

ГАСТОН ЛЕРУ

THE DOUBLE
LIFE

Гастон Леру

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Gaston Leroux

The Double Life

HISTORICAL PREFACE

I WAS passing through the waiting-room of the *Morning Journal* on a certain evening last year when my attention was drawn to a man seated in a corner. He was dressed in black and his appearance was that of the deepest dejection. In fact upon his face I read the most melancholy despair.

He was not weeping, his eyes were dry and almost expressionless and received the impression of exterior objects like motionless ice. He had placed upon his knees a small oaken chest, ornamented with ironwork. His hands were crossed over this object and hung down, accentuating his dejected appearance.

An attendant told me that he had been awaiting my arrival there three long hours without a movement, without so much as a sigh. I went towards him, and announcing myself, I invited him to enter my office. I showed him a seat, but instead of taking it he came straight to my writing-desk and placed the little oaken chest on it. "Sir, this chest belongs to you," said he, and his voice seemed far away and indistinct. "My friend, M. Théophraste Longuet, commissioned me to bring it to you. Take it, sir, and believe me, your servant." As he spoke the man bowed and made a motion toward the door. I stopped him, however, and said: "Why, do not go, I cannot receive this box without a knowledge of its contents." He replied: "Sir, I do not know what it contains, it is locked and its key is lost. You might have to break it open to find out the contents." I replied: "Then at least I would like to know to whom I am indebted for bringing it to me."

"My friend, M. Théophraste Longuet, called me Adolphe," replied the man, in a voice so melancholy that it seemed to grow more faint and indistinct with each syllable.

"Well, if M. Longuet had brought me the chest himself, he would most certainly have told me what it contains; I expect that M. Longuet, himself."

"I also, sir," said the man, "but M. Théophraste Longuet is dead, and I am his sole executor."

By this time he had edged his way to the door, and having said these words, he opened the door and departed. I was taken back by this sudden move and stood staring at the door, then at the chest. Collecting myself I hastily followed the man, but could find no trace of him... he had disappeared.

Opening the chest I found it contained a bundle of papers, which at first I regarded with indifference, but which I presently began to examine with greater interest. The deeper I penetrated the more mysterious they appeared to be and the more unexpected were the adventures revealed. In fact, so strange did they seem that I at first could not believe my intelligence, and if the proof had not been in front of me I never would have been convinced of their reality.

It was some time before I could bring myself to realize my position regarding these papers. M. Théophraste Longuet had made me heir to this chest and to the mysteries lying therein. In fact, the secrets of his life.

These papers were written in the form of memoirs and were voluminous. They related with the minutest detail, all the incidents of an exceptionally dramatic existence. M. Théophraste Longuet had by the discovery of a document two centuries old acquired the proof that Louis Dominique Cartouche, the most cunning criminal in the annals of French crime, and he, Théophraste, were one and the same person. This was indeed a most startling discovery and valuable, for it also put me on the track of the treasures of the famous Cartouche.

He had frequently confided in me facts about his peculiar life, but an untimely death, certain terrible events related in these documents, had prevented him from telling me all. We had been great friends. I had written for a journal he had called his "favorite organ." He had chosen me as

his companion and confidant from among many other journalists, not because of any superiority of intellect, but rather, as he used to say, “because a reliable level-headed friend is worth twenty acquaintances, and he found me reliable.” There was much significance in this word, “level-headed,” as you will learn as you read this narrative.

Having thoroughly examined the papers, I immediately took them to my manager, who was a keen business man. He did not hesitate for a moment to find the “Treasures of Cartouche” a valuable piece for his paper, and it is now a matter of common knowledge how curiously the sum of twenty-five thousand francs, divided into seven sums, were hidden in and around Paris, and how the author of these lines in the history of the chest which appeared in print in the month of October, in the year 1903, * touched lightly upon the story found therein.

* This date is very important, for it established the fact that my authentic history of Cartouche had appeared before Mr. Frank Brentano’s book, and that one two books the day after that of Mr. Maurice Bernard.

I have believed it my duty toward the public, and also to the memory of Théophraste Longuet, to publish in volume the authentic history of the reincarnation of Cartouche, written exclusively from the documents found in the little oaken chest, a plain narrative, unembellished by all that which I, poor journalist, had added for the chance reader of my journal.

The reader will find more than a mere treasure. The documents are of the greatest literary value, inasmuch as they contain proof of things hitherto only dreamt of. It is certain that many people imagining themselves of superior intellect will doubt and possibly scoff at many of these mysteries.

The oaken chest contained the secret of the tomb; it also contained the history of the Talpa people written by no less an authority than M. Milfroid, Commissioner of Police, who remained for three weeks with M. Théophraste Longuet in the subterranean home of those monsters. This last infernal comedy would most certainly have met with incredulity had not it been vented by one of the most honest and intellectual of Police Commissioners. M. Milfroid was a most noble and accomplished character, and he could place music, painting, sculptors among his accomplishments.

Now before closing this preface I must warn my readers that they will find many strange things in the narrative, weird and almost supernatural. And I would say that unless he is possessed with great level-headedness, he must not read the secrets of the Life of Théophraste Longuet.

CHAPTER I

M. Théophraste Longuet Wishes to Inform Him-self and Visits Historical Monuments

THE strange adventures of M. Théophraste Longuet, which ended so tragically, originated in a visit to the prison of the Conciergerie, on the 28th of June, 1899. Therefore this history is modern; but the writer would say that, having read and examined all the papers and writings of M. Théophraste Longuet, its recentness does not detract from its sensational character.

When M. Longuet rang the bell of the Conciergerie he was accompanied by his wife, Marceline, and M. Adolphe Lecamus. The latter was a close friend. It was his physique that had attracted M. Longuet. He was not handsome, but was tall and well built, and every movement showed that strength which M. Longuet lacked. His forehead was broad and convex, his eyebrows were heavy and straight. He had a habit of every now and then lifting them gracefully to express his disdain of others and his confidence in himself. His grey eyes twinkled under near-sighted spectacles, and the straight nose, the proud arch of the underlip, surmounted by a dark, flowing mustache, the square outline of his chin and his amaranthine complexion, all combined to accentuate his strong appearance.

He had been employed as postmaster at Turin, and had traveled considerably. He had crossed the sea. This was also an attraction to M. Longuet, who had never crossed anything, unless it was the Seine.

M. Longuet had been a rubber stamp manufacturer, but had made sufficient money to retire at an early age. He was the antithesis of Adolphe in build and character. His face showed no marked intelligence, and his slight build lent almost insignificance to his appearance. He had, however, imagination, and he used to laughingly say to Adolphe: "Even if I haven't traveled, I run just as much risk in walking the streets of Paris as one who crosses the ocean in ships. Might not houses collapse or pots of flowers fall on one's head?" Thus he lived a monotonous existence, relieved only by the morbid workings of his mind.

Before his retirement he had worked hard and had little time to study, therefore, now he had leisure, it occurred to him to occupy his time in improving his mind. It was with this intention that we find him visiting the various buildings of historic interest around Paris.

On ringing the bell of the Conciergerie the iron door turned heavily on its hinges. A warden shaking the keys demanded of Théophraste his permit. He had anticipated this and had received it that morning from the Prefect of Police. He tendered it with satisfaction, looking around at his companion with the confidence of anticipations realized.

The gate-keeper turned the little company over to the Chief Warden, who was passing at the time. Marceline was much impressed, and as she leaned on Adolphe's arm, thought of Marie Antoinette's dungeon, the Grevin Museum, and all the mysteries of this famous prison. The Chief Warden said: "Are you French?" to which Théophraste replied, laughingly, for he was typically French: "Do we look like English people?"

