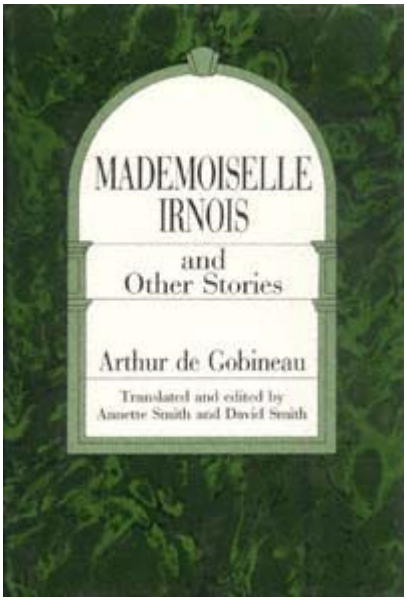
Preferred Citation: de Gobineau, Arthur Joseph. *Mademoiselle Irnois and Other Stories.* Berkeley: University of California Press, c1987 1988. http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft2w1004x8/



"Mademoiselle Irnois" and Other Stories

Arthur de Gobineau

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Berkeley · Los Angeles · Oxford

Preferred Citation: de Gobineau, Arthur Joseph. *Mademoiselle Irnois and Other Stories.* Berkeley: University of California Press, c1987 1988. http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft2w1004x8/

Acknowledgments

Our thanks go to the staff of the Millikan Library of the California Institute of Technology, in particular Janet Jenks, Judith Nollar, and Ruben Ybarra for their help with references; to the staff of the Cabinet des Estampes of the Bibliothèque Nationale, especially Jacqueline Martinet. David Elliot helped us with military and Lance Davis with economic history. For reading and responding to various sections and stages of our work, we want to thank Jean Gaulmier, Jean Boissel, Pierre-Louis Rey (who also provided us the photograph of Gobineau), Virgil Burnett, Jerome McGann, Oscar Mandel, Eleanor Searle, and John Sutherland. We are both endebted and grateful to our colleague George Pigman III, who has patiently and generously educated us in word processing, formatting, and typesetting (and when education failed, took over); to John R. Miles, who encouraged us early in the game, when it most counted; to our editor Scott Mahler, a loyal champion of our manuscript; to David Grether, chairman of the Humanities and Social Sciences Division of the California Institute of Techology, for a travel grant which permitted iconographic research and for other financial assistance; and finally to each other: *Amant alterna Camenae* .

ANNETTE AND DAVID SMITH

Foreword

Introducing at a century's distance a fiction writer who was also a historian, a philosopher, and a self-taught scientist requires a large and complex web of information. Rather than annotate the introduction and translations excessively, we would like to acknowledge here the sources to which many of our pages refer whether annotated or not. The three volumes of the *Pléiade* edition of

Gobineau's *Oeuvres* , edited by Jean Gaulmier with the collaboration of Jean Boissel (Vol. I), of Pierre Lésétieux and Vincent Monteuil (Vol. II), and of Jean Boissel and Marie-Louise Concasty (Vol. III), amount to a condensed research library. The three volumes represent the culmination of several decades of studies centered (from 1966 to 1978) around the *Etudes gobiniennes* . Boissel's *Gobineau, L'Orient et l'Iran* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973) [cited as *L'Orient et l'Iran*] and *Gobineau* (Paris: Hachette, 1981) and Pierre-Louis Rey's *Univers romanesque de Gobineau* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981) [cited as *Univers romanesque*] provide comprehensive treatments of Gobineau's relationship with the Middle East, his life and his aesthetics, respectively. Finally, some of the ideas in the first two sections of the introduction are borrowed from a study by Annette Smith, *Gobineau et l'histoire naturelle* (Paris/Geneva: Droz, 1984). Still, not all has been said elsewhere, and it is our hope that this hearty sampling of Gobineau's short stories will give English-speaking readers an appetite for the rest of the fare.

The texts on which our translations are based are those of the *Pléiade* edition, in which typographical errors as well as numerous small errors inadvertently introduced by the author have been corrected by the editors. Still, there remain many baffling lines and redundancies that stem from Gobineau's generally spontaneous and emotional, rather than logical, style. His punctuation as well was personal, at times erratic. For the most part, these flaws and eccentricities have been reproduced in the translation as part of his *écriture* ; only those that would have interfered with clarity have been altered.

We have also observed French conventions regarding the punctuation of dialogue (though using American quotation marks), in part because they better render Gobineau's mode of handling it and in part because they help retain the flavor of the French text, albeit translated. To a similar though temporal end, we have occasionally and unobtrusively, we hope, capitalized somewhat more in accordance with nineteenth-century practice than that of our own time.

With regard to rendering Gobineau's approximations of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian words and place-names, we looked for English transliterations from the period or as close to it as possible. With this in mind we used the following sources in this order of priority: J. J. Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (London, 1851) and *A Journey through Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor* . . . (London, 1812); J. P. Ferrier, *Caravan Journeys and Wanderings in Persia, Afghanistan, Turkestan* . . . (London, 1856) and *History of the Afghans* (London, 1859); A. W. Kinglake, *Eothen* (London, 1893); E. G. Browne, *A Year amongst the Persians* . . . (London, 1893); and S. G. Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs* . . . (New York, 1899). We only exceptionally borrowed from *The Travels of Sir John Chardin into Persia and the East Indies* (1691) as it is of another era. We favored the first four works because Gobineau knew Morier's and

---

Ferrier's writing. These authors were rarely consistent vis-à-vis one another and not always consistent within their own works, and concessions had to be made to common sense and euphony. Finally, *Webster's International Dictionary* proved helpful when all else failed.

