some witchery in the man's mysterious air, and that it was not solely the length of his sword and the skill of his dog which played such wonderful havoc with the moles and weasels. There were whispered rumours of the enchanted herbs that he employed to lure these suspicious animals from their holes into his nets. However, as people found themselves better off for his magic, no one dreamt of denouncing it as criminal.

I do not know if you have ever seen one of the rat-hunts. It is a curious sight, especially in a fodder-loft. The man and dog climbing up ladders and running along beams with marvellous assurance and agility, the dog sniffing every hole in the wall, playing the cat, crouching down and lying in wait until the game comes out for his master's rapier; the man thrusting through bundles of straw and putting the enemy to the sword – all this, when arranged and carried out with gravity and dignity by Don Marcasse, was, I assure you, a most singular and interesting performance.

When I saw this trusty fellow I felt equal to braving the sorcerer, and advanced boldly. Sylvain stared at me in admiration, and I noticed that Patience himself was not prepared for such audacity. I pretended to go up to Marcasse and speak to him, as though quite unconcerned about the presence of my enemy. Seeing this he gently thrust aside the mole-catcher, and, laying his heavy hand on my head, said very quietly:

"You have grown of late, my fine gentleman!"

The blood rushed to my face, and, drawing back scornfully, I answered:

"Take care what you are doing, clodhopper; you should remember that if you still have your two ears, it is to my kindness that you owe them."

"My two ears!" said Patience, with a bitter laugh.

Then making an allusion to the nickname of my family, he added:

"Perhaps you mean my two hamstrings? Patience, patience! The time, maybe, is not far distant when clodhoppers will rid the nobles of neither ears nor hamstrings, but of their heads and their purses."

"Silence, Master Patience!" said the mole-catcher solemnly; "these are not the words of a philosopher."

"You are quite right, quite right," replied the sorcerer; "and in truth, I don't know why I allow myself to argue with this lad. He might have had me made into pap by his uncles. I whipped him in the summer for playing me a stupid trick; and I don't know what happened to the family, but the Mauprats lost a fine chance of injuring a neighbour."

"Learn, peasant," I said, "that a nobleman always takes vengeance nobly. I did not want my wrongs avenged by people more powerful than yourself; but wait a couple of years; I promise I will hang you with my own hand on a certain tree that I shall easily recognise, not very far from the door of Gazeau Tower. If I don't I will renounce my birthright; if I spare you I will take the title of wolf-driver."

Patience smiled; then, suddenly becoming serious, he fixed on me that searching look which rendered his physiognomy so striking. Then turning to the weasel-hunter:

"It is strange," he said; "there must be something in blood. Take the vilest noble, and you will find that in certain things he has more spirit than the bravest of us. Ah! it is simple enough," he added, speaking to himself; "they are brought up like that, whilst we – we, they tell us, are born to obey. Patience!"

He was silent for an instant; then, rousing himself from his reverie, he said to me in a kindly though somewhat mocking tone:

"And so you want to hang me, Monseigneur Straw-Stalk? You will have to eat a lot of beef, then, for you are not yet tall enough to reach the branch which is to bear me; and before then.. perhaps many things will happen that are not dreamt of in your little philosophy."

"Nonsense! Why talk nonsense?" said the mole-catcher, with a serious air; "come, make peace. Monseigneur Bernard, I ask pardon for Patience; he is an old man, a fool."

"No, no," said Patience; "I want him to hang me; he is right; this is merely my due; and, in fact, it may come more quickly than all the rest. You must not make too much haste to grow, monsieur; for I – well, I am making more haste to grow old than I would wish; and you who are so brave, you would not attack a man no longer able to defend himself."

"You didn't hesitate to use your strength against me!" I cried. "Confess, now; didn't you treat me brutally? Wasn't it a coward's work, that?"

"Oh, children, children!" he said. "See how the thing reasons! Out of the mouths of children cometh truth."

And he moved away dreamily, and muttering to himself as was his wont. Marcasse took off his hat to me and said in an impassive tone:

"He is wrong.. live at peace.. pardon.. peace.. farewell!"

They disappeared; and there ended my relations with Patience. I did not come in contact with him again until long afterward.

VI

I was fifteen when my grandfather died. At Roche-Mauprat his death caused no sorrow, but infinite consternation. He was the soul of every vice that reigned therein, and it is certain that he was more cruel, though less vile, than his sons. On his death the sort of glory which his audacity had won for us grew dim. His sons, hitherto held under firm control, became more and more drunken and debauched. Moreover, each day added some new peril to their expeditions.

Except for the few trusty vassals whom we treated well, and who were all devoted to us, we were becoming more and more isolated and resourceless. People had left the neighbouring country in consequence of our violent depredations. The terror that we inspired pushed back daily the bounds of the desert around us. In making our ventures we had to go farther afield, even to the borders of the plain. There we had not the upper hand; and my Uncle Laurence, the boldest of us all, was dangerously wounded in a skirmish. Other schemes had to be devised. John suggested them. One was that we should slip into the fairs under various disguises, and exercise our skill in thieving. From brigands we became pick-pockets, and our detested name sank lower and lower in infamy. We formed a fellowship with the most noisome characters our province concealed, and, by an exchange of rascally services, once again managed to avoid destitution.

I say we, for I was beginning to take a place in this band of cutthroats when my grandfather died. He had yielded to my entreaties and allowed me to join in some of the last expeditions he attempted. I shall make no apologies; but here, gentlemen, you behold a man who has followed the profession of a bandit. I feel no remorse at the recollection, no more than a soldier would feel at having served a campaign under orders from his general. I thought that I was still living in the middle ages. The laws of the land, with all their strength and wisdom, were to me words devoid of meaning. I felt brave and full of vigour; fighting was a joy. Truly, the results of our victories often made me blush; but, as they in no way profited myself, I washed my hands of them. Nay, I remember with pleasure that I helped more than one victim who had been knocked down to get up and escape.

This existence, with its movement, its dangers, and its fatigues, had a numbing effect on me. It took me away from any painful reflections which might have arisen in my mind. Besides, it freed me from the immediate tyranny of John. However, after the death of my grandfather, when our band degraded itself to exploits of a different nature, I fell back under his odious sway. I was by no means fitted for lying and fraud. I displayed not only aversion but also incapacity for this new industry. Consequently my uncle looked upon me as useless, and began to maltreat me again. They would have driven me away had they not been afraid that I might make my peace with society, and become a dangerous enemy to themselves. While they were in doubt as to whether it was wiser to feed me or to live in fear of me, they often thought (as I have since learned) of picking a quarrel with me, and forcing a fight in which I might be got rid of. This was John's suggestion. Antony, however, who retained more of Tristan's energy and love of fair play at home than any of his brothers, proved clearly that I did more good than harm. I was, he declared, a brave fighter, and there was no knowing when they might need an extra hand. I might also be shaped into a swindler. I was very young and very ignorant; but John, perhaps, would endeavour to win me over by kindness, and make my lot less wretched. Above all, he might enlighten me as to my true position, by explaining that I was an outcast from society, and could not return to it without being hanged immediately. Then, perhaps, my obstinacy and pride would give way, out of regard to my own well-being on the one hand, and from necessity on the other. At all events, they should try this before getting rid of me.