"This is the first time," explained the Chief Warden, "that any French people have asked permission to visit the Conciergerie. French people are indifferent to things of interest in their own country." "They are wrong, sir," replied Théophraste, wiping his spectacles. "In the monuments of the past we have foundations of the future." This idea rather pleased him, and he looked for approval to Adolphe and Marceline. He continued following the Warden. "As for me, I am an old Parisian and would have visited all these places of interest long ago but for my work. I have worked hard at my trade and the only leisure I got was when I went to bed. That time is over now, sir, and now is the time for me to educate myself," and he struck the century-old pavement with the end of his green umbrella.

Passing a small door and a large wicket, they descended some steps and were in the guard-room. The first thing to draw attention made Adolphe laugh, Marceline blush, and Théophraste turn in disgust. It was the capital of a Gothic column carved to symbolize the story of Abelard and Heloise. Abelard was pleading with the Carion Fulbert for his clemency, while the latter was taking the child from Heloise.

"It is strange," said M. Longuet, "that in the name of art the Government should tolerate such obscenities. That capital is a disgrace to the Conciergerie and should be removed." M. Lecamus did not agree, and said: "Many things are excusable in art if they are done in the right spirit."

However, the subject was dropped and they were soon interested in other parts of these old historic buildings. The Chief Warden conducted them through the Tower of Cæsar, into the Silver Tower, or Tower of Bon Bee. They thought of the thousand of illustrious prisoners who had been incarcerated in prison for years. Marceline could not keep from thinking of the martyred Marie Antoinette, of Elizabeth, and the little Dauphin, and of the waxen gendarmes in the museum, who watched over the Royal family. All this impressed her, and her mind was continually carried back to those stirring times. The Silver Tower had been transformed into a record office, and the modern writing desks were in striking contrast to the old medieval walls. Returning through the guard-room, they directed their steps towards the Bon Bee Tower. Théophraste had read about this tower and imagined he knew it well, so wishing to appear well informed, asked of the Warden, "Is it not there, sir, that the last meal of the Girondists was served? You ought certainly to tell us exactly where to find the table, and also the place which Camille des Moulins occupied." The Warden replied that the Environdists had dined in the chapel and that they would soon visit it.

"I wish to know Camille des Moulins' place," said Théophraste, "because he was a friend of mine."

"And mine also," said Marceline, with a look towards Adolphe, which seemed to say, "Not as much as you, Adolphe."

But Adolphe laughed and said Camille was not a Girondist, he was a Franciscan friar, a friend of Danton, a Septembrarian.

Théophraste was vexed, and Marceline protested that if he had been anything of the sort Lucille would not have married him. Adolphe did not insist, but as they had by now reached the chamber of torture, he feigned condescendingly to be interested in the labels which adorned the drawers decorating the walls, "Hops," "Cinnamon," "Spice," etc.

"Here is the room in question. They have transformed it into the doctor's store-room."

"It is just as well, perhaps," said Théophraste, "but not so impressive."

Adolphe and Marceline were of the same opinion. They were not at all impressed. Here was the famous torture chamber. They expected something else. They were disillusioned. Outside, when viewed from the court of the Sundial, the formidable aspect of those old feudal towers, the last vestige of the palace of the French monarchy, momentarily brought fear and awe to their minds. That prison had stood a thousand years, had known so many tragedies, death rattles, legendary miseries, hidden secrets. It seemed that one only had to step inside to find an inquisition court in some dark corner, damp and funereal. Here seemed to be all the tragedies of the history of Paris, as immortal as the very walls.

What a disillusion here in these towers with a little plaster and paint they had made the office of the Director of Records, the store-room of the prison doctor. One could carouse here where once the hangman held sway. One could laugh where only the cries of the tortured were heard.

Now there would have been nothing unusual about this visit to the Conciergerie but for a very extraordinary incident which occurred after the party had left the torture chamber. The incident was weird and inexplicable, and while I read M. Longuet's own description of it, I confess I found it impossible to believe. Therefore I went to the Chief Warden, who had shown the party round the prison, and asked for his account of the incident.

He gave it to me in the following words:

Sir, the affair passed as usual, and the lady, the two gentlemen and I visited the kitchen of St. Louis, which is now used as a store-house for plaster. We proceeded towards the dungeon of Marie Antoinette, which is now the chapel. On the way I showed them the crucifix, before which she prayed before mounting the cart which is now in the Director's room. I told the man with the green umbrella that we had been obliged to transfer the Queen's arm-chair to the Director's room, because the English visitors had carried away pieces from it as souvenirs. We had by this time arrived at the end of the Street of Paris-you know the street that leads from Paris to the Conciergerie. We passed through that frightfully dark passage, where we found the grating behind which they cut off the hair of the women before execution. You know that it is the very same grating. It is a passage where never a ray of sunlight penetrates. Marie Antoinette walked through that passage on the day of her death. It is there that the old Conciergerie stands just as it was hundreds of years ago.

I was describing the Street of Paris, when suddenly the man with the green umbrella cried out in a voice so unlike the previous voice, so strangely that the other gentleman and lady looked startled: "Zounds, it is the walk of the Straw Dealers." He said it in a weird tone and his whole attitude was changed. He used the expression, zounds, twice. I told him he was mistaken, that the walk of the Straw Dealers is what we call to-day the Street of Paris. He answered me in the same strange voice: "Zounds, you cannot tell me that! I have lain there on that straw like the others!" I remarked to him, smilingly, although not without a feeling of fear, that no one had lain on that straw in the alley of the Straw Dealers for more than two hundred years.

He was just about to answer me when his wife intervened. "What are you saying, Théophraste?" said she. "Do you wish to teach Monsieur his business? You have never been to the Conciergerie before." Then he said in his natural voice, the voice by which I had known him at first: "That is so, I have never been here before."

I could not understand then at all, but thought the incident closed, when he did something stranger still.

We visited the Queen's Dungeon, Robespierre's Dungeon, the Chapel of the Girondists, and that little gate, which is still the same as when the unfortunate prisoners, called the Septembrians, leaped over it to be massacred in the court. We were now in the Street of Paris. There was a little stairway on the left which we did not descend. It led to the cellars which I did not deem necessary to show, as it was dark and difficult of access. The gate at the bottom of this staircase is closed by a grating which is perhaps a thousand years old-possibly more. The gentleman, whom they called Adolphe, proceeded with the lady toward the door leading out of the guard-room, but without saying a word the man with the green umbrella descended the little staircase. When he was at the grating he cried out in that strange, weird voice: "Well, where are you going? It is here." The gentleman and the lady stopped as if petrified. The voice was terrible, and nothing in the outward appearance of the man would make you believe that the voice came from him. In spite of my fear I ran to the head of the stairs. I was thunderstruck. He ordered me to open the grating, and I don't know how I obeyed him. It was as if I had been hypnotized. I obeyed mechanically. Then when the grating was opened he disappeared in the darkness of the cellar. Where had he gone? How could he find his way? Those subterranean passages of the Conciergerie are plunged in frightful darkness and nobody has been down there for centuries and centuries.

He had already gone too far for me to stop him. He had hypnotized me. I stayed about a quarter of an hour at the entrance of that dark hole. His companions were in the same state as I was. It was impossible to follow him. Then suddenly we heard his voice, not his first voice, but his second. I was so startled I had to cling to the grating for support. He cried out: "It is thou, Simon l'Anvergust." I could not answer. He passed near me, and as he passed it seemed to me that he put a scrap of paper in his jacket pocket. He leaped up the steps with one bound and rejoined the lady and gentleman. He gave them no explanation. As for me, I ran to open the door of the prison for them. I wanted

to get them outside. When the wicket was open and the man with the green umbrella was walking out, without apparent reason he said: “We must avoid the wheel.” I don’t know what he meant, as there was no carriage near.