As a rule we have refrained from annotating words that are sufficiently explained in the text by the author, but for convenience we have annotated foreign words and those that would require the average reader to seek help in a dictionary or an encyclopedia.

While a general background for Gobineau seemed desirable before approaching the texts, information relevant to each one of the stories as well as our own critical notes on the stories are presented at the end of the volume. Thus, general readers eager to attack the fiction will not be delayed by the scholarly apparatus and need not go further than the stories themselves. Scholars and students of literature will, it is hoped, find the afterword useful. All translations are our own unless specified otherwise.

For a complete Gobineau bibliography, see any of the works mentioned at the beginning of this foreword. In addition to the *Pléiade* edition of the *Oeuvres* , we list below all editions and collections of Gobineau's works cited in the notes and, where appropriate, the abbreviations used.

Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg (Fonds Gobineau). [BNUS]

Correspondance entre le Comte de Gobineau et le Comte de Prokesch-Osten (1854–1876). Paris: Plon, 1933. [*Corr. Prokesch-Osten*]

Correspondance Tocqueville-Gobineau. In A. de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres complètes* , Vol. IX. Paris: Gallimard, 1959. [*Corr. Tocqueville*]

— xii —

Les Dépêches diplomatiques du Comte de Gobineau en Perse , edited by A. Doris Hytier. Geneva: Droz, 1959. [*Dépêches diplomatiques*]

Deux études sur la Grèce moderne. Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1905.

Dom Pedro e o Conde de Gobineau , edited by G. Raeders. Sao Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1938. [*Corr. Pedro*]

Ecrits de Perse: Treize lettres à sa soeur , edited by A. B. Duff. *Mercure de France* (Nov. 1957): 385–415.

Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines , edited by J. Boissel. In *Oeuvres* , Vol. I, pp. 1174. [*Essai*].

Etudes critiques (1842–1847) , edited by R. Béziau. Paris: Klincksieck, 1984.

Etudes gobiniennes , Vols. I–IX, edited by J. Gaulmier. Paris: Klincksieck, 1966–1978.

Histoire d'Ottar Jarl, pirate norvégien. . . .Paris: Didier et Cie, 1879. [*Ottar Jarl*]

Lettres à deux Athéniennes , edited by N. Mela. Athens: Lib. Kauffmann, 1936.

Lettres brésiliennes , edited by M. L. Concasty. Paris: Editions du Delta, 1969.

Mademoiselle Irnois, Adélaïde et autres nouvelles , edited by P.-L. Rey. Paris: Gallimard, 1985 [*Mademoiselle Irnois*].

Nouvelles asiatiques , edited by J. Boissel. In *Oeuvres* , Vol. III, pp. 305–573.

— xiii —

Les Pléiades , edited by J. Gaulmier. In *Oeuvres* , Vol. III, pp. 929–1168.

Oeuvres. 3 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1983–1987. [*Pl.* I, *Pl.* II, *Pl.* III]

Poemi inediti di Arthur de Gobineau , edited by P. Berselli Ambri. Florence: L. Olshki, 1965. [*Poemi inediti*]

Les Religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale , edited by J. Gaulmier and V. Monteuil. In *Oeuvres* , Vol. II, pp. 403–809. [*Religions et philosophies*]

Trois ans en Asie , edited by J. Gaulmier and V. Monteuil. In *Oeuvres* , Vol. II, pp. 27–401.

Voyage à Terre-Neuve . Paris: Hachette, 1861.

— 1 —

Introduction

In the realm of French literature, one of the surest signs of an author's consecration is inclusion in the definitive, critical *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* published by Gallimard. The works of Arthur de Gobineau finally received such recognition in 1983, missing the centennial of his death by one year. Gobineau would, however, have been satisfied. "Time is on my side," he wrote in 1869.[1] He also wrote, "My contemporaries will only appreciate me one hundred years after my death,"[2] which, perhaps, offers evidence of clairvoyance, if not logic. But then Logic and Luck were not among those presiding over his birth. It would be difficult to name a nineteenth-century writer more at odds with his era.

The simplest way to characterize Gobineau is by the prefix *anti.* He was antirepublican, anticolonialist, antiprogressive, and antievolutionist in the century of democratization, imperialist expansion, technical progress, and Darwinism. As a student, he was judged impertinent and expelled from school. As a writer, he offended even some of his strongest supporters (Tocqueville, for one) with the somber anti-Christian determinism of *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* , irked such veteran orientalists as Botta, Pott, and Mohl with his eccentric explanation of the cuneiforms, and ranted in vain against evolutionists as entrenched as Lyell, Oppert, and even Darwin. But he felt an equal contempt for the "so outrageously ignorant and inept" good Catholics

— 2 —

in the opposite camp.[3] As a diplomat in Greece, he antagonized his English and Russian counterparts as well as the Greek Nationalists. And he periodically infuriated his administrative superiors with his

constant complaints, leaving a voluminous record of his squabbles with them in a thick (still unpublished) dossier monomaniacally labeled "Various Knaveries." Yet, this rebel sought admission to the Legion of Honor and usurped the title of count, courted, however awkwardly, seats in two academies, and solicited an audience with Napoleon III, "that Bonaparte" whom he despised almost as much as the "Rrrrépubbblique."[4] His personal life ended in vociferous strife with his wife and two daughters and led to a testament worthy of the Divine Marquis: "I hereby leave and bequeath what Madame de Gobineau my wife has not stolen or spent from my estate to Baroness de Guldencrone, born Diane de Gobineau . . . and do so only because the law requires it."[5]