"For," said Antony to round off his homily, "we were ten Mauprats last year; our father is dead, and, if we kill Bernard, we shall only be eight."

This argument gained the day. They brought me forth from the species of dungeon in which I had languished for several months; they gave me new clothes; they exchanged my old gun for a

beautiful carbine that I had always coveted; they explained to me my position in the world; they honoured me with the best wine at meals. I promised to reflect, and meanwhile, became rather more brutalized by inaction and drunkenness than I had been by brigandage.

However, my captivity had made such a terrible impression on me that I took a secret oath to dare any dangers that might assail me on the territories of the King of France, rather than endure a repetition of that hideous experience. Nothing but a miserable point of honour now kept me at Roche-Mauprat. It was evident that a storm was gathering over our heads. The peasants were discontented, in spite of all our efforts to attach them to us; doctrines of independence were secretly insinuating themselves into their midst; our most faithful retainers were growing tired of merely having their fill of bread and meat; they were demanding money, and we had none. We had received more than one serious summons to pay our fiscal dues to the state, and as our private creditors had joined hands with the crown officers and the recalcitrant peasants, everything was threatening us with a catastrophe like that which had just overtaken the Seigneur de Pleumartin in our province.[1]

My uncles had long thought of making common cause with this country squire in his marauding expeditions and his resistance to authority. However, just as Pleumartin, about to fall into the hands of his enemies, had given his word of honour that he would welcome us as friends and allies if we went to his assistance, we had heard of his defeat and tragic end. Thus we ourselves were now on our guard night and day. It was a question of either fleeing the country or bracing ourselves for a decisive struggle. Some counselled the former alternative; the others declared their resolve to follow the advice of their dying father and to find a grave under the ruins of the keep. Any suggestion of flight or compromise they denounced as contemptible cowardice. The fear, then, of incurring such a reproach, and perhaps in some measure an instinctive love of danger, still kept me back. However, my aversion to this odious existence was only lying dormant, ready to break out violently at any moment.

One evening, after a heavy supper, we remained at table, drinking and conversing – God knows in what words and on what subject! It was frightful weather. The rain, driven through the broken windows, was running in streams across the stone floor of the hall; and the old walls were trembling in the storm. The night wind was whistling through chinks in the roof and making the flames of our resin torches flicker weirdly. During the meal my uncles had rallied me very much on what they called my virtue; they had treated my shyness in the presence of women as a sign of continence; and it was especially in this matter that they urged me to evil by ridiculing my modesty. While parrying these coarse gibes and making thrusts in the same strain, I had been drinking enormously. Consequently, my wild imagination had become inflamed, and I boasted that I would be bolder and more successful with the first woman brought to Roche-Mauprat than any of my uncles. The challenge was accepted amid roars of laughter. Peals of thunder sent back an answer to the infernal merriment.

All at once the horn was heard at the portcullis. Everybody stopped talking. The blast just blown was the signal used by the Mauprats to summon each other or make themselves known. It was my Uncle Laurence, who had been absent all day and who was now asking to be let in. We had so little confidence in others that we acted as our own turnkeys in the fortress. John rose and took down the keys, but he stopped immediately on hearing a second blast of the horn. This meant that Laurence was bringing in a prize, and that we were to go and meet him. In the twinkling of an eye all the Mauprats were at the portcullis, torch in hand – except myself, whose indifference at this moment was profound, and whose legs were seriously conscious of wine.

"If it is a woman," cried Antony as he went out, "I swear by the soul of my father that she shall be handed over to you, my valiant young man, and we'll see if your courage comes up to your conceit."

[1] The reputation which the Seigneur de Pleumartin has left behind him in the province will preserve the story of Mauprat from the reproach of exaggeration. Pen would refuse to trace the savage obscenities and refinements of cruelty which marked the life of this madman, and which perpetuated the traditions of feudal brigandage in Berry down to the last days of the ancient monarchy. His chateau was besieged, and after a stubborn resistance he was taken and hanged. There are many people still living, nor yet very advanced in years, who knew the man.

I remained with my elbows on the table, sunk in an uncomfortable stupor.

When the door opened again I saw a woman in a strange costume entering with a confident step. It required an effort to keep my mind from wandering, and to grasp what one of the Mauprats came and whispered to me. In the middle of a wolf-hunt, at which several of the nobles in the neighbourhood had been present with their wives, this young lady's horse had taken fright and bolted away from the rest of the field. When it had pulled up after a gallop of about a league, she had tried to find her way back; but, not knowing the Varenne district, where all the landmarks are so much alike, she had gone farther and farther astray. The storm and the advent of night had completed her perplexity. Laurence, happening to meet her, had offered to escort her to the chateau of Rochemaure, which, as a fact, was more than six leagues distant; but he had declared that it was quite near, and had pretended to be the gamekeeper there. She did not actually know the lady of Rochemaure, but being a distant connection of hers, she counted upon a welcome. Never having seen the face of a single Mauprat, and little dreaming that she was so near their haunt, she had followed her guide confidingly; and as she had never in her life caught a glimpse of Roche-Mauprat, whether in the distance or close at hand, she was led upon the scene of our orgies without having the least suspicion of the trap into which she had fallen.

When I rubbed my heavy eyes and beheld this woman, so young and so beautiful, with her expression of calm sincerity and of goodness, the like of which I had never seen on the brow of any other (for all those who had passed the portcullis of our abode were either insolent prostitutes or stupid victims), I could not but think I was dreaming.

Remembering how prominently fairies figured in my legends of chivalry, I almost fancied that Morgana or Urganda had come among us to administer justice; and, for the moment, I felt an inclination to throw myself on my knees and protest against any judgment which should confound me with my uncles. Antony, to whom Laurence had quickly given the cue, approached her with as much politeness as he had in his composition, and begged her to excuse his hunting costume, likewise that of his friends. They were all nephews or cousins of the lady of Rochemaure, whom they were now awaiting before sitting down to table. Being very religious, she was at present in the chapel, in pious conference with the chaplain. The air of simple confidence with which the stranger listened to these absurd lies went to my heart, but I had not a very clear idea of what I felt.

"Please," she said to my Uncle John, who was dancing attendance on her with the leer of a satyr, "please do not let me disturb this lady. I am so troubled about the anxiety I must be causing my father and my friends at the present moment, that I could not really stop here. All I ask is that she will be kind enough to lend me a fresh horse and a guide, so that I may return to the place where I presume my people may have gone to wait for me."

"Madame," replied John, with assurance, "it is impossible for you to start again in such weather as this; besides, if you did, that would only serve to delay the hour of rejoining those who are looking for you. Ten of our men, well mounted and provided with torches, shall set out this very moment in ten different directions and scour every corner of Varenne. Thus, in two hours at the most, your relatives will be certain to have news of you, and you will soon see them arriving here, where we will entertain them as best we can. Please, then, set your mind at rest, and take some cordial to restore you; for you must be wet through and quite exhausted."

"Were it not for the anxiety I feel," she answered with a smile, "I should be famished. I will try to eat something; but do not put yourselves to any inconvenience on my account. You have been far too good already."