CHAPTER II

An Explanation from Théophraste

NOW in reading the last chapter one would immediately think that M. Longuet had gone mad. What had possessed him? Where did he go? In order that you might fully understand his peculiar actions I will give you the extract from his memoirs relating to this incident. He writes:

I am a man of sound body and mind. I am a good citizen and recognize all the laws. I believe laws are necessary for the proper regulation of society. I dislike heartily any formalities, and in determining my lines of conduct I have always chosen the simplest way.

I dislike imaginative people, and the occult has always been repulsive to me. However, this is not through want of understanding, for my friend, Adolphe Lecamus, had given himself up to the study of spiritualism. Whoever teaches spiritualism teaches foolishness, and the desire to question the spirits of the dead by means of the planchette seems to me to be beyond belief, it is grotesque. However, I have assisted at some of Adolphe's seances which he had given for the benefit of Marceline and myself. I have even taken a certain part in them, desiring to prove the absurdity of his theories. My wife and I once rested our hands on a table for a quarter of an hour waiting for it to move. Nothing happened, and we laughed heartily at him. However, my wife was more sympathetic, and was inclined to be a little more serious. Women are always more susceptible to the occult and ready to believe in the mysterious. Adolphe bought her books, which she read eagerly, and he amused himself sometimes by willing her to sleep, by making passes with his hands and breathing on her eyes. It seemed foolish, and I should not have allowed it from any one else, but I have always had a liking for Adolphe, and know that it amuses him. Marceline and he said that I was a skeptic. However, I am not a skeptic, as a skeptic is one who doubts all. I believe in progress, but do not believe that one person having an unnatural influence over another tends towards progress. Therefore I am not a skeptic, but rather a philosopher.

During his travels Adolphe read a great deal. I have had to work hard all my life, therefore, while he is an idealist, I am a materialist.

It seems necessary for me to thus describe my character so that it may be well understood that the happenings of the day before yesterday were not due to any occult reasons. I visited the prison in just the same manner as I would go to a store to buy a cravat. I wanted to learn, that is all. Having sold my business, I have more leisure, and so I said to myself: "I will visit the interesting places of the city of Paris." Fate decreed that the Conciergerie was the first place to be visited. I do not know whether I really regret it.

At present I am calm and collected and can relate all I remember of what happened.

While we were in the Towers nothing happened worth recording. I remember trying to picture to myself in the little room which looked like a grocery store all the horrors of the place, how the executioners and their assistants approached the prisoners with their monstrous machines, how so many illustrious persons were martyred, and all the terrible griefs and agonies which had been witnessed within these walls. But the transformation had taken all the romance away, and the labels, "Senna," "Hops," etc., did not inspire imagination. Even the Bon Bee Tower, also called Bavarde, on account of the terrible cries which were heard in it, has been changed into offices. However, I must not complain. These are all the signs of progress and a more enlightened age.

But we penetrated into that part of the Conciergerie which has changed little during all these centuries, which had not been spoiled by the plasterer and in which all the stones could tell their own history; then it was that a most inexplicable fever took possession of me, and when we had reached the dark end of the walk of the "Straw Dealers," I cried out from my soul, "Zounds! this is the walk of the Straw Dealers."

I turned around immediately to find out who had uttered these words. They were all staring at me, and I was convinced that it was myself who had cried out. It seemed so strange. The voice was not like mine, but it had emanated from me. Even now it is unaccountable.

The Warden pretended that we had passed the walk of the "Straw Dealers." I told him that I knew the place better than he, for I had lain there on the straw myself. But I had never been in the Conciergerie before, and yet I was sure of it. It is difficult to explain. While we walked through the chapel of the Girondists, and the Warden was explaining the story to us, I played with my umbrella. I tried to appear natural and collected. Although the things which happened were quite natural, and not the result of any effort, a cold perspiration seized me and I shook like a leaf. I remember that I found myself at the bottom of the stairs, standing before a grating. I was endowed with almost superhuman strength. Shaking the grating, I called out for the others to follow. However, the others had gone ahead and did not hear. I called to the Warden to open the grating. I don't know what would have happened if he had not done so, quickly. I was crazy, and yet everything was natural to me. Truly, I was in a state of great nervous excitement, but everything was lucid to me. Never before had I seen so clearly as when in that dark cellar. Never before had I recognized a place so vividly as when I was down there where I had never been before. My God! I did not know them, and yet I recognized them.

Without hesitating I groped around, feeling the stones in the dark, and my feet trod a soil which seemed familiar but which had not been trodden for centuries. I seemed to know these very stones, forgotten in the darkness of those cellars. I slid the length of the damp flagstones as if I had been accustomed to the way. My finger-nails came in contact with sharp stones in the wall and I counted the seams as I passed. I knew that if I turned round I would see a certain square light in the distant gallery, a single ray in all this place where the sun had forgotten to shine since France's history had begun. I turned and saw it, and I felt my heart beat violently.

Here there was a momentary interruption in the writings. M. Longuet, having explained what had happened to him in that strange hour in the Conciergerie, was greatly agitated. It was with difficulty he remained master of his thoughts. It was difficult to follow them; they seemed to come and go, just leaving faint traces on the paper of the record.

He resumed the pen with feverish hand. Continuing to busy himself with the subterranean passages, he writes:

It is necessary to pause here as one pauses at the edge of a precipice. My very thoughts make me shiver!...

And the Bavarde, there it stands. There are the walls which have helped to make history. It is not on high in the glorious sunlight that the Bavarde tells its history. It is here in the blackness of the earth. There are some large iron staples in the wall here. The very chains of Ravallac! I recall no more; but towards that ray, the sole ray of light, as eternal and immovable as the very walls- towards that small square beam, which since the beginning of things has taken and kept the shape of a sentinel, I advanced. There was some impelling force which urged me on. I rushed ahead while the fever was in me and seemed to intoxicate me. Suddenly I paused, my feet seemed held to the ground and my fingers ran sliding and pressing the length of the wall. What it was that impelled my finger, what was the thought, I cannot tell. All at once I let my umbrella fall, and drawing my pen-knife, began to scrape steadily between two stones. The dust and cement powdered away easily, and soon my knife struck something between the stones, and I pulled the thing out.

This is why I am sure I was not mad. This thing has been before my eyes. In my most peaceful hours I, Théophraste Longuet, see it in my writing-desk. It is not I who am mad, but this thing itself! It is a piece of torn paper, stained. . . a document of which it is easy to tell the age and calculated to plunge any man into the deepest consternation.

The paper is, as you must know, terribly decayed. The dampness has eaten into half the words, which seem, on account of their reddish tint, to have been written with blood.

I took the document to the small ray of light, and on looking it over my hair seemed to stand on end with horror. *There I could recognize my own handwriting*, and I give you this precious and mysterious document clearly translated:

“Dead and buried all his treasures after the Treachery of April 1st. Go, take a look in the barroom! Look at the furnace! Look at the weathercock! Dig a while and you shall be rich!”

CHAPTER III

A Search and a Discovery

M. ADOLPHE LECAMUS and Marceline thought M. Théophraste's actions strange, but they were too much occupied with an affair of their own to attach very great importance to them. However, M. Théophraste concealed his anxiety and pretended that the visit to the Conciergerie was quite a natural occurrence. He had gone down in the cellars just to satisfy a natural curiosity, not being one of those who make a superficial inspection of things of interest.