Should we see him, as one of his most sympathetic critics does, as "a torn and aggressive being, tentative and proud . .{nb. dreaming of what he is not and rejecting what he is"[6] or, more prosaically, as a neurotic? Neither view is an inducement to read his works or to learn more about him. But we can also see in him a loving newlywed; an attentive, if demanding, father; a fiercely loyal and sometimes chivalrous friend. He was cultivated by many eminent personalities of his time and, because he was a brilliant conversationalist, was lionized by many hostesses. Although reduced to a roving bachelorhood during the last twenty years of his life, he invariably found, wherever he was stationed, the love of women who were always beautiful and often distinguished. Perhaps the secret of his charisma lay in his indomitable energy. The young writer's naive mottoes (*Réussir ou mourir* or *Malgré tout*), the adult's passion for daring voyages, the older man's willing plunge into a second career, all show the same lust for life. It takes unusual faith in oneself, in art, and in the

world to take up the sculptor's chisel as a serious commercial venture after twenty-eight years of civil service. Gobineau worked at his sculpture with the same magnitude of conception demonstrated in his most ambitious poetic works. Unlike his fiction, his sculpture, unfortunately, turned out to be as mediocre as his poetry. Still, the vision of a penniless, aged, feverish, and half-blind Gobineau stubbornly carving away in his barren Rome studio (which he once considered sharing with an ill-treated donkey) offers a clue to the question of why, after fascinating his contemporaries, he has been hailed by ours as one of the real *tempéraments* in French literature. Whether he is also "the most underrated writer in the nineteenth century"[7] is for his readers to decide.

"We Were, in Short, the Uprooted"[en8]"We Were, in Short, the Uprooted"[8]

In another display of singular logic, Gobineau wrote of his birth in 1816 in Ville-d'Avray, "I was born on a Fourteenth of July . . . which proves that opposites often come together."[9] What it proved is unclear; but what Gobineau meant to indicate was the irony of this child of a Legitimist family, later a man haunted by a nostalgia for the old monarchic order and boasting of a Viking Jarl as his ancestor, having been born on Bastille Day. His father, Louis, an officer from an ancient and distinguished Bordeaux family, was indeeed faithful enough to the Bourbon kings that he went to jail on this account in 1813 and was later (in 1831) ordered to retire. Thus, the family settled into the relative poverty that would plague Gobineau all his life, even though he was at heart disdainful of material possessions. While he maintained a satisfactory relationship with his respectable but mediocre father, it was his mother who really shaped his destiny. Anne-Louise Madeleine de Gercy brought to the marriage the double enigma of a father who might have been

one of Louis XV's bastards and of a Creole mother from Santo Domingo. While Creoles are, of course, defined as of pure white blood, by a curious metonymy, they represented for Gobineau (who married one himself) the closest thing to mulatto women, in whom he found "an often powerful charm."[10] Madeleine de Gobineau was restless and bored by provincial life and had literary ambitions, which eventually resulted in two obscure publications. The story of her life is not unlike that of a less worthy "Muse du Département," that daring Balzac heroine. But what makes a good *feuilleton* rarely makes a good family.

After the birth of a second child, Caroline (who was always to remain Gobineau's confidante), Madame de Gobineau had another daughter by her children's young preceptor, Charles de La Coindière. In 1827 (Gobineau was then eleven) she and her lover left the conjugal home, taking the three children along on a life of wandering and less than straight business. In 1830, charged with swindling, she fled to Basel and then to Bienne, also in Switzerland, where Gobineau attended the local gymnasium for approximately eighteen months. Madame de Gobineau thereby fulfilled the old truth

that no parental curse or beneficence is unmitigated. For while she created in the young Gobineau an immense insecurity and anxiety about his origins (one she would later increase by circulating rumors that he was a foundling), she was also responsible for giving him a solidly Germanic and Germanophile education. The gymnasium masters introduced him to eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German idealism and its two-pronged currents: organicism and orientalism. The former promoted a biological model for all aspects of human endeavor, particularly in the social sciences; the latter, a rediscovery of the Orient as the cradle of Western civilization. Gobineau's lifelong tropisms—his organic view of history and his obsession with origins (of mankind, of cultures, of writing, of Persia, and eventually

of his own family)—were activated by the curriculum of the Bienne gymnasium and reinforced, in the second case, by the basic and private wound of a displaced and ill-loved child.

In 1834, the two older children were called back to France by their father, then living in Lorient. Instead of pursuing mathematics, which would have opened to him the doors of Saint-Cyr, Gobineau embarked on a program of general studies, of which the classics, folklore and (even this early) oriental subjects and languages comprised a sizable part. In October 1835, having failed to gain entrance to the military academy, he left for Paris with fifty francs in his pocket. His Parisian uncle, Thibault-Joseph, an aging lecher and the supposed "rich uncle," never became the gold mine anticipated by the family. Gobineau rented a garret and painfully survived with menial jobs. This harsh initiation into the "hell" of Paris triggered his lasting hatred of the metropolis and his eventual self-imposed expatriation.

He had arrived with letters of introduction to some of the eminent men and fashionable salons of the time. The lively correspondence with his family—his sister in particular—constitutes a humorous documentation of the life of an impecunious twenty-year-old would-be dandy and already committed intellectual. Under the wings of such established scholars as Mohl, Baron Eckstein, Quatremère, Sainte-Beuve, acquainted with Ballanche, Lamartine, de Maistre, Lacordaire, Talleyrand, Tocqueville, and even Alexander von Humboldt, the great anthropologist and pioneering ecologist, Gobineau served his apprenticeship as a mediocre poet, passable orientalist, and gifted journalist. Between 1840 and 1848, he published several feuilletons, including "Mademoiselle Irnois," and wrote one tragedy. With a group of selected friends (the "Scelti") he founded the soon-aborted *Revue de l'orient* and then, in 1848, the more serious *Revue provinciale* , dedicated to the administrative decentralization of France. Sometime in 1844, Gobineau, who in the