Approaching the table, where I was still resting on my elbows, she took some fruit that was by my side without noticing me. I turned and stared at her insolently with a besotted expression. She returned my gaze haughtily – at least, so it appeared to me then. I have since learned that she did not even see me; for, while making a great effort to appear calm and to reply with an air of confidence to the offers of hospitality, she was at heart very much disturbed by the unexpected presence of so

many strange men with their forbidding mien and rough garb. However, she did not suspect anything. I overheard one of the Mauprats near me saying to John:

"Good! It's all right; she is falling into the trap. Let us make her drink; then she will begin to talk."

"One moment," replied John; "watch her carefully; this is a serious matter; there is something better to be had out of this than a little passing pleasure. I am going to talk it over with the others; you will be sent for to give your opinion. Meanwhile keep an eye on Bernard."

"What is the matter?" I said abruptly, as I faced him. "Does not this girl belong to me? Did not Antony swear it by the soul of my grandfather?"

"Yes, confound it, that's true," said Antony, approaching our group, whilst the other Mauprats surrounded the lady. "Listen, Bernard; I will keep my word on one condition."

"What is that?"

"It is quite simple: that you won't within the next ten minutes tell this wench that she is not at old Rochemaure's."

"What do you take me for?" I answered, pulling my hat over my eyes. "Do you think that I am an idiot? Wait a minute; would you like me to go and get my grandmother's dress which is upstairs and pass myself off for this same lady of Rochemaure?"

"A splendid idea!" replied Laurence.

"But before anything is done," said John, "I want to speak to you all."

And making signs to the others, he drew them out of the hall. Just as they were going out I thought I noticed that John was trying to persuade Antony to keep watch over me. But Antony, with a firmness which I could not understand, insisted on following the rest. I was left alone with the stranger.

For a moment I remained bewildered, almost stupefied, and more embarrassed than pleased at the *tete-a-tete*. Then I endeavoured to think of some explanation of these mysterious things that were happening around me, and succeeded, as far as the fumes of the wine would allow me, in imagining something fairly probable, though, indeed, remote enough from the actual truth.

I thought I could account for everything I had just seen and heard by supposing, first, that the lady, quiet and richly dressed though she was, was one of those daughters of Bohemia that I had sometimes seen at fairs; secondly, that Laurence, having met her in the country, had brought her here to amuse the company; and, thirdly, that they had told her of my condition of swaggering drunkenness, and had prevailed on her to put my gallantry to the proof, whilst they were to watch me through the keyhole. My first movement, as soon as these ideas had taken possession of me, was to rise and go straight to the door. This I locked with a double turn and then bolted. When I had done this I returned to the lady, determined that I would not, at all events, give her cause to laugh at my bashfulness.

She was sitting close to the fire, and as she was occupied in drying her wet garments, leaning forward over the hearth, she had not taken any notice of what I was doing; but when I approached her the strange expression on my face caused her to start. I had made up my mind to kiss her, as a beginning; but, I know not by what miracle, as soon as she raised her eyes to mine, this familiarity became impossible. I only had sufficient courage to say:

"Upon my word, mademoiselle, you are a charming creature, and I love you – as true as my name is Bernard Mauprat."

"Bernard Mauprat!" she cried, springing up; "you are Bernard Mauprat, you? In that case, change your manner and learn to whom you are talking. Have they not told you?"

"No one has told me, but I can guess," I replied with a grin, while trying hard to trample down the feeling of respect with which her sudden pallor and imperious attitude inspired me.

"If you can guess," she said, "how is it possible that you allow yourself to speak to me in this way? But they were right when they said you were ill-mannered; and yet I always had a wish to meet you."

“Really!” I said, with the same hideous grin. “You! A princess of the king’s highway, who have known so many men in your life? But let my lips meet your own, my sweet, and you shall see if I am not as nicely mannered as those uncles of mine whom you were listening to so willingly just now.”

“Your uncles!” she cried, suddenly seizing her chair and placing it between us as if from some instinct of self-defence. “Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu! Then I am not at Madame de Rochemaure’s?”

“Our name certainly begins in the same way, and we come of as good a rock as anybody.”

“Roche-Mauprat!” she muttered, trembling from head to foot, like a hind when it hears the howl of wolves.

And her lips grew quite white. Her agony was manifest in every gesture. From an involuntary feeling of sympathy I shuddered myself, and I was on the point of changing my manner and language forthwith.

“What can there be in this to astound her so?” I asked myself. “Is she not merely acting a part? And even if the Mauprats are not hidden behind some wainscot listening to us, is she not sure to give them an account of everything that takes place? And yet she is trembling like an aspen leaf. But what if she is acting? I once saw an actress play Genevieve de Brabant, and she wept so that one might have been deceived.”

I was in a state of great perplexity, and I cast harassed glances now at her, now at the doors, which I fancied every moment would be thrown wide open amid roars of laughter from my uncles.

This woman was beautiful as the day. I do not believe there has ever lived a woman as lovely as she. It is not I alone who say so; she has left a reputation for beauty which has not yet died out in her province. She was rather tall, slender, and remarkable for the easy grace of her movements. Her complexion was very fair, while her eyes were dark and her hair like ebony. Her glance and her smile showed a union of goodness and acuteness which it was almost impossible to conceive; it was as if Heaven had given her two souls, one wholly of intellect, the other wholly of feeling. She was naturally cheerful and brave – an angel, indeed, whom the sorrows of humanity had not yet dared to touch. She knew not what it was to suffer; she knew not what it was to distrust and dread. This, indeed, was the first trial of her life, and it was I, brute that I was, who made her undergo it. I took her for a gipsy, and she was an angel of purity.

She was my young cousin (or aunt, after the Breton fashion), Edmee de Mauprat, the daughter of M. Hubert, my great-uncle (again in the Breton fashion), known as the Chevalier – he who had sought release from the Order of Malta that he might marry, though already somewhat advanced in years. My cousin was the same age as myself; at least, there was a difference of only a few months between us. Both of us were now seventeen, and this was our first interview. She whom I ought to have protected at the peril of my life against the world was now standing before me trembling and terror-stricken, like a victim before the executioner.

She made a great effort, and approaching me as I walked about the hall deep in thought, she explained who she was, adding:

“It is impossible that you can be an infamous creature like all these brigands whom I have just seen, and of whose hideous life I have often heard. You are young; your mother was good and wise. My father wanted to adopt you and bring you up as his son. Even to-day he is still full of grief at not being able to draw you out of the abyss in which you lie. Have you not often received messages from him? Bernard, you and I are of the same family; think of the ties of blood; why would you insult me? Do they intend to assassinate me here or torture me? Why did they deceive me by saying that I was at Rochemaure? Why did they withdraw in this mysterious way? What are they preparing? What is going to happen?”

Her words were cut short by the report of a gun outside. A shot from the culverin replied to it, and the alarm trumpet shook the gloomy walls of the keep with its dismal note. Mademoiselle de Mauprat fell back into her chair. I remained where I was, wondering whether this was some new

scene in the comedy they were enjoying at my expense. However, I resolved not to let the alarm cause me any uneasiness until I had certain proof that it was not a trick.

"Come, now," I said, going up to her again, "own that all this is a joke. You are not Mademoiselle de Mauprat at all; and you merely want to discover if I am an apprentice capable of making love."