The following day, M. Théophraste, under the pretext of putting his affairs in order, shut himself up in his office and gave instructions for nobody to disturb him. Leaning over the balcony he looked out upon the little square of Anvers and reflected over the happenings of yesterday. There was nothing in the view to distract him. He was accustomed to the scene below: nurses pushing perambulators gossiping over the latest news, and a few professors walking towards the Rollie College. The Avenue Touraine rang with the shouts of college students who had come before the lecture hour.

Nothing had changed; the world was just the same. To-day, like yesterday, or like the day before yesterday. The people were going to their business just the same. Even Nidine Petito, the wife of the Italian professor, who lived in the apartment below, was the same. She began to play the "Carnival of Venice" on the piano just as she did every day.

Nothing had changed; thus he reflected. On turning round he could see amongst his papers on the desk, the document. Did it really exist? He had passed a restless night and was now attributing his strange adventure to a bad dream-but no, it could not be that, for there was the paper on his desk, in his own handwriting, and written in blood. Good God! perhaps it was his own blood. What thoughts, what thoughts!

Théophraste passed his hand over his forehead. He was perspiring and restless. Suddenly breathing a sigh and slapping his thigh with his hand, he appeared to have come to a definite resolution, and put the paper carefully away in his portfolio.

He remembered that Signor Petito, the Italian professor, was an expert in handwriting and that he had had experience in engraving. He would take the document to him and ask his opinion. His friend Adolphe was also interested in graphology, but only in a spiritual way, and so he would not confide in him. There was already too much mystery in the affair without mixing it up with spiritualism and mediums.

He had only known the professor to bow to on the stairs, and so in presenting himself he was introduced. The professor greeted him cordially, and after the usual formalities, Théophraste broached the subject of his visit. He produced the paper, and a letter which he had written some time previously. "Signor Petito," he commenced, "having heard of your renown as an expert in handwriting, I would be grateful to you if you would examine this letter, and this document, and give me the result of your observations. I may say that there is no connection between the two papers."

Théophraste was not in the habit of lying, and blushed redder than a peony. But Signor Petito was already deeply engrossed in the examining of the two papers. His scholarly eye looked over one, then the other. He placed them together, held them up to the light, passed his hand over the writing, and measured them. Then he laughed, showing his white teeth.

"Monsieur Longuet," said he, "it is not necessary for me to keep you waiting long for a reply. This document is in a very bad condition, but the specimen of handwriting can still be read. They are in every way similar to the letter, and I would swear before any tribunal that those two handwritings have been traced by the same hand."

Then he entered into details. "A child," he said, "could not be mistaken about it." He pointed out how this duplicate writing was identically angular. "We call a handwriting angular, Monsieur,

when the hair-strokes which join the bottom of the letters and the separate letters are at an acute angle to the down-strokes of the letters. Do you understand? Compare this hook and that one, those hair-strokes with these others, and all those letters getting larger, larger in both writing and in equal measure. But what a clear writing, Monsieur; I have never seen such clear writing before. As clear as if cut with a knife.”

By this time Théophraste had become white with nervousness. Signor Petito thought that he was going to faint. However, he arose, picked up the document and the letter, and having thanked Signor Petito, he went out.

He wandered the streets for a long time, and at last turning down a small street, he stood in front of an old door in the Rue Inger. Entering, he found himself in a narrow, dark passage. A man came out of a back room, and on recognizing Théophraste, greeted him in a friendly way. He was wearing a square paper cap, and had on a black gown which reached down to his feet.

“Good-day, Théophraste, good-day. What happy chance has brought you here?”

As it had been two years since they had last seen each other they at first spoke of family matters and other generalities. Ambrose spoke of his trade of engraving visiting cards. He had been a printer. He had been a printer in the province, but having put all he had into an invention for a new paper, he had failed. He was a distant cousin to Marceline, and when he was deep in financial troubles, Théophraste had come to his rescue.

Théophraste seated himself on the wicker chair in the small room which served as a workshop. This room was lighted by a large window reaching from floor to ceiling.

“Ambrose, you are an expert. No one can approach you in the knowledge of papers, eh?” “That is not quite true,” said Ambrose, “but I can judge a good paper.”

“You understand all kinds?”

“All kinds.”

“If some one showed you a piece of paper, could you tell the age of it?”

“Yes,” said Ambrose, “I could. I have published a treatise on the water-marks of papers used in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That study was accepted by the Academy.” “I know, and I have great respect for your knowledge.”

“Well, the thing is simple. The oldest paper showed a plain, glossy surface, but soon there appeared wide lines crossed at intervals by perpendicular lines, both giving the impression of a metal trellis over which the paste had been spread. From the fourteenth century they used these as a maker’s mark, and in the end they designed figures in brass wire, initials, words, emblems of all sorts -these are the water-marks. Every sheet of water-marked paper tells its tale, and the year of its make can be detected, but the difficulty is to decipher it. This necessitates a little practice.” Théophraste opened his portfolio and took out the paper.

“Can you tell me the exact date of this?” Ambrose put on his eyeglass and took the paper to the daylight.

“There is the date,” he said, “172—, the last figure is rubbed out. It must be of the eighteenth century.”

“Oh,” said Théophraste, “I saw that date quite well, but do you really think that the paper is-of that century? Does not the date lie? That is what I want to know.”

Ambrose showed him the center of the paper. “See?”

Théophraste said nothing. Then Ambrose lit a small lamp and held the paper up before it. In illuminating the document one could detect in the thickness of the paper the design of a crown.

“Théophraste,” said Ambrose excitedly, “that paper is exceedingly rare. That mark is almost unknown, for a very little paper was made with that sign, which is called the Crown of Thorns. That paper, my dear Théophraste, was made in 1721.”

“You are sure?”

“Yes, but tell me,” cried Ambrose, who could not conceal his surprise, “how is it that this document, dated 1721, could be by all visible marks in your handwriting?”

Théophraste said nothing, but getting up and putting the document back into the portfolio, he hastened out of the house.

And so here was proof enough. He could doubt it no longer. This paper, dated in the beginning of the eighteenth century, in the time of the Regents, this sheet that he had sought for in the prison, distinctly bore his own handwriting. He had written on that sheet, he, Théophraste Longuet, late maker of rubber stamps, who retired last week at the age of 41—he wrote on that sheet of paper these incomprehensible words in 1721. However, it did not want Signor Petito or Ambrose to prove it to him. He knew it himself. Everything within him cried out, “It is your paper!” And so instead of being Théophraste Longuet, son of John Longuet, master gardener to the Ferte sous Jonaise, he had been in the past some one he did not know, but who had been reborn in him. Yes, that was it, and he now had the great desire to recall having lived 200 years.

Who was he? What was his name? In which body had his immortal soul elected momentarily to live? He felt certain that these questions would not remain long unanswered. Was it true that some of the things ignored in his present existence constituted part of his past life? What was meant by certain expressions spoken in the Conciergerie? Who, then, was Simon de Anvergust, whose name had been twice repeated by his burning lips?

“Yes, yes, the name, in former times my own, his also,” wrote Théophraste in his journal, “arose from my awakened brain, and knowing who I was, I recalled the whole life lived in former years, and I read in a flash from that piece of paper all the details of a past life.”