first years of his Parisian life had had his heart broken by a provincial girlfriend, met Clémence Monnerot, and in 1846 he married her. Whether coincidence or the result of Gobineau's personal bent, she, like Gobineau's maternal grandmother, was a Creole, and, like his mother (who by then had seen the inside of several prisons), seems to have been a willful woman. Beautiful enough to have served as a model for Chassériau, distinguished in manners and with a flair for elegance, Clémence nevertheless repeated the pattern set by Gobineau's family: she eventually left her husband. However, in 1849, the turning point in his career, their marriage was quiet and happy. The couple became the parents of a daughter, Diane, and only the lack of money prevented perfect happiness. But that same year, their financial situation improved. Tocqueville, who had been one of Gobineau's mentors since 1843, became minister of foreign affairs and took his protégé as his *chef de cabinet* , then secured his appointment as first secretary of the French Legation in Berne.

It was thus that Gobineau's thirty-year career as a maverick diplomat began. He was not a success. Although his journalistic training had given him a fine intuition about foreign affairs, he was cantankerous, frank, stubborn, proud, and poor—five reasons for his superiors, many of whom were run-of-the-mill bureaucrats, to dislike him. His posts and missions took him all over the world, from Switzerland to Greece, from Germany to Newfoundland, and from Brazil to Sweden. By far the most important assignment for Gobineau's intellectual maturation was his being posted to the Middle East, which he welcomed as "the real thing" after his merely bookish (and perhaps superficial) knowledge of the Orient.

He went twice to Persia. The first time, from May 1855 to January 1858, he was *chargé de mission* , then head of the French Legation. During this period, he traveled in a caravan from Boûchir to Teheran, camping in the midst

— 7 —

of bedouins. The impression made on the neophyte Gobineau by this rough but relatively genuine way of apprehending Persia and by the unforgettable visions of Persepolis and Ispahan would color forever his responses to the Middle East. Teheran, where he and his family enjoyed the novelty of being western "potentates," was, at least at first, more to the taste of Clémence. But soon, cholera, administrative harassment, the corruption of French adventurers in Persia, diplomatic complications resulting from the aftermath of the Crimean War and from the war between Persia and Afghanistan, and Clémence's increasing loneliness disenchanted them with the diplomatic profession. Nothing, however, succeeded in causing Gobineau to be disenchanted with Persia itself. After eighteen months, Clémence insisted on returning to France with Diane; Gobineau accompanied them to the Russian frontier. At this time cholera was taking its toll everywhere, and Gobineau almost lost his own daughter, if not to cholera, to an exotic fever. Clémence, exhausted and pregnant, and Diane, barely recovered, dragged themselves through the Caucasus to the Black Sea where, thanks to the intervention of a close friend, the Austrian statesman Prokesch-Osten, they were able to regain Constantinople on an English frigate, though not without encountering a storm so terrible that the tiller broke and the passengers had to be lashed to their bunks. It is not surprising that Clémence was hardly on solid land when she bought (with the money left by Thibault-Joseph, who had finally condescended to die) the small castle of Trye near Beauvais and that she was, thereafter, less willing to accompany her husband on diplomatic missions. Persia, which had fulfilled Gobineau's dreams to the point that, as he wrote later, he would mourn it the rest of his life,[11] had indeed been a double-edged bounty.

Gobineau himself returned to France. By then, he had published his extravagant *Lecture des textes cunéiformes* and was working on *Trois ans en Asie* and *L'Histoire des Perses* .

— 8 —

In 1859, he turned down an appointment in China and accepted a diplomatic mission to Newfoundland, a seven-month trip to which we owe the story, "The Caribou Hunt." In 1862 and 1863, Gobineau, now plenipotentiary, returned alone to Persia via Constantinople and the Caucasus. This time he stayed mostly in Teheran, which allowed him to expand his knowledge of Persian and Arabic languages and literatures. Under the guidance of rabbis and mullahs, he led the life of "a happy alchemist," wallowing in rare manuscripts and old books and attempting to become "more Persian than the Persians."[12] He finished another work on cuneiforms as well as *Les Religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale* . But partly under pressure from his wife, who had been lobbying for his transfer and who had not yet entirely given up her conjugal prerogatives, Gobineau had himself put on leave and returned home. Clémence succeeded almost too well. There were rumors of an appointment in Washington. Nothing could have more appalled Gobineau, who saw the United States as the cauldron of all evils: not only did the Americans treat Indians and blacks cruelly, disowning in private their public ideals, but, even worse, theirs was the prototype of a democratic, technological, and uniform mass culture. Fortunately, he was appointed to Greece. Gobineau, Clémence, and their (by then) two daughters arrived in Athens in November 1865.

If Persia had been an intellectual catalyst for Gobineau, Greece was the station where he achieved the greatest personal happiness. This time, Clémence condescended to go along; the appointment promised to be glamorous. Her elegance and the beauty of her two daughters thrilled the court of nineteen-year-old King George I. The family's status reached its apex in April 1866 when, with pomp and circumstance, Diane married one of the king's aides-de-camp, the Danish Baron de Guldencrone, on a French frigate in Piraeus harbor. Acquiring a real Viking as a son-in-law fit perfectly

---

— 9 —

Gobineau's Aryan myth. Gobineau now turned to a new cycle of literary production, partly under the influence of Zoé and Marie Dragoumis, two sisters of an enlightened Athens family, one of whom, Zoé, he secretly loved for many years. Excursions to Corfu, Naxos and Santorin, with their many remains of medieval French occupation, motivated him to see to the publication of his historical novel, *L'Abbaye de Typhaines* . He wrote "The Crimson Handkerchief" and was already conceiving the fine "Akrivie Phrangopoulo" and a collection of poems, *L'Aphroessa* , which was no less mediocre than his earlier ones.