"I swear by Christ," she answered, taking my hands in her own, which were cold as death, "that I am Edmee, your cousin, your prisoner – yes, and your friend; for I have always felt an interest in you; I have always implored my father not to cease his efforts for you. But listen, Bernard; they are fighting, and fighting with guns! It must be my father who has come to look for me, and they are going to kill him. Ah!" she cried, falling on her knees before me, "go and prevent that, Bernard! Tell your uncles to respect my father, the best of men, if you but knew! Tell them that, if they hate our family, if they must have blood, they may kill me! Let them tear my heart out; but let them respect my father."

Some one outside called me in a violent voice.

"Where is the coward? Where is that wretched boy?" shouted my Uncle Laurence.

Then he shook the door; but I had fastened it so securely that it resisted all his furious blows.

"That miserable cur is amusing himself by making love while our throats are being cut! Bernard, the mounted police are attacking us! Your Uncle Louis had just been killed! Come and help us! For God's sake, come, Bernard!"

"May the devil take the lot of you," I cried, "and may you be killed yourself, if I believe a single word of all this. I am not such a fool as you imagine; the only cowards here are those who lie. Didn't I swear that the woman should be mine? I'm not going to give her up until I choose."

"To hell with you!" replied Laurence; "you are pretending."

The shots rang out faster. Frightful cries were heard. Laurence left the door and ran in the direction of the noise. His eagerness proved him so much in earnest that I could no longer refuse to believe him. The thought that they would accuse me of cowardice overcame me. I advanced towards the door.

"O Bernard! O Monsieur de Mauprat!" cried Edmee, staggering after me; "let me go with you. I will throw myself at your uncles' feet; I will make them stop the fight; I will give them all I possess, my life, if they wish.. if only they will spare my father."

"Wait a moment," I said, turning towards her; "I am by no means certain that this is not a joke at my expense. I have a suspicion that my uncles are there, behind that door, and that, while our whippers-in are firing off guns in the courtyard, they are waiting with a blanket to toss me. Now, either you are my cousin, or you are a.. You must make me a solemn promise, and I will make you one in return. If you are one of these wandering charmers and I quit this room the dupe of your pretty acting, you must swear to be my mistress, and to allow none other near you until I have had my rights; otherwise, for my part, I swear that you shall be chastised, even as my spotted dog Flora was chastised this morning. If, on the other hand, you are Edmee, and I swear to intervene between your father and those who would kill him, what promise will you make me, what will you swear?"

"If you save my father," she cried, "I swear to you that I will marry you, I swear it."

"Ho! ho! indeed!" I said, emboldened by her enthusiasm, the sublimity of which I did not understand. "Give me a pledge, then, so that in any case I do not go out from here like a fool."

I took her in my arms and kissed her. She did not attempt to resist. Her cheeks were like ice. Mechanically she began to follow me as I moved to the door. I was obliged to push her back. I did so without roughness; but she fell as one in a faint. I began to grasp the gravity of my position; for there was nobody in the corridor and the tumult outside was becoming more and more alarming. I was about to run and get my weapons, when a last feeling of distrust, or it may have been another sentiment, prompted me to go back and double-lock the door of the hall where I was leaving Edmee. I put the key into my belt and hastened to the ramparts, armed with a gun, which I loaded as I ran.

It was simply an attack made by the mounted police, and had nothing whatever to do with Mademoiselle de Mauprat. A little while before our creditors had obtained a writ of arrest against

us. The law officers, beaten and otherwise severely handled, had demanded of the King's advocate at the provincial court of Bourges another warrant of arrest. This the armed police were now doing their best to execute. They had hoped to effect an easy capture by means of a night surprise. But we were in a better state of defence than they had anticipated. Our men were brave and well armed; and then we were fighting for our very existence; we had the courage of despair, and this was an immense advantage. Our band amounted to twenty-four all told; theirs to more than fifty soldiers, in addition to a score or more of peasants, who were slinging stones from the flanks. These, however, did more harm to their allies than they did to us.

For half an hour the fighting was most desperate. At the end of this time the enemy had become so dismayed by our resistance that they fell back, and hostilities were suspended. However, they soon returned to the attack, and again were repulsed with loss. Hostilities were once more suspended. They then, for the third time, called upon us to surrender, promising that our lives should be spared. Antony Mauprat replied with an obscene jest. They remained undecided, but did not withdraw.

I had fought bravely; I had done what I called my duty. There was a long lull. It was impossible to judge the distance of the enemy, and we dared not fire at random into the darkness, for our ammunition was too precious. All my uncles remained riveted on the ramparts, in case of fresh attack. My Uncle Louis was dangerously wounded. Thoughts of my prisoner returned to my mind. At the beginning of the fight I had heard John Mauprat saying, that if our defeat seemed imminent, we must offer to hand her over to the enemy, on condition that they should raise the seige; that if they refused, we must hang her before their eyes. I had no longer any doubts about the truth of what she had told me. When victory appeared to declare for us they forgot the captive. But I noticed the crafty John quitting the culverin which he so loved to fire, and creeping away like a cat into the darkness. A feeling of ungovernable jealousy seized me. I threw down my gun and dashed after him, knife in hand, resolved, I believe, to stab him if he attempted to touch what I considered my booty. I saw him approach the door, try to open it, peer attentively through the keyhole, to assure himself that his prey had not escaped him. Suddenly shots were heard again. He sprang to his maimed feet with that marvellous agility of his, and limped off to the ramparts. For myself, hidden as I was by the darkness, I let him pass and did not follow. A passion other than the love of slaughter had just taken possession of me. A flash of jealousy had fired my senses. The smell of powder, the sight of blood, the noise, the danger, and the many bumpers of brandy we had passed round to keep up our strength had strangely heated my brain. I took the key from my belt and opened the door noisily. And now, as I stood before my captive again, I was no longer the suspicious and clumsy novice she had so easily moved to pity: I was the wild outlaw of Roche-Mauprat, a hundred times more dangerous than at first. She rushed towards me eagerly. I opened my arms to catch her; instead of being frightened she threw herself into them, exclaiming:

"Well! and my father?"

"Your father," I said, kissing her, "is not there. At the present moment there is no question either of him or of you. We have brought down a dozen gendarmes, that is all. Victory, as usual, is declaring for us. So, don't trouble yourself any more about your father; and I, I won't trouble myself further about the King's men. Let us live in peace and rejoice in love."

With these words I raised to my lips a goblet of wine which had been left on the table. But she took it out of my hands with an air of authority that made me all the bolder.

"Don't drink any more," she said; "think seriously of what you are saying. Is what you tell me true? Will you answer for it on your honour, on the soul of your mother?"

"Every word is true; I swear it by your pretty rosy lips," I replied, trying to kiss her again.

But she drew back in terror.

"Oh, mon Dieu!" she exclaimed, "he is drunk! Bernard! Bernard! remember what you promised; do not break your word. You have not forgotten, have you, that I am your kinswoman, your sister?"

"You are my mistress or my wife," I answered, still pursuing her.

"You are a contemptible creature!" she rejoined, repulsing me with her riding whip. "What have you done that I should be aught to you? Have you helped my father?"