Monsieur Théophraste Longuet, to state the matter frankly, had not arrived at the conclusion without having, in these incoherent lines, wandered before. The happenings of these days were too unusual. Imagine, he was simple-minded, a little heavy, a little foppish, he had never invented anything in his life. He was just an amiable, honest citizen, stupid and headstrong. He had no religion. He left that to the women, and without declaring his atheism, used to say: “When one dies, it is forever.” However, now he had discovered by an extraordinary incident, that one never dies. He had to support this, and in doing so declared that not even those in the business, in occult science, frequenting spirits daily, could have such palpable proof. In the end Théophraste made his resolution quickly.

This anterior existence could no longer be denied, although he knew nothing about it. In the uncertainty of his mind he could not associate the date 1721 with his visit to the Conciergerie.

However, he came to this final conclusion. In 1721 he had been confined in the Conciergerie Prison, probably as a prisoner of state. He could not admit for a second that he, Théophraste Longuet, had been shut up, even under Louis XV, as a common criminal. In a solemn moment, perhaps before being put to torture, he had drawn up this document and hidden the paper between the stones in the dungeon, and passing by there two centuries later, had found it again. This was simple enough and not the result of any supernatural inspiration. The facts themselves were enough.

Certain words of the document were in themselves quite natural and of the most momentous importance. These were “Treasure... treachery of the first of April.”

It was with these words that he hoped to discover his identity. First, he had been rich and powerful. The words about the treasure showed conclusively that the man had been rich and that he had buried his treasure. He had been powerful and had been betrayed. Théophraste had in his mind that the treason had been a memorable treason, perhaps historic—the treachery of the first of April.

Yes, all the oddities and all the mysteries of the document left at least a glimpse of something certain: that he had been a great personage, that he had buried his treasures; and that after having buried them mysteriously, more mysteriously still revealed their existence, at the price of much cunning; perhaps at the price of his own blood. Without doubt those tinted words had been written with blood.

Later he proposed to ask a distinguished chemist to examine it. The treasures belonged to him, and if necessary he would use this document to establish his right to them.

Théophraste was not rich. He had retired from business with a modest little income. He had a comfortable little house with a garden and bowling alley. However, this was little, with the somewhat extravagant tastes of Marceline, and so the treasure would be most acceptable. He therefore applied himself diligently to the research.

It must be said, though, to his credit, that he was much more puzzled by the mystery of his personality than by the mystery of the treasure, and that he resolved to temporarily suspend his research until the time when he could at least give a name to this personage that he had been-Théophraste Longuet in 1721. That discovery which interested him most came to be in his mind the key of all the others.

That which astonished him most was the sudden development of what he called his “historical instinct,” the instinct which had been deficient in him all his life, but which had been revealed to him with the suddenness and force of a clap of thunder in the depths of the Conciergerie. In one moment, the Other, as he used to say in conversing of this great 18th-century personage, had possessed him. It was the Other who had found the document; it was the Other who had cried out in the Conciergerie; it was the Other who had called to Simon l’Anvergust, and since the Other had disappeared, Théophraste did not know what had become of him. He sought him in vain; he examined himself; he searched his very soul.

Before this adventure Théophraste had no curiosity about the beginning or ending of things, he had not wasted time in wondering over philosophical mysteries; in his vanity he had always shrugged his shoulders at such things. However, now things were different; here was a quiet citizen, with little scientific knowledge, who had to prove that a manufacturer of India rubber in the year 1899 had been shut up in a dungeon after having buried treasures in 1721. But the revelation of this extraordinary fact had come to him spontaneously and remained so fixed in his mind that he resolved to probe the matter to the bottom.

His instinct abandoned him momentarily and he would search books and discover who this powerful, rich person was who had been betrayed on April 1st; which April 1st? This remained to be determined. He haunted the libraries from that time on. He marshaled before him the Premiers of the Kingdom. He found nothing to give him a clue. Some dukes and peers, some illustrious generals, some great financiers, a few princes of the blood. He stopped an instant at Law, but he was too dissipated; at Maurice de Saxe, who ought to have won the Battle of Fontenoy; at the Count du Barry, who had had the most beautiful mistress in Paris. He feared that perhaps he had been the Count de Charolais, who distinguished himself by his debauches, and killed the thatchers on the roofs by shooting at them. He was forty-eight hours the Cardinal of Palegria, but was disgusted when he learned that his Eminence had been a farm hand for the Duchess of Maine. It was refreshing to find in some corner of history a sympathetic count or lord that the writers of the epoch had adorned in engaging colors and on whom they had bestowed some virtues. But Théophraste soon saw that all these would have to be abandoned. For none of them had the principal qualifications of having been shut up in the Conciergerie in 1721, or having been betrayed on an April 1st.

However, in the Journal of the Barber, he discovered a bastard of the Regent, about whom were some startling facts which precipitated him into a state of great excitement.

Before entering into the details, however, of this discovery, we will return to the doings of Marceline and M. Adolphe Lecamus.

CHAPTER IV

Some Philosophy and a Song

LET us leave Paris awhile and return to the little estate on the banks of the Marne, which Théophraste generally moved to with the first rays of the July sun. This year he was to go there before Marceline and his friend, Adolphe, who had been commissioned to survey the timbers on some lands elsewhere. Thus these last few days he could spend alone in security and peace to attend to this unusual treatise which his new position in the world had given him.

The name of the house was “Villa Flots d’Azure.” Théophraste had given it this name against the wishes of Adolphe, who protested that the name was for a villa near the sea. He had replied with logic that he had often gone to the Preport, and that he had always seen the sea green; that he knew the Marne, and that on account of the reflected blue sky the water seemed blue. Do they not say “the beautiful blue Danube”? It was not only the ocean that had blue waves, so he did not see why he should not call his villa on the Marne “Villa Flots d’Azure.”

That day was the anniversary of their marriage. Théophraste was very fond of Marceline, and these anniversaries were always the occasion for much merry-making. Marceline also loved Théophraste, and saw no reason why she should not like Adolphe equally as well, whereas, on the other side, Adolphe adored Marceline and would have died for Théophraste. On reflection, the name “Villa Flots d’Amour” would have been more appropriate than “Villa Flots d’Azure,” such harmony existed therein.

Théophraste shook Adolphe’s hand effusively. He complimented his wife on her beauty. He had his green umbrella that day, and in making his congratulations twirled it in a fashion, as he thought, resembling the manner in which they used canes in the beginning of the eighteenth century. He was not a vain person, but he knew by this scientific miracle that he had been a great man two hundred years ago, and he felt that he should convey the impression that he had moved among great people and affairs.

It was their custom upon their return to their country house to invite a few friends to a party to celebrate the occasion. Upon this occasion Théophraste was at his best. He was in high spirits, and while passing the good word to the gentlemen, made flattering speeches to the ladies. The table was set in the garden under a tent where the guests assembled. After a while the conversation turned to the latest doings in angling. M. Lopard had caught a trout of three pounds; old M. Tartoush had cast his line on Sunday-having caught nothing, complained that people made too much noise shooting during the week, and drove the fish from these waters. All joined in the conversation and gave their experiences except M. Théophraste.

He kept silent. He found the topic too commonplace and felt a desire to raise its level. He wanted it to drift into some subject related to that preoccupying his mind. After awhile he was able to get Adolphe interested in the subject of ghosts. From ghosts the conversation led on to spiritualism. One lady knew a somnambulist and related some strange stories which were calculated to work upon the imagination of the company. Adolphe, upon this, explained the spiritualistic point of view of the phenomena of somnambulism, and cited well-known authorities. He seemed quite in his element, and finally reached the point desired by Théophraste, the transmigration of souls and reincarnation.