Greece could have been interesting professionally. Still trying its wings as a sovereign state, it depended on the protection of England, France, and Russia. Gobineau was not, unfortunately, the supple mediator that the situation required. Moreover, he was exasperated by the Greek Nationalists' push for expansion, which he considered immature (he noted in "Akrivie Phrangopoulo" that Turkish

rule in the Cyclades had at least the advantage of having maintained a very low profile). His years in Persia had made him a supporter of the crescent rather than the cross. Perhaps the most embarrassing and painful moment in his career came when he had his compatriot, Gustave Flourens (the son of physiologist Pierre Flourens, whom he admired very much), arrested and deported for agitating in favor of the Cretan insurrection. But what good could be expected from a country that, although it boasted of descending from the original Hellenes, offered one of the worst examples of racial mixing?

Alas, the Greek Eden turned out to be only an oasis. Gobineau was appointed plenipotentiary to Rio de Janeiro and took up his post in March 1869, without Clémence. The single bonus of his new position was an active intellectual friendship with Emperor Dom Pedro II. Although he continued to kindle the flame in his letters to the Greek sisters, he was not long in finding another muse, a Brazilian Bovary,

---

— 10 —

Aurea Posno, with whom he would for several years exchange curiously ambiguous letters. But the miasma of Brazil did not agree with him. In his boredom, his imagination flew back to sunny Greece or to other times. He wrote two epics in verse, *Beowulf* and the first version of *Amadis* , and two of his best stories, "Akrivie Phrangopoulo" and "Adélaïde."

In 1870, having contracted swamp fever, Gobineau was granted a medical leave. He returned to his beloved Trye, where he had been elected mayor. It could not have been a worse time to exercise his stewardship. Because of his education and his many friends amongst the German intelligentsia, he did not believe that Germany would ally itself with Prussia or that the Prussian soldiers could become barbarous ruffians. The Franco-Prussian War proved him wrong on both counts. However, Gobineau performed his duty as first magistrate impeccably, organizing the defense of the canton, staying in the village while the population fled, and negotiating with the Prussians in place of the prefect, who also had fled. In 1871, he mediated between the Thiers government and the occupiers, considerably reducing the war levy for the department of the Oise. But in the opinion of his constituents, none of this made up for the fact that he spoke German fluently and had a polite relationship with the German officers billeted in his chateau or that his son-in-law was a blond, blue-eyed foreigner. During that year, Gobineau, whose material circumstances bordered on misery, watched the struggle between the Commune and the Versailles government with relatively less contempt and more sympathy for the popular rebellion than for the Versaillais. But in the midst of the turmoil, his major preoccupation remained the writing of his longest and most ambitious novel, *Les Pléiades* .

Fortunately for his purse, for he was by then reduced to expedients, Gobineau was appointed plenipotentiary to Stockholm in 1872. His correspondence from Sweden shows, at first, his delight at being in the only part of the world that,

---

— 11 —

according to him, retained traces of the great Aryan race. His literary production was at full momentum: he started on *Nouvelles asiatiques* and *La Renaissance* , published *Souvenirs de voyage* and finished *Les Pléiades* . Perhaps Gobineau felt relieved that Clémence did not endure Stockholm for more than six months. After her departure, he channeled his full emotional and intellectual energy into a passionate relationship with Mathilde de La Tour, an Italian diplomat's wife, who became his constant love, companion, and protector throughout his last years. Whether it was this liaison or a series of petty financial quarrels with his wife and daughters that precipitated it, the rupture with his family was permanent by 1876; and Trye, the only fixed residence Gobineau had had in his wandering existence, was sacrificed to this intensive war.

In January 1877, Minister of Foreign Affairs Descazes, feeling (with good reason) that Gobineau, who had been traveling with Dom Pedro for four months, had become a plenipotentiary in absentia, summarily retired him. For the next six years, Gobineau resumed his nomadic life, this time between Italy, where Madame de La Tour resided; Chaméane, her castle in the center of France; Solesme, the Benedictine abbey which his sister had entered in 1868; Paris; and, occasionally, Bayreuth, as the guest of Wagner, whom he had met in Berlin and Venice. (Posterity would later brand mere literary exchanges regarding *Amadis* and *Nouvelles asiatiques* as the conspiracy of the prophet and the cantor of the master race.) The second version of *Amadis* , written during the period 1877 to 1879, was Gobineau's swan song. In these years, he devoted himself almost entirely to his sculptures and to complicated schemes through which he hoped to sell them. His health, which was seriously impaired by the Brazilian fevers, declined, and he began to lose his sight. He bore his poverty and physical ailments with an elegant stoicism, finding solace in Madame de La Tour's tenderness, the loyalty

— 12 —

of his old servant, Honoré, and the affection of his two dogs. On October 13, 1882, on his way from Chaméane to Pisa, where his friend San Vitale awaited him, he felt exhausted and took refuge in a hotel in Turin. The next day, in the carriage taking him back to the train station, he suffered a massive stroke. He died at around midnight, alone in a simple hotel room in a strange city. It was the last caravansary in a nomadic life; he would have preferred a tent and a camel train.