"I swore to help him; and I would have helped him if he had been there; it is just the same, therefore, as if I really had. But, had he been there, and had I tried to save him and failed, do you know that for this treachery Roche-Mauprat could not have provided any instrument of torture cruel enough and slow enough to drag the life out of me inch by inch? For all I know, they may actually have heard my vow; I proclaimed it loudly enough. But what do I care? I set little store by a couple of days more or less of life. But I do set some store by your favour, my beauty. I don't want to be the languishing knight that every one laughs at. Come, now, love me at once; or, my word, I will return to the fight, and if I am killed, so much the worse for you. You will no longer have a knight to help you, and you will still have seven Mauprats to keep at bay. I'm afraid you are not strong enough for that rough work, my pretty little love-bird."

These words, which I threw out at random, merely to distract her attention so that I might seize her hands or her waist, made a deep impression on her. She fled to the other end of the hall, and tried to force open the window; but her little hands could not even move the heavy leaden sash in the rusty ironwork. Her efforts made me laugh. She clasped her hands in terror, and remained motionless. Then all at once the expression of her face changed. She seemed to have resolved how to act, and came toward me smiling and with outstretched hand. So beautiful was she thus that a mist came over my eyes and for a moment I saw her not.

Ah, gentlemen, forgive my childishness. I must tell you how she was dressed. After that weird night she never wore that costume again, and yet I can remember it so exactly. It is a long, long time ago. But were I to live as long as I have already lived again, I should not forget a single detail, so much was I struck by it amid the tumult that was raging within me and without; amid the din of shots striking the ramparts, the lightning flashes ripping the sky, and the violent palpitations which sent my blood surging from my heart to my brain, and from my head to my breast.

Oh, how lovely she was! It seems as if her shade were even now passing before my eyes. Yes; I fancy I see her in the same dress, the riding-habit which used to be worn in those days. The skirt of it was of cloth and very full; round the waist was a red sash, while a waistcoat of pearl-gray satin, fastened with buttons, fitted closely to the figure; over this was a hunting-jacket, trimmed with lace, short and open in front; the hat, of gray felt, with a broad brim turned up in front, was crowned with half a dozen red feathers. The hair, which was not powdered, was drawn back from the face and fell down in two long plaits, like those of the Bernese women. Edmee's were so long that they almost reached the ground.

Her garb, to me so strangely fascinating, her youth and beauty, and the favour with which she now seemed to regard my pretensions, combined to make me mad with love and joy. I could imagine nothing more beautiful than a lovely woman yielding without coarse words, and without tears of shame. My first impulse was to take her in my arms; but, as if overcome by that irresistible longing to worship which characterizes a first love, even with the grossest of beings, I fell down before her and pressed her knees to my breast; and yet, on my own supposition, it was to a shameless wanton that this homage was paid. I was none the less nigh to swooning from bliss.

She took my head between her two beautiful hands, and exclaimed:

"Ah, I was right! I knew quite well that you were not one of those reprobates. You are going to save me, aren't you? Thank God! How I thank you, O God! Must we jump from the window? Oh, I am not afraid; come – come!"

I seemed as if awakened from a dream, and, I confess, the awakening was not a little painful.

"What does this mean?" I asked, as I rose to my feet. "Are you still jesting with me? Do you not know where you are? Do you think that I am a child?"

“I know that I am at Roche-Mauprat,” she replied, turning pale again, “and that I shall be outraged and assassinated in a couple of hours, if meanwhile I do not succeed in inspiring you with some pity. But I shall succeed,” she cried, falling at my feet in her turn; “you are not one of those men. You are too young to be a monster like them. I could see from your eyes that you pitied me. You will help me to escape, won’t you, won’t you, my dear heart?”

She took my hands and kissed them frenziedly, in the hope of moving me. I listened and looked at her with a sullen stupidity scarcely calculated to reassure her. My heart was naturally but little accessible to feelings of generosity and compassion, and at this moment a passion stronger than all the rest was keeping down the impulse she had striven to arouse. I devoured her with my eyes, and made no effort to understand her words. I only wished to discover whether I was pleasing to her, or whether she was trying to make use of me to effect her escape.

“I see that you are afraid,” I said. “You are wrong to be afraid of me. I shall certainly not do you any harm. You are too pretty for me to think of anything but of caressing you.”

“Yes; but your uncles will kill me,” she cried; “you know they will. Surely you would not have me killed? Since you love me, save me; I will love you afterwards.”

“Oh, yes; afterwards, afterwards,” I answered, laughing with a silly, unbelieving air; “after you have had me hanged by those gendarmes to whom I have just given such a drubbing. Come, now; prove that you love me at once; I will save you afterwards. You see, I can talk about ‘afterwards’ too.”

I pursued her round the room. Though she fled from me, she gave no signs of anger, and still appealed to me with soft words. In me the poor girl was husbanding her one hope, and was fearful of losing it. Ah, if I had only been able to realize what such a woman as she was, and what my own position meant! But I was unable then. I had but one fixed idea – the idea which a wolf may have on a like occasion.

At last, as my only answer to all her entreaties was, “Do you love me, or are you fooling me?” she saw what a brute she had to deal with, and, making up her mind accordingly, she came towards me, threw her arms round my neck, hid her face in my bosom, and let me kiss her hair. Then she put me gently from her, saying:

“Ah, mon Dieu! don’t you see how I love you – how I could not help loving you from the very first moment I saw you? But don’t you understand that I hate your uncles, and that I would be yours alone?”

“Yes,” I replied, obstinately, “because you say to yourself: ‘This is a booby whom I shall persuade to do anything I wish, by telling him that I love him; he will believe it, and I will take him away to be hanged.’ Come; there is only one word which will serve if you love me.”

She looked at me with an agonized air. I sought to press my lips to hers whenever her head was not turned away. I held her hands in mine. She was powerless now to do more than delay the hour of her defeat. Suddenly the colour rushed back to the pale face; she began to smile; and with an expression of angelic coquetry, she asked:

“And you – do you love me?”

From this moment the victory was hers. I no longer had power to will what I wished. The lynx in me was subdued; the man rose in its place; and I believe that my voice had a human ring, as I cried for the first time in my life:

“Yes, I love you! Yes, I love you!”

“Well, then,” she said, distractedly, and in a caressing tone, “let us love each other and escape together.”

“Yes, let us escape,” I answered. “I loathe this house, and I loathe my uncles. I have long wanted to escape. And yet I shall only be hanged, you know.”

“They won’t hang you,” she rejoined with a laugh; “my betrothed is a lieutenant-general.”

“Your betrothed!” I cried, in a fresh fit of jealousy more violent than the first. “You are going to be married?”

“And why not?” she replied, watching me attentively.

I turned pale and clinched my teeth.

“In that case,.” I said, trying to carry her off in my arms.

“In that case,” she answered, giving me a little tap on the cheek, “I see that you are jealous; but his must be a particular jealousy who at ten o’clock yearns for his mistress, only to hand her over at midnight to eight drunken men who will return her to him on the morrow as foul as the mud on the roads.”

“Ah, you are right!” I exclaimed. “Go, then; go. I would defend you to the last drop of my blood; but I should be vanquished by numbers, and I should die with the knowledge that you were left to them. How horrible! I shudder to think of it. Come – you must go.”

“Yes! yes, my angel!” she cried, kissing me passionately on the cheek.