“Is it possible,” said Marceline, “that a soul comes back to live in its body? You have often told me so, Adolphe, but it seems to me that one’s reason strongly repulses such an hypothesis.” “Nothing is lost in Nature,” replied Adolphe, positively. “Neither the soul nor the body. All is transformed, the soul as well as the body. The reincarnation of souls at the end of a century is a doctrine which goes back to such great antiquity that the ancient philosophers do not deny it.”

“If one’s soul returned to a body,” said Marceline, “one would surely know it.”

“Not always,” said Adolphe, “but sometimes.” “Ah, sometimes?” asked Théophraste, who was by this time becoming intensely interested.

“Yes, there are cases. For instance: Ptolemy Caesar, son of Caesar and Cleopatra, who was king of Egypt before Christ, remembered well to have been Pythagoras, a Greek philosopher, who lived 600 years before.”

“Impossible!” cried the ladies, and the gentlemen smiled skeptically.

“You need not laugh, gentlemen. It is impossible to be more serious. Our actual transformation, which is the final word in science, is in full accord with the theory of reincarnation. What is transformation except the idea that living things transform themselves, progressing one into another? Nature presents herself to us under the aspect of a spark, elaborately perfecting without ceasing to create, to attain an ideal which will be the millennium. Whatever Nature does for the body she does for the soul. It can be proved, for I have studied this side a great deal, and it is the original of all sciences.

Monsieur Adolphe was not understood by the company, a fact of which he was inwardly proud. He liked to feel a superiority of intellect, and often he would raise the conversation above the level of his audience just to gratify his vanity. He touched on many points which only need be referred to lightly here in order to convince skeptics that the extraordinary history of Théophraste is founded on a most scientific basis.

“The transmigration of souls was taught in India,” said Adolphe; “the cradle of the genus human, then in Egypt, then in Greece. They chanted its mysteries in the name of Orpheus. Pythagoras, who continued the teaching, did not admit with the philosophers on the banks of the Ganges that the soul traveled over the cycle of all animal existence. He made it come back, for example, into a pig.”

“There are some men,” said Madame Beulie, “who still have the souls of pigs.”

“Without doubt,” said Adolphe, smiling; “but what Pythagoras says is that we must not conclude from that, that pigs have the souls of men. Plato also adopts this doctrine. It is the first which gave in the Phidon the proof that souls do not exile themselves forever and that they come back to animate bodies anew.”

“Oh, if we could only get proof of that it would be nothing for me to die,” declared old Mlle. Tabouret, who had a mortal terror of dying.

“Here are the proofs,” continued Adolphe. “They are two in number. One is taken from the general law of Nature, the other from human nature. First, Nature is governed by the laws of contraries, and from that we see that while death succeeds life, all would end by being absorbed in death, and Nature would one day come to an end like Endymion. Therefore I say that we exist after death.

“Secondly, if after consulting the general laws of Nature we turn to our own minds, we will find there the same dogma attested by the fact of resemblance. ‘To learn,’ said Plato, ‘is nothing but to recollect. Since our souls learn, they must have a resemblance. What does it recollect except to have lived, and to have lived in another body? Why can we not believe that in leaving the body while it is animate at this time it can animate several others in succession?’ I quote Plato literally,” remarked Adolphe.

Then he passed from Plato to a modern authority. “Charles Fournier has said: ‘Where is the old man who has not truly wished to be born again, and to use in another life the experience he has acquired in this?’ To pretend that that desire ought not to be realized is to admit that God can deceive us. We ought then to recognize that we have lived previous to being what we are, and that several other lives await us. All these lives, to the number of eight hundred and ten, are distributed between five periods and embrace a span of eighty-one thousand years. Allan Hardai reckons that the soul returns to another body after two or three thousand years unless we die a violent death. Then it is quite possible one can be reincarnated after two hundred years.”

Adolphe had by this time drawn all around him and became the center of attraction by his entertaining remarks. Théophraste had sat open-eyed, listening intently, and upon hearing the last

remark thought “That is well. They may have hung me; so if I did not die that way, they may have got rid of me by some other death more in keeping with my station in life. Nevertheless,” he thought, “if all these people here could only realize that they had a prince of the royal blood among them, they would be very much astonished, and be filled with respect. But no, he will still be Théophraste Longuet, manufacturer of rubber stamps.”

Champagne was brought, and soon the air rang merrily with general chatter and the explosion of corks. It was then that Marceline turned around to Théophraste and begged him to sing the song which he was accustomed to sing on the anniversary of their marriage. He had sung it the day of their wedding, and on account of its beauty they had adopted it as their wedding song. It was Lissette de Baranger.

However, to the consternation of Marceline and all the guests, instead of singing the song, he rose, threw his napkin on the table and said to her in that strange voice which they heard at the Conciergerie:

“As thou wishest, Marie Antoinette, I can refuse thee nothing.”

“Oh, my God,” cried Marceline. “Hear what he called me in that strange voice!”

The guests were obviously uncomfortable, and did not know what to make of his peculiar behavior. The song was a vulgar song of the Regency period, and certainly not for such a gathering as was at this party. He sang it with the old French air:

Tou joli belle mimiere—
Tou joli, moulin.

CHAPTER V

Théophraste Remembers Himself

THEOPHRASTE sang the song in loud, strident tones, his eyes sparkling, glass in hand. It was with indescribable surprise that the company received it, and despite the richness of the rhyme, the couplet was followed by no applause. An awkward silence followed, and all the ladies looked to Marceline for an explanation.

What was it that Marceline could explain? Adolphe himself looked at Théophraste in surprise; but Théophraste, as if possessed with the devil, continued with the second couplet of the drinking song. When he had finished, he sat down, looked around with satisfaction, and said to Marceline, “What do you think of that, Marie Antoinette?”

In the midst of a death-like silence preserved by all, Marceline asked tremblingly, “Why do you call me Marie Antoinette?”

“Because you are the most beautiful of all!” cried Théophraste. “I appeal to Madame la Marechale de Bouilleurs, who has taste. I appeal to all of you. And there is not one who, by the signet of the Pope, will contradict me, neither the Eros Picards, nor the Bourbons, nor the Burgundias, nor the Provincials, nor the Poet St. Jack, nor Gatelard, nor Bras-de-Fer, nor Guente Noir, not even Bal-a-voir.”

M. Théophraste had on his right old Mlle. Tabouret, and he pinched her knee as he looked at Marceline, which nearly made that austere person faint. No one dared to move; for the fiery look of Théophraste frightened the whole company. He leaned amorously towards Mlle. Tabouret, and said to her, staring at Marceline, who was by this time weeping: “Let us see, Mlle. Tabouret, am I not right? To whom can I compare her? Is it La Belle Laitere, or La Petite Minion; or even La Blanche of the bowling alley; or La Belle Helene, who kept the Harp Tavern?”

Turning towards Adolphe, he said with great energy, “Come you, Va-de-Bon Cour, tell me your opinion. Look at Marie Antoinette a little while. By the fatted calf, she puts them all in the shade: Jeannette, the flower girl of the Royal Palace; Marie Leroy and the female Solomon, the beauty of the Temple; Jeanne Bonnefoy, who kept the café of the Port Marie; Manon de Versailles, the poultry girl—none of them approach her in beauty.”

He then leapt with one bound upon the table, and breaking the dishes, cups and plates into a thousand pieces, held his glass over his head and shouted, “Let us drink to the Queen of the Nymphs, Marie Antoinette.”

Draining his glass, he smashed it against the table and waved his hand, which was covered with blood. By this time the party had fled in terror, fearing that some tragedy would follow Théophraste’s strange behavior. On superficially thinking of these curious actions one would immediately conclude that he had gone mad or was drunk, but this was not the case. There is another kind of sense beside common sense. It was not because he was crazy or drunk that he could sing a song that he had never learnt, speak a language that he had never heard, or refer to people that he had never read about, who had been dead for centuries. There must have been some other force working in his brain.