History, Natural and Otherwise

Gobineau's literary works cannot be presented without a discussion of his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* as it is the cornerstone of his worldview. It is also the basis for Gobineau's reputation as apologist for the master race and instigator of the Holocaust. In fact, this reputation is undeserved, for to have had the impact on modern history that some claim, the *Essai* would have had to have been read widely, especially in Germany. We can now make a reasonable estimate of its readership in the years following publication: four hundred readers in France, perhaps one hundred fifty in Germany.[13] And in both countries, it received very few reviews; the most extensive, by the linguist, Pott, was not favorable. One of the two direct forefathers of National Socialism, Houston S. Chamberlain, Wagner's son-in-law, belittled Gobineau, calling him a paranoid, an unrealistic dreamer not interested in building a Brave New World; the other, Alfred Rosenberg, never mentioned him.

It is true that after 1890 awkward attempts by the Gobineau Vereinigung (a group of Gobinolators headed by Ludwig Schemann) to salvage his reputation in Germany succeeded in making *La Renaissance* and *Nouvelles asiatiques* better known. And when Wilhelm II mounted the throne in

— 13 —

1890, German neo-Nationalists and expansionists exhumed the *Essai* from thirty-five years of obscurity and claimed to find in it a theoretical justification for their will to power. But Gobineau was dead by then and, alas, could not protest the astonishing twists given his ideas. It is also true that around the turn of the century, when anti-Semitism grew in Western Europe, it found an excuse in Gobineau's sentimental and mythical vision of the original Aryans, even though that vision had as many practical implications for its author as the Golden Age might have had for Ovid. Indeed, Gobineau twice referred to his projection of the distant future as a "divination."[14]

The *Essai* irked enough of Gobineau's contemporaries to block his election to the Académie française, but for reasons arising from concerns that are quite different. Tocqueville, for instance, disapproved of its anti-Christian determinism, which he perceived as a sort of Jansenism in the guise of science; Quatrefages, an anthropologist, found Gobineau's argument regarding miscegenation scientifically unconvincing; and Renan abstained from reviewing the book, undoubtedly because he was about to pilfer it in his *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* . Gobineau never thought of the Jews as a *race* , since the Semites were but one branch of the original white race and the Jews but one of the Semitic groups. In contrast, Renan wrote that "the Semitic race . . . truly represents an inferior combination in human nature."[15] Why is it, then, that "Renanism" did not supersede "Gobinism" as a synonym of anathema in the French language? And if the standard should be biological determinism, why not talk of "Tainism" or "Zolaism," among others? Moreover, at the time the *Essai* appeared, Germanophile attitudes were not extraordinary in France. Around 1850, the hereditary enemy was still England; the tradition of revenge against the Huns did not enter French life prior to the 1870 defeat by Prussia. Gobineau grew up

— 14 —

and wrote in a literary world in which Germany had been an ally and, occasionally, a figurehead.

If one actually reads the *Essai* (its length makes it a chore), it becomes clear that Gobineau would not plead guilty to the three counts he has been charged with. First, the *Essai* could not possibly confer on the Aryan race a mandate to rule the world, since Gobineau considered the race extinguished by centuries of miscegenation and relegated its pure state to a legendary prehistoric time.[16] He conceded that a few isolated remnants might still survive in Norway, Sweden, and Great Britain, but all other modern nations had long since diluted their pure white blood with black or yellow blood. The Latin peoples were especially tainted, as were the French and even the *Germans* , those "hybrids" (*métis*). Second, expansionism (such as the Third Reich later sought) contained the seeds of its own destruction: no race could conquer others and remain pure, no state could expand and remain stable *and free* . Disequilibrium was built into growth; aggressive civilizations escaped the Charybdis of

instability only to crash into the Scylla of despotism. The *Essai* , then, could never have sponsored national socialism since the core of its political argument (if there was one at all) goes against all forms of centralized government, from the early Hamite despots to the modern American megastate via the Greek city and the Roman Empire. Only local, self-contained, and organic modes of government, such as the ancient Aryan *Odel*, could achieve stability, peace, and freedom. Third, and finally, the Jews are treated, in the *Essai* , in exactly the same way as other ethnic groups. Both branches of the original white race, the Hamite and the Semite, were vigorous in their beginnings, but both had degenerated through centuries of interbreeding with black and yellow peoples. Thus, in its disparaging view of modern mankind, the *Essai* never singles out the Jews. In fact, Gobineau salutes the ancient Hebrews as "a people gifted in everything they undertook, a free people, a

— 15 —

strong people, an intelligent people which, before bravely losing, arms in hand, the title of independent nation, had given the world almost as many scholars as merchants."[17]

So what is the *Essai* ? It is a somber *epic* on the origins and history of mankind, prompted, like all fiction, by its author's psychic needs. Raised on a Legitimist myth, bypassed by the bourgeois monarchy of his time, disgusted by the spectacle of the 1848 Revolution, and tormented by his own origins, Gobineau saved his sanity by finding the world sick, even moribund. According to him the explanation of man's present condition is to be found in the past, and the first books of the *Essai* offer such an explanation, a priori, with a superb contempt for scientific induction. Having confronted the mortality of civilizations and their inequality in the past as well as in the present and having eliminated one by one all institutional and environmental causes, Gobineau focuses on the notion of genetic leveling among races originally unequal.

Did Gobineau believe in the superiority of the white race? *In its original state* , yes. Yes, when it came to dynamism and to a certain mixture of altruism and practicality, the qualities in which he saw the best guarantees of lasting civilization. The two other races, however, had their own strengths, which made miscegenation a partial gain.[18] Blacks had intuition and artistic instinct,[19] but they were passive. Gobineau wrote later that they embodied the *feminine* principle.[20] The yellow race was materialistic, tenacious, and diligent, but unimaginative. It embodied the *masculine* principle. The special greatness of the white race came from the fact that, masculine in origin, it had been strong enough to expand and to integrate the complementary principles of other races while keeping its momentum long enough to flourish. For example, the Sistine Chapel would not exist if blacks had not intermarried with the Assyrian and Egyptian civilizations, which are the mothers of ours.[21] Nonetheless,

— 16 —

the white race, too, eventually declined through this process, for if miscegenation strengthened the weak, in the long run it weakened the strong. It was an ambiguous message and a harsh vision: one pays a price for everything, even for success.