These caresses, the first a woman had given me since my childhood, recalled, I know not how or why, my mother’s last kiss, and, instead of pleasure, caused me profound sadness. I felt my eyes filling with tears. Noticing this, she kissed my tears, repeating the while:

“Save me! Save me!”

“And your marriage?” I asked. “Oh! listen. Swear that you will not marry before I die. You will not have to wait long; for my uncles administer sound justice and swift, as they say.”

“You are not going to follow me, then?” she asked.

“Follow you? No; it is as well to be hanged here for helping you to escape as to be hanged yonder for being a bandit. Here, at least, I avoid a twofold shame: I shall not be accounted an informer, and shall not be hanged in a public place.”

“I will not leave you here,” she cried, “though I die myself. Fly with me. You run no risk, believe me. Before God, I declare you are safe. Kill me, if I lie. But let us start – quickly. O God! I hear them singing. They are coming this way. Ah, if you will not defend me, kill me at once!”

She threw herself into my arms. Love and jealousy were gradually overpowering me. Indeed, I even thought seriously of killing her; and I kept my hand on my hunting-knife as long as I heard any noise or voices near the hall. They were exulting in their victory. I cursed Heaven for not giving it to our foes. I clasped Edmee to my breast, and we remained motionless in each other’s arms, until a fresh report announced that the fight was beginning again. Then I pressed her passionately to my heart.

“You remind me,” I said, “of a poor little dove which one day flew into my jacket to escape from a kite, and tried to hide itself in my bosom.”

“And you did not give it up to the kite, did you?” asked Edmee.

“No, by all the devils! not any more than I shall give you up, you, the prettiest of all the birds in the woods, to these vile night-birds that are threatening you.”

“But how shall we escape?” she cried, terror-stricken by the volleys they were firing.

“Easily,” I said. “Follow me.”

I seized a torch, and lifting a trap-door, I made her descend with me to the cellar. Thence we passed into a subterranean passage hollowed out of the rock. This, in bygone days had enabled the garrison, then more numerous, to venture upon an important move in case of an attack; some of the besieged would emerge into the open country on the side opposite the portcullis and fall on the rear of the besiegers, who were thus caught between two fires. But many years had passed since the garrison of Roche-Mauprat was large enough to be divided into two bodies; and besides, during the night it would have been folly to venture beyond the walls. We arrived, therefore, at the exit of the passage without meeting with any obstacle. But at the last moment I was seized with a fit of madness. I threw down my torch, and leaned against the door.

“You shall not go out from here,” I said to the trembling Edmee, “without promising to be mine.”

We were in darkness; the noise of the fight no longer reached us. Before any one could surprise us here we had ample time to escape. Everything was in my favour. Edmee was now at the mercy

of my caprice. When she saw that the seductions of her beauty could no longer rouse me to ecstasy, she ceased to implore, and drew backward a few steps.

"Open the door," she said, "and go out first, or I will kill myself. See, I have your hunting-knife. You left it by the side of the trap-door. To return to your uncles you will have to walk through my blood."

Her resolute manner frightened me.

"Give me that knife," I said, "or, be the consequences what they may, I will take it from you by force."

"Do you think I am afraid to die?" she said calmly. "If this knife had only been in my hand yonder in the chateau, I should not have humbled myself before you."

"Confound it!" I cried, "you have deceived me. Your love is a sham. Begone! I despise you. I will not follow such as you."

At the same time I opened the door.

"I would not go without you," she cried; "and you – you would not have me go without dishonour. Which of us is the more generous?"

"You are mad," I said. "You have lied to me; and you do not know what to do to make a fool of me. However, you shall not go out from here without swearing that your marriage with the lieutenant-general or any other man shall not take place before you have been my mistress."

"Your mistress!" she said. "Are you dreaming? Could you not at least soften the insult by saying your wife?"

"That is what any one of my uncles would say in my place; because they would care only about your dowry. But I – I yearn for nothing but your beauty. Swear, then, that you will be mine first; afterwards you shall be free, on my honour. And if my jealousy prove so fierce that it may not be borne, well, since a man may not go from his word, I will blow my brains out."

"I swear," said Edmee, "to be no man's before being yours."

"That is not it. Swear to be mine before being any other's."

"It is the same thing," she answered. "Yes; I swear it."

"On the gospel? On the name of Christ? By the salvation of your soul? By the memory of your mother?"

"On the gospel; in the name of Christ; by the salvation of my soul; by the memory of my mother."

"Good."

"One moment," she rejoined; "I want you to swear that my promise and its fulfilment shall remain a secret; that my father shall never know it, or any person who might tell him."

"No one in the world shall hear it from me. Why should I want others to know, provided only that you keep your word?"

She made me repeat the formula of an oath. Then we hurried forth into the open, holding each other's hands as a sign of mutual trust.

But now our flight became dangerous. Edmee feared the besiegers almost as much as the besieged. We were fortunate enough not to meet any. Still, it was by no means easy to move quickly. The night was so dark that we were continually running against trees, and the ground was so slippery that we were unable to avoid falls. A sudden noise made us start; but, from the rattle of the chain fixed on its foot, I immediately recognised my grandfather's horse, an animal of an extraordinary age, but still strong and spirited. It was the very horse that had brought me to Roche-Mauprat ten years before. At present the only thing that would serve as a bridle was the rope round its neck. I passed this through its mouth, and I threw my jacket over the crupper and helped my companion to mount; I undid the chain, sprang on the animal's back, and urging it on desperately, made it set off at a gallop, happen what might. Luckily for us, it knew the paths better than I, and, as if by instinct, followed their windings without knocking against any trees. However, it frequently slipped, and in recovering

itself, gave us such jolts that we should have lost our seats a thousand times (equipped as we were) had we not been hanging between life and death. In such a strait desperate ventures are best, and God protects those whom man pursues. We were congratulating ourselves on being out of danger, when all at once the horse struck against a stump, and catching his hoof in a root on the ground, fell down. Before we were up he had made off into the darkness, and I could hear him galloping farther and farther away. As we fell I had caught Edmee in my arms. She was unhurt. My own ankle, however, was sprained so severely that it was impossible for me to move a step. Edmee thought that my leg had been broken. I was inclined to think so myself, so great was the pain; but soon I thought no further either of my agony or my anxiety. Edmee's tender solicitude made me forget everything. It was in vain that I urged her to continue her flight without me. I pointed out that she could now escape alone; that we were some distance from the chateau; that day would soon be breaking; that she would be certain to find some house, and that everywhere the people would protect her against the Mauprats.

"I will not leave you," she persisted in answering. "You have devoted yourself to me; I will show the same devotion to you. We will both escape, or we will die together."

"I am not mistaken," I cried; "it is a light that I see between the branches. Edmee, there is a house yonder; go and knock at the door. You need not feel anxious about leaving me here; and you will find a guide to take you home."

"Whatever happens," she said, "I will not leave you; but I will try to find some one to help you."

"Yet, no," I said, "I will not let you knock at that door alone. That light, in the middle of the night, in a house situated in the heart of the woods, may be a lure."

I dragged myself as far as the door. It felt cold, as if of metal. The walls were covered with ivy.

"Who is there?" cried some one within, before we had knocked.

"We are saved!" cried Edmee; "it is Patience's voice."

"We are lost!" I said; "he and I are mortal enemies.