Modern scientific experiments have shown with indisputable examples that this particular case was far from unique. Ignorant people, who neither knew how to read or write, who had never been outside their village, have been known to give most correct answers to the medium who questioned them in a dead language. And this has been before professors of colleges, not before charlatans. It is difficult to explain. It is the mystery of this life, the life hereafter. Some say that it is a learned spirit talking through these ignorant mouths, others have timidly expressed the opinion that such phenomena can only be explained by the remembrance of a former life. Therefore the things which

Théophraste said and did without understanding, the Other who relives in him at intervals understands perfectly well, and if we would understand them we must know who this Other is.

As to Théophraste, after the guests had disappeared from the tent, he climbed down from the table. He found it more difficult to reach the floor than it had been to climb upon the table, and he knelt down, taking great precaution not to fall. He then assumed his natural self and called Marceline. She did not answer him, and in searching for her he found her trembling with fright in her room. He closed the door carefully and prepared to give an explanation. She looked at him with her large eyes, amazed, filled with tears, and he felt it his duty as a husband not to conceal from her any longer this extraordinary phenomenon which had been preoccupying his mind.

The night was ideal, and after they had retired he said to her, "My dear Marceline, you cannot understand what has happened to me this evening, and I can assure you I don't understand myself, but in telling you all I know perhaps we can arrive at some conclusion."

He then related all the details of his visits to the cellars of the Conciergerie. He concealed nothing, and sketched in minute details the extraordinary feelings which had actuated him that evening, and the unknown influence which had commanded him. At first she said nothing, but softly moved away from him as if afraid of him; but when he came to the document which revealed the existence of the treasures, she demanded to see it at once. He judged then that she was taking an interest in the adventure and felt thankful. They got up and he showed her the paper in the light of the full moon, which was streaming into the room. Like all those who had seen it before, she recognized the handwriting immediately, and made the sign of the cross as if fearing some sorcery. Marceline was not a fool, but explained that she could not help making the sign. However, she soon became composed, and began to praise Adolphe, who, in spite of Théophraste's disapproval, had initiated her into the elements of spiritualism, a science she said which would be of some service to Théophraste in his condition. But even in the face of that uncontestable evidence she found it difficult to believe that he was a reincarnated spirit dating back two hundred years, until he asked her who she thought he had been.

Marceline didn't think that he had been a very great personage, and in reply to his disappointed inquiry she said:

"Because this evening you sang in slang, and the ladies whose names you mentioned do not belong to the aristocracy. People who frequented La Terpidere, La Platire, Manon de Versailles, I think are not of much account."

"But I also mentioned the leader of the Bouffleurs," replied Théophraste, "and you know that morals were so dissolute under the Regency of the Duke of Orleans that the fashion at Court was to call the ladies in slighting terms. What do you think of the idea of me being the Bastard of the Regent?"

For sole response she embraced Théophraste in delight, and recollecting his duty on this day of celebration proved to her that if he was more than two hundred years old, his love always remained youthful.

CHAPTER VI

M. Lecamus Expresses His Views

AFTER a while Marceline was able to persuade Théophraste to confide in M. Adolphe Lecamus. She declared that Adolphe's great experience, his certain knowledge of the science of metaphysics, ought to be a great help to a man who had buried treasures two hundred years before and wished to find them again. "And," she added, "it is he who will be able to reveal your identity."

He yielded to her persuasions, and in the morning told Adolphe everything. Adolphe was astonished, and it surprised Théophraste that a man who professed Spiritualism should show so much emotion when face to face with a reincarnated spirit. He said that Théophraste's conduct at the dinner table the day before and the words he uttered to him before and since the visit to the Conciergerie were well calculated to prepare him for such a confidence, but he did not expect such a thing as this. He demanded to see the proof of such a phenomenon. Théophraste readily showed the document, and Adolphe could not deny the authenticity of it. He recognized the handwriting at once, and exclaimed, upon examination, that the handwriting explained many things to him. He had often thought how curiously the characters in Théophraste's handwriting differed from his real character. It had always been difficult for him to associate the handwriting with Théophraste.

"Really," said Théophraste, "what character do you ascribe to me?"

"Well, if you will promise not to bear me any ill, I will tell you!"

On this assurance he painted Théophraste's character. It was that of a kind citizen, an honest merchant, an excellent husband, but a man incapable of showing any firmness, wit or energy. He told him also that his timidity was excessive, and that kindness was always ready to degenerate into weakness. The picture was not at all flattering, and Théophraste felt a little hurt.

"And now," said he, "that you have told me what you think of my character, tell me what you think of my writing."

Then he made observations on his handwriting which would not have failed to make him quite angry if he had not remembered that Signor Petito had said the same. He said:

"Your writing expresses all the contrary sentiments in your nature as I know it, and I can imagine nothing more antithetical than your writing and your real character. Thus you do not write a characteristic hand, but the handwriting of the Other."

Théophraste was deeply interested. He thought of the strength and energy of the Other, he imagined that he was a great captain. However, Adolphe's next remark completely disillusioned him.

"Any sign in those formations, in the pointed fashion they have of reuniting, and in the way of growing tall and of climbing up, and of passing each other, show energy, firmness, obstinacy, ardor, activity, and ambition, but all for evil."

This dismayed him, but he exclaimed with a show of spirit: "Where is the evil? Where is the good? If Attila had known how to write perhaps he would have written like Napoleon."

"They called Attila the scourge of God."

"And Napoleon the scourge of man," replied Théophraste, with difficulty controlling his anger.

How could it be that Théophraste Longuet could have been anything else but an honest being before his birth, during his life, and after his death?

Marceline agreed with him, and Adolphe fearing that he had gone too far made apologies.

CHAPTER VII

Théophraste and His Black Plume

FOR the next few days M. Lecamus and M.

Longuet occupied themselves with evidence of this phenomenon, and were often seen together, conversing mysteriously, in the bar-rooms and about town, about the treason of the first of April. They left the Villa Flots d'Azure to return to Paris, with the intention of searching the libraries. They worked diligently for several days without any result, until M. Longuet began to lose spirit. M. Lecamus was more patient.

One evening as they were walking towards the Rond Point, in the Champs Elysees, he turned around and said, "What can we do to find the approximate place where the treasures are buried if you have not your black plume?" Théophraste and Marceline could not understand this, and asked for an explanation. He commented:

"You have heard of the water witches who could discover water by the aid of a wand, by a phenomenon which nobody has as yet been able to explain. These witches traced water across the various beds of earth, and by pointing the little rods, indicated where it was necessary to dig in order to make a well. I do not despair of showing you, Théophraste, where your treasures are buried. I will conduct you over the ground shown in the document, and tell you where it is that you must dig to find your treasure."

"Yes," interrupted Théophraste, "but this does not explain to us what you mean by 'the black plume.'"

"I am coming to that now. I am obliged to speak of Darwin. You will understand directly. You know that Darwin devoted himself to several celebrated experiments, of which the best known is that with pigeons.

"Desirous of accounting for the phenomenon of heredity and the value that he attached to it, he closely studied the breeding of pigeons, which is sufficiently rapid to have enabled him to draw conclusions upon an appreciable number of generations. At the end of the tenth generation he found the same type of pigeon, with the same defects, the same qualities, the same form, the same outline, and the same black plume there in the same place where the first pigeon had a black feather. Very well! With that I will prove to you that it is the same with souls as it is with bodies.