The subsequent books of the *Essai* develop a somber script. In Book II, Gobineau tells how the Hamites (now become black through intermarriage with the people they had vanquished) mixed with the white Semites, thus causing the decadence of Egypt but also the birth of arts and poetry, and in Book III, how the white Aryans, whose name meant "honorable" and who came originally from the plateaus of Central Asia, conquered China (where they were overwhelmed by the yellow populations) and India (in the south of which they were penetrated by black elements). Book IV focuses on the most ancient white populations in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, including the Greeks, and Book V, on the beginnings of Western Europe, ending with the grandeur and decadence of Rome. Book VI takes up what Gobineau considered the true "Western civilization," that is, Germanic, as it had been several centuries before Christ, and appends two chapters on America, vilipending the Anglo-Saxons both for their genocide of the Indians and blacks and for their illusory democratic regime (his challenge to Tocqueville). Finally, the "*Conclusion générale* " recapitulates this grim panorama and evokes its logical consequences in a great prophetic vision: the modern human species shall become but the tasteless, colorless, fiberless product, the *caput mortuum* , of an endless mixing of blood, characterless, futureless—but *equal* in all its parts.

On balance, is Gobineau a racist? Yes, in a nineteenth-century way, that is, imbued with the notion of differences and with the assumption of an initial inequality among races and prejudiced as to the canon of physical beauty (although the odious description of the black type in the *Essai* is of-

— 17 —

ten contradicted by the traveler's impressions in *Trois ans en Asie*).[22] Yes, in the sense that he considered genetic factors as decisive and sufficient and that he underrated environmental ones in the destiny of nations and individuals. But he was not a racist in our modern sense, first, because in his view all races had, by his time, degenerated, and second, because he never implied hatred or hinted at genocide. "A society is in itself neither good nor evil; neither wise nor foolish; it is." Races were comparable to oaks or grass which "occupy each its place in vegetal series" and whose strength or weakness is therefore no cause for pride or contempt.[23] After Ancillon and Herder and before Spengler and (why not?) Lévi-Strauss, Gobineau's thesis implied the respect for diversity that our egalitarian and homogenizing culture may have lost.

Scientifically, was all this extravagance? In the light of twentieth-century anthropology and ethnology, assuredly. Gobineau had access to the science of his time, though not always at first hand. His footnotes sometimes amounted to mere name-dropping. But his vehemence and a sort of ontological persecution complex account even more for his lack of objectivity. For he sensed that he had been beached on disenchanted shores after the wreck of a whole world, his world, whose roots were to be found in the Aristotelian order of nature. All species had been created simultaneously and ever after coexisted harmoniously in "the Great Chain of Being." The "Reigns of Nature" (to use Buffon's words) constituted "a whole forever alive, forever unchanging."[24] The evolutionary hypothesis (widely promulgated since the eighteenth century and fought to the bitter end by Gobineau) played havoc with the essential, atemporal perfection of nature. So had the history of Man, by stirring the original distribution of human races. Gobineau's "syndrome," then, was a more ontological and epistemological variation of the romantic *mal du siècle* , and it explains his particular kind of apocalypticism.

— 18 —

The idea of the life and death of civilizations was common to almost all great nineteenth-century syntheses. Long before Valéry borrowed the theme from Gobineau's *Essai* , Vico, Saint-Simon, Ballanche, Herder, Hegel, and Michelet (to name but a few) proposed this application of the organic model to history. But most saw it in the light of cycles of regeneration and ultimate progress. What characterizes Gobineau is the death wish at the core of his vision: "Mankind [*i.e.* , man as the product of history] is sick, therefore it will die," but also, "Mankind is degenerate, therefore guilty, therefore it must die." Consequently, unlike its romantic counterpart, Gobineau's apocalypse does not feature clashing planets, or falling stars, or the voice from "the Mouth of Darkness." It does not intimate the survival of the spirit. Instead, the earth is left a barren swamp in which helpless herds of ruminants (Gobineau's last metaphor for the human race) will *forever* stagnate in torpid stupidity, an unusually materialistic statement for that time.

"Relentlessly to Reproduce Human Nature"[en25]"Relentlessly to Reproduce Human Nature"[25]

This may seem a long preamble to stories that are delightfully aerial; but in addition to trying to alter any a priori resistance to their author, its aim is to help in reading them more accurately, for, in substance and in form, the stories are inseparable from Gobineau's philosophy. He read widely in natural history while writing the *Essai* ; the two volumes refer to thirty-five such sources and in a few cases (Prichard, Cuvier, Blumenbach, von Humboldt, Flourens, Carus) repeatedly. These readings confirm a lifelong interest in the natural sciences, particularly in zoology and physiology, that is already evidenced in his daily life (he adored and collected animals), choice of friends and acquaintances (zoologists, ecologists, explorers), and correspondence. And in

---

— 19 —

our opinion this accounts for what makes him profoundly different from the romantic generation with which he otherwise shares a number of standard themes, such as the myth of a distant golden age, the cult of the Middle Ages, and the passion for exoticism. There is no reason to deny that these also exist in Gobineau's fiction, and his works have often been explained from these points of view. But his "zoophilia" led to a "zoomorphism": instead of referring to a vague and idealistic nature, as do many romantics, his imaginary world is perfused with the forces and principles that regulate a realistic biological world.