"Fear nothing," she said; "follow me. It was God that led us here."

"Yes, it was God that led you here, daughter of Heaven, morning star!" said Patience, opening the door; "and whoever is with you is welcome too at Gazeau Tower."

We entered under a surbased vault, in the middle of which hung an iron lamp. By the light of this dismal luminary and of a handful of brushwood which was blazing on the hearth we saw, not without surprise, that Gazeau Tower was exceptionally honoured with visitors. On one side the light fell upon the pale and serious face of a man in clerical garb. On the other, a broad-brimmed hat overshadowed a sort of olive-green cone terminating in a scanty beard; and on the wall could be seen the shadow of a nose so distinctly tapered that nothing in the world might compare with it except, perhaps, a long rapier lying across the knees of the personage in question, and a little dog's face which, from its pointed shape, might have been mistaken for that of a gigantic rat. In fact, it seemed as if a mysterious harmony reigned between these three salient points – the nose of Don Marcasse, his dog's snout, and the blade of his sword. He got up slowly and raised his hand to his hat. The Jansenist cure did the same. The dog thrust its head forward between its master's legs, and, silent like him, showed its teeth and put back its ears without barking.

"Quiet, Blaireau!" said Marcasse to it.

VII

No sooner had the cure recognised Edmee than he started back with an exclamation of surprise. But this was nothing to the stupefaction of Patience when he had examined my features by the light of the burning brand that served him as torch.

“The lamb in the company of the wolf!” he cried. “What has happened, then?”

“My friend,” replied Edmee, putting, to my infinite astonishment, her little white hand into the sorcerer’s big rough palm, “welcome him as you welcome me. I was a prisoner at Roche-Mauprat, and it was he who rescued me.”

“May the sins of his fathers be forgiven him for this act!” said the cure.

Patience took me by the arm, without saying anything, and led me nearer the fire. They seated me on the only chair in the house, and the cure took upon himself the task of attending to my leg, while Edmee gave an account, up to a certain point, of our adventure. Then she asked for information about the hunt and about her father. Patience, however, could give her no news. He had heard the horn in the woods, and the firing at the wolves had disturbed his tranquility several times during the day. But since the storm broke over them the noise of the wind had drowned all other sounds, and he knew nothing of what was taking place in Varenne. Marcasse, meanwhile, had very nimbly climbed a ladder which served as an approach to the upper stories of the house, now that the staircase was broken. His dog followed him with marvellous skill. Soon they came down again, and we learned that a red light could be distinguished on the horizon in the direction of Roche-Mauprat. In spite of the loathing I had for this place and its owners, I could not repress a feeling very much like consternation on hearing that the hereditary manor which bore my own name had apparently been taken and set on fire. It meant disgrace, defeat; and this fire was as a seal of vassalage affixed to my arms by those I called clodhoppers and serfs. I sprang up from my chair, and had I not been held back by the violent pain in my foot, I believe I should have rushed out.

“What is the matter?” said Edmee, who was by my side at the time.

“The matter is,” I answered abruptly, “that I must return yonder; for it is my duty to get killed rather than let my uncles parley with the rabble.”

“The rabble!” cried Patience, addressing me for the first time since I arrived. “Who dares to talk of rabble here? I myself am of the rabble. It is my title, and I shall know how to make it respected.”

“By Jove! Not by me,” I said, pushing away the cure, who had made me sit down again.

“And yet it would not be for the first time,” replied Patience, with a contemptuous smile.

“You remind me,” I answered, “that we two have some old accounts to settle.”

And heedless of the frightful agony caused by my sprain, I rose again, and with a backhander I sent Don Marcasse, who was endeavouring the play the cure’s part of peacemaker, head over heels into the middle of the ashes. I did not mean him any harm, but my movements were somewhat rough, and the poor man was so frail that to my hand he was but as a weasel would have been to his own. Patience was standing before me with his arms crossed, in the attitude of a stoic philosopher, but the fire was flashing in his eyes. Conscious of his position as my host, he was evidently waiting until I struck the first blow before attempting to crush me. I should not have kept him waiting long, had not Edmee, scorning the danger of interfering with a madman, seized my arm and said, in an authoritative tone:

“Sit down again, and be quiet; I command you.”

So much boldness and confidence surprised and pleased me at the same time. The rights which she arrogated to herself over me were, in some measure, a sanction of those I claimed to have over her.

“You are right,” I answered, sitting down.

And I added, with a glance at Patience:

“Some other time.”

“Amen,” he answered, shrugging his shoulders.

Marcasse had picked himself up with much composure, and shaking off the ashes with which he was covered, instead of finding fault with me, he tried, after his fashion to lecture Patience. This was in reality by no means easy to do; yet nothing could have been less irritating than that monosyllabic censure throwing out its little note in the thick of a quarrel like an echo in a storm.

“At your age,” he said to his host; “not patient at all. Wholly to blame – yes – wrong – you!”

“How naughty you are!” Edmee said to me, putting her hand on my shoulder; “do not begin again, or I shall go away and leave you.”

I willingly let myself be scolded by her; nor did I realize that during the last minutes we had exchanged parts. The moment we crossed the threshold of Gazeau Tower she had given evidence of that superiority over me which was really hers. This wild place, too, these strange witnesses, this fierce host, had already furnished a taste of the society into which I had entered, and whose fetters I was soon to feel.

“Come,” she said, turning to Patience, “we do not understand each other here; and, for my part, I am devoured by anxiety about my poor father, who is no doubt searching for me, and wringing his hands at this very moment. My good Patience, do find me some means of rejoining him with this unfortunate boy, whom I dare not leave to your care, since you have not sufficient love for me to be patient and compassionate with him.”

“What do you say?” said Patience, putting his hand to his brow as if waking from a dream. “Yes, you are right; I am an old brute, an old fool. Daughter of God, tell this boy, this nobleman, that I ask his pardon for the past, and that, for the present, my poor cell is at his disposal. Is that well said?”

“Yes, Patience,” answered the cure. “Besides, everything may be managed. My horse is quiet and steady, and Mademoiselle de Mauprat can ride it, while you and Marcasse lead it by the bridle. For myself, I will remain here with our invalid. I promise to take good care of him and not to annoy him in any way. That will do, won’t it, Monsieur Bernard? You don’t bear me any ill-will, and you may be very sure that I am not your enemy.”

“I know nothing about it,” I answered; “it is as you please. Look after my cousin; take her home safely. For my own part, I need nothing and care for no one. A bundle of straw and a glass of wine, that is all I should like, if it were possible to have them.”

“You shall have both,” said Marcasse, handing me his flask, “but first of all here is something to cheer you up. I am going to the stable to get the horse ready.”

“No, I will go myself,” said Patience; “you see to the wants of this young man.”

And he passed into another lower hall, which served as a stable for the cure’s horse during the visits which the good priest paid him. They brought the animal through the room where we were; and Patience, after arranging the cure’s cloak on the saddle, with fatherly care helped Edmee to mount.

“One moment,” she said, before letting them lead her out. “Monsieur le Cure, will you promise me on the salvation of your soul not to leave my cousin before I return with my father to fetch him?”

“I promise solemnly,” replied the cure.

“And you, Bernard,” said Edmee, “will you give me your word of honour to wait for me here?”