"At the end of the tenth generation, we find the same soul, as far as it exists, with the same defects, the same virtues, and, as it were, with the original black feather. While giving you this illustration, it is necessary to distinguish between the soul which reappears thus hereditarily, and that which comes back by reincarnation. Believing that it is the result of a unique combination which nothing can oppose, and, since it dwells in a case called a body, is hereditary in the same degree as that body, an hereditary soul which comes from an ancestor always has his black feather, while a soul which comes back by reincarnation finds itself in a body which is in no way prepared to receive it. The aggregate materials of this body are original, and decaying, momentarily impose a silence on that soul.

"But a time comes when this soul becomes the strongest, when it speaks, when it shows itself entirely, just as the black feather does.

"Now, Théophraste, for several generations you were the honest gardeners in the Ferte-sous-Jonarre. But when that soul speaks in you, you are no longer yourself. Théophraste Longuet has disappeared. It is the Other who is there. It is the Other who has the gesture, the manner, the action, the black feather. It is the other who recalls the mystery of the treasure, it is the Other who remembers the Other."

“Oh! This is admirable!” exclaimed Théophraste, who was so deeply moved that he could hardly refrain from weeping with excitement. “And now I understand what you mean by my black feather. My black feather returns to me when I am the Other.”

“And he will help you then, my friend,” declared Adolphe with conviction. “But until we have released the unknown who is hidden in Théophraste Longuet, and until he lives with sufficient strength, audacity, and liberty, until he is resuscitated, in a word, until he appears to us with his ‘black feather,’ we will confine ourselves to the study of that interesting document which you brought from the Conciergerie. Let us make a plan for penetrating the mystery. We will find out exactly where the treasures are buried, but we must wait for the spirit who dwells in you to say to us, ‘It is there.’”

“My friend,” said Marceline, overflowing with admiration, “you talk like a book, and I wonder that you have not more often tried to teach us these things, for we are so ignorant. You must not leave a stone unturned to find the treasure. I do not fear the destruction of the earth on account of the object of our search.”

Adolphe turned around to reprove Marceline for her flippancy, but at this moment M. Milfroid, the Commissioner of Police, approached, and Adolphe rose to greet his friend.

Adolphe introduced M. Milfroid to M. and Mme. Longuet. He was a man of about forty years of age, elegantly dressed, immaculate gloves, a silvery ringlet of hair on the white forehead. He advanced, smiling and bowing.

“We have often heard our friend M. Adolphe speak of you,” said Marceline. “Your fame has gone before you.”

“Oh, madame, I have known you for a long time. Every time I meet M. Lecamus he speaks to me of his friends of the Rue Gerauds, and in such terms that it has been my greatest desire to have the happiness of being presented to you.”

Marceline was conquered by such gallant manners. “I hear that you play the violin very well,” she said.

“I am equally interested in philosophy,” said M. Milfroid. “An interest which I owe to M. Adolphe, who is continually in dispute with me over the immortality of the soul, and other psychic matters. He has really made a convert of me.”

“Monsieur,” said Théophraste, who had not yet taken part in the conversation, “Adolphe and I like to converse about serious matters, also. We were just speaking of the relations between the soul and the body, and the different ways that the soul has of behaving with the body.”

“Ah!” said M. Milfroid, who desired to shine before Marceline, “are you able to distinguish between matter and mind, or the material and the spiritual? Matter and mind are the same thing in the eyes of science. That is to say, they constitute alike one unit, one force, produce at one time the phenomenon of cause and effect, tending to one end, the progressive steps of existence. You are the only ones, gentlemen, to still make that old distinction between matter and mind.”

After a while they rose and returned through the Place de la Concorde. At the entrance to the Rue Royale, there was a crowd of people, shouting and gesticulating. Théophraste, an old Parisian, wanted to know what was taking place, and flung himself into the crowd.

“Look out for pickpockets,” Marceline called to him.

“Oh, madame,” said Monsieur Milfroid, the Commissioner of Police, “there are no pickpockets when I am about.”

“It is true. We should be in no danger when you are here.”

“I do not know about that,” said Adolphe, looking about them. “My friend here appears more dangerous to me than all the pickpockets on earth.” At this they all laughed.

Théophraste made them wait ten minutes before he appeared, and then he announced that it was a coachman who had gotten his wheels locked with an automobile, and could not separate them.

Marceline felt annoyed at having been kept waiting so long on such a slight pretext. However, her thoughts were diverted in doing the honors of a hostess, and she invited M. Milfroid to dinner.

During the dinner many pleasantries were passed, and M. Milfroid excelled in complimenting Marceline.

Suddenly, he became uneasy, and plunging his hands in his pockets, looked vainly for his handkerchief. After a final and useless search, he passed his forefinger under his moustache, and sighed, declaring that it did not matter.

However, at that moment Théophraste wiped his mouth, and Marceline asked him where he had found such a beautiful handkerchief. M. Milfroid at once recognized it as his own, and thinking it just a piece of pleasantry, took the handkerchief from Théophraste. However, feeling in his left side, he became pale and exclaimed, "Good God! I have lost my pocketbook. There were five hundred francs in it." M. Milfroid did not regret losing the five hundred francs, but he found himself ridiculed by Adolphe, and Marceline teased him gently and laughed prettily. They were all poking fun at him, and this made him furious.

"M. Milfroid," said Théophraste, "if you need any money for the evening I can lend it to you," and he drew a wallet from his pocket. M. Milfroid uttered a cry: it was his! M. Milfroid took the wallet from him as he had done the handkerchief, and alleging numerous engagements, he took his leave. Before going down the stairs, he said to his friend Adolphe, who followed him, "These are nice kind of people you have introduced me to."

When Adolphe returned to the dining-room, Théophraste was emptying his pockets. On the table there lay three watches, six handkerchiefs, several pocketbooks, containing large sums of money, and eighteen checks.

CHAPTER VIII

An Appeal for Help

THE important events of this story and its hero have occupied us to such an extent that we have not found time to present Monsieur Lecamus as he should be. The little that we know of him does not effect our sympathy. The place that he occupies in the house of Longuet, which is eminently immoral; the cynicism with which he deceives an innocent soul; the little danger that he seems to run in accomplishing the larceny- these are good reasons why we have deferred showing our contempt for him. It may be said that we have judged hastily, and have not allowed him to plead extenuating circumstances. The principal one, and the one which it would be well for us to dwell upon, is that he really liked Théophraste above everybody else. He loved him with his faults, his weaknesses, his ingenuousness, the confidence he had in him, and above all, the admiration Théophraste had for him. There was no sacrifice he would not make for Théophraste, and I daresay that if Théophraste had any pecuniary troubles, which after all are the only troubles which really count here below, Adolphe Lecamus would open his purse, and give to him freely. Adolphe loved Théophraste even above Marceline; and although I do not pretend to deal here with psychology, I find myself confronted with a case which is much less common than one would be inclined to believe. For Adolphe loved Marceline because he had made her his mistress.

If he had learned, by some supernatural warning, that Théophraste would some day learn his real position in the household, he would only have respected Marceline. "But," he thought to himself, "Théophraste will never know anything about it, and as unknown evils do not exist, I will be the lover of the wife of my best friend."

These lines are necessary, that the reader may understand properly the knavish tricks of the lover. But we must understand distinctly Adolphe's devotion to Théophraste.

After the departure of the Commissioner, they all set themselves to consider what was to be done with the articles which Théophraste had brought home with him. At first they all sat silently looking at the objects, no one wishing to break the silence, until Théophraste said, "I have nothing more in my pockets. I really believe I have got my black plume."

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