In the first place, Gobineau approaches human groups and their milieus with the same kind of

interest naturalists bring to the observation of species and specimens. In *Les Pléiades* , he poked fun at the Princess of Woerbeck, who divided society into animal castes: great mammals, lesser quadrupeds, birds, fish and, finally, insects. But this is more or less the way he himself saw society, except that ruminants often joined ants and termites at the lower end of his private bestiary. The Princess, of course, based her categories on rank, while Gobineau based his on energy, vitality, and honor. The First Empire court and business world in "Mademoiselle Irnois," the Persian bazaars of "The War with the Turcomans," and Madame de Hermannsburg's boudoir in "Adélaïde" remind one not only of a morphologist's collection, which records outward features, but also of an ethologist's field notes. The Naxiotes in "Akrivie Phrangopoulo" are presented as an endangered species, an older form of life preserved by geographical isolation: Naxos is Gobineau's Galapagos.

Because these milieus are depicted as biological, their inhabitants are driven by universal forces that transcend the particular social group and often tear through its tissue. The silky salons in "Adélaïde" become jungles in which chandeliers throw the same cruel and indifferent light on the pas-

sions as would an African sun on the fight of great cats. Under the oriental flourishes of Gobineau's prose in "Turcomans" run primitive instincts: aggression, attachment, fear, jealousy, self-defense. This is a world in which females have the strength, the resourcefulness, and the initiative in sexual selection given them by nature, in which the *signs* of emotions (blushing, pallor, grinding of teeth, stamping, contractions, dilated nostrils) are more eloquent than their verbal expressions, in which lushness of hair, freedom of stride, and intensity of the eyes advertise the alpha-animals and their opposites, the weak. It is a world in which submission and domination are conveyed by ritual gestures, in which the seeking and securing of a mate (to whom one will be bonded) is never confused with sentimentality or eroticism.

Again, passion or violence alone would make Gobineau no more than a typical romantic writer. But one mark of romanticism is that passions are the prerogative of extraordinary individuals, whom they raise above ordinary men. This is not so in Gobineau, for whom they are simply the behavior of what he often calls *natures* or *créatures* (also, sometimes, *constitutions* or *constructions*). As such, they are always innocent, but also unheroic. In this respect, even the much discussed elite of his *Pléiades* (the gentlemanly "happy few" of his best-known novel) need to be redefined: regardless of their moral struggles, their arrival at a higher moral plane results from the normal trajectory of their nature. Undoubtedly, this makes them more predictable as characters (a reproach sometimes addressed to their creator),[26] but they act, move, and speak with the self-assurance of instinct. Gobineau's characters are never embarrassed by their own contradictions or philosophically concerned about life's contradictions. They are survivors, above all. Emmelina Irnois shows what happens when instinct is derailed. The magnificent way the narrator of "The War with the Turcomans" cheats his officers, goes through wars, coexists with con-

querors, adjusts to polyandry, in which Adélaïde and her mother maintain their respective territories so as to prevent the defeat of either—all this amounts to an ecology. Nature always finds its path, always lands on its feet. Through his narrator, Gobineau says it in his own way at the end of "Adélaïde": "If it were a novel that I am telling you about, I would tranquilly have one and the other [women] die here of exhaustion, shame, and grief. There would be reason enough. But, not at all. Things rarely end this way in real life."

Gobineau's fiction also owes much of its form to an organic model and to the priority given by his system of values to nature over culture. A series of literary articles he wrote for periodicals between 1842 and 1847 are revealing.[27] The qualities he most often praises in, or requires of, other writers are expressed in terms of warmth, energy, rapidity, vigor, ardor, mettle, verve, freedom—in other words, the characteristics one normally associates with the higher orders of animals. And these qualities are precisely what shine in the composition and style of his own fiction. With strong, unrestrained openings that move rapidly to the core of the tale, sudden, brief, often anticlimactic closures à la Chekhov, and unelaborated or absent transitions (this last trait, of course, more evident in his novels than in his short stories), Gobineau's narratives simulate the prompt attack and flight of animals in the wild. Each tale has its own pace. "Adélaïde" uncoils, "Turcomans" trots along, "Mademoiselle Irnois" crawls, "A Traveling Life" advances with the charming (or exasperating) capriciousness of a caravan, "Akrivie Phrangopoulo" digresses through an excursion to Santorini at the end of which Norton's decision to cross this Greek Rubicon surprises not by its substance but by its suddenness—loose composition for a genre (the short story) that in itself showed a predilection for the

discontinuous and heterogeneous.

The authors in Gobineau's empyrean were Stendhal (appreciated as a brilliant observer), Balzac (because, unlike

— 22 —

Gautier, he escaped the curiomania of a *commissaire-priseur* —"antique auctioneer"), Musset (when he overcame his *mal du siècle*), but primarily those classic writers whom he perceived as unself-consciously realistic. He always showed a great mistrust of words and, in the long run, considered deliberate stylistic features as an obstacle to the transparency of the subject, which he felt necessary to the recovery of truth. In our era, when most intellectual production is analyzed from the point of view of a radical idealism, this "core realism" at the center of Gobineau's aesthetic beliefs might seem a naive position to take in the same general period that Flaubert was confiding to Louise Colet his ambition to create a self-sufficient literary object that "would exist by virtue of the mere internal strength of its style"[28] and would replace, even void, the world of referents.

In this respect a strange thing happens: Gobineau often re-creates objects that impose themselves on the reader with the same hallucinatory presence as Charles Bovary's immortal headgear. Only one does not perceive the author's labor in the text, which, on the contrary, has an air of felicitous negligence. And he *was* negligent, writing fast (his masterpiece "Adélaïde" was written in one day), with the casualness characteristic of an aristocrat indulging in a hobby. Let us look, for instance, at the description of Akrivie's hair (pp. 118–119 in our translation): "