“I can’t say,” I answered; “that will depend on the length of your absence and on my patience; but you know quite well, cousin, that we shall meet again, even if it be in hell; and for my part, the sooner the better.”

By the light of the brand which Patience was holding to examine the horse’s harness, I saw her beautiful face flush and then turn pale. Then she raised her eyes which had been lowered in sorrow, and looked at me fixedly with a strange expression.

“Are we ready to start?” said Marcasse, opening the door.

“Yes, forward,” said Patience, taking the bridle. “Edmee, my child, take care to bend down while passing under the door.”

“What is the matter, Blaireau?” said Marcasse, stopping on the threshold and thrusting out the point of his sword, gloriously rusted by the blood of the rodent tribe.

Blaireau did not stir, and if he had not been born dumb, as his master said, he would have barked. But he gave warning as usual by a sort of dry cough. This was his most emphatic sign of anger and uneasiness.

“There must be something down there,” said Marcasse; and he boldly advanced into the darkness, after making a sign to the rider not to follow. The report of firearms made us all start. Edmee jumped down lightly from her horse, and I did not fail to notice that some impulse at once prompted her to come and stand behind my chair. Patience rushed out of the tower. The cure ran to the frightened horse, which was rearing and backing toward us. Blaireau managed to bark. I forgot my sprain, and in a single bound I was outside.

A man covered with wounds, and with the blood streaming from him, was lying across the doorway. It was my Uncle Laurence. He had been mortally wounded at the siege of Roche-Mauprat, and had come to die under our eyes. With him was his brother Leonard, who had just fired his last pistol shot at random, luckily without hitting any one. Patience’s first impulse was to prepare to defend himself. On recognising Marcasse, however, the fugitives, far from showing themselves hostile, asked for shelter and help. As their situation was so desperate no one thought that assistance should be refused. The police were pursuing them. Roche-Mauprat was in flames; Louis and Peter had died fighting; Antony, John, and Walter had fled in another direction, and, perhaps, were already prisoners. No words would paint the horror of Laurence’s last moments. His agony was brief but terrible. His blasphemy made the cure turn pale. Scarce had the door been shut and the dying man laid on the floor than the horrible death-rattle was heard. Leonard, who knew of no remedy but brandy, snatched Marcasse’s flask out of my hand (not without swearing and scornfully reproaching me for my flight), forced open his brother’s clinched teeth with the blade of his hunting-knife, and, in spite of our warning, poured half the flask down his throat. The wretched man bounded into the air, brandished his arms in desperate convulsions, drew himself up to his full height, and fell back stone dead upon the blood-stained floor. There was no time to offer up a prayer over the body, for the door resounded under the furious blows of our assailants.

“Open in the King’s name!” cried several voices; “open to the police!”

“Help! help!” cried Leonard, seizing his knife and rushing towards the door. “Peasants, prove yourselves nobles! And you, Bernard, atone for your fault; wash out your shame; do not let a Mauprat fall into the hands of the gendarmes alive!”

Urged on by native courage and by pride, I was about to follow his example, when Patience rushed at him, and exerting his herculean strength, threw him to the ground. Putting one knee on his chest, he called to Marcasse to open the door. This was done before I could take my uncle’s part against his terrible assailant. Six gendarmes at once rushed into the tower and, with their guns pointed, bade us move at our peril.

“Stay, gentlemen,” said Patience, “don’t harm any one. This is your prisoner. Had I been alone with him, I should either have defended him or helped him to escape; but there are honest people here who ought not to suffer for a knave; and I did not wish to expose them to a fight. Here is the Mauprat. Your duty, as you know, is to deliver him safe and sound into the hands of justice. This other is dead.”

“Monsieur, surrender!” said the sergeant of the gendarmes, laying his hand on Leonard.

“Never shall a Mauprat drag his name into the dock of a police court,” replied Leonard, with a sullen expression. “I surrender, but you will get nothing but my skin.”

And he allowed himself to be placed in a chair without making any resistance.

But while they were preparing to bind him he said to the cure:

“Do me one last kindness, Father. Give me what is left in the flask; I am dying of thirst and exhaustion.”

The good cure handed him the flask, which he emptied at a draught. His distorted face took on an expression of awful calm. He seemed absorbed, stunned, incapable of resistance. But as soon as they were engaged in binding his feet, he snatched a pistol from the belt of one of the gendarmes and blew his brains out.

This frightful spectacle completely unnerved me. Sunk in a dull stupor, no longer conscious of what was happening around me, I stood there as if turned to stone, and it was only after some minutes that I realized that I was the subject of a serious discussion between the police and my hosts. One of the gendarmes declared that he recognised me as a Hamstringer Mauprat. Patience declared that I was nothing but M. Hubert de Mauprat's gamekeeper, in charge of his daughter. Annoyed at the discussion, I was about to make myself known when I saw a ghost rise by my side. It was Edmee. She had taken refuge between the wall and the cure's poor frightened horse, which, with outstretched legs and eyes of fire, made her a sort of rampart with its body. She was as pale as death, and her lips were so compressed with horror that at first, in spite of desperate efforts to speak, she was unable to express herself otherwise than by signs. The sergeant, moved by her youth and her painful situation, waited with deference until she could manage to make herself understood. At last she persuaded them not to treat me as a prisoner, but to take me with her to her father's chateau, where she gave her word of honour that satisfactory explanations and guarantees would be furnished on my account. The cure and the other witnesses, having pledged their words to this, we set out all together, Edmee on the sergeant's horse, he on an animal belonging to one of his men, myself on the cure's, Patience and the cure afoot between us, the police on either side, and Marcasse in front, still impassive amid the general terror and consternation. Two of the gendarmes remained behind to guard the bodies and prepare a report.

VIII

We had travelled about a league through the woods. Wherever other paths had crossed our own, we had stopped to call aloud; for Edmee, convinced that her father would not return home without finding her, had implored her companions to help her to rejoin him. To this shouting the gendarmes had been very averse, as they were afraid of being discovered and attacked by bodies of the fugitives from Roche-Mauprat. On our way they informed us that this den had been captured at the third assault. Until then the assailants had husbanded their forces. The officer in command of the gendarmes was anxious to get possession of the keep without destroying it; and, above all, to take the defenders alive. This, however, was impossible on account of the desperate resistance they made. The besiegers suffered so severely in their second attempt that they found themselves compelled to adopt extreme measures or to retreat. They therefore set the outer buildings on fire, and in the ensuing assault put forth all their strength. Two Mauprats were killed while fighting on the ruins of their bastion; the other five disappeared. Six men were dispatched in pursuit of them in one direction, six in another. Traces of the fugitives had been discovered immediately, and the men who gave us these details had followed Laurence and Leonard so closely that several of their shots had hit the former only a short distance from Gazeau Tower. They had heard him cry that he was done for; and, as far as they could see, Leonard had carried him to the sorcerer's door. This Leonard was the only one of my uncles who deserved any pity, for he was the only one who might, perhaps, have been encouraged to a better kind of life. At times there was a touch of chivalry in his brigandage, and his savage heart was capable of affection. I was deeply moved, therefore, by his tragic death, and let myself be carried along mechanically, plunged in gloomy thoughts, and determined to end my days in the same manner should I ever be condemned to the disgrace he had scorned to endure.

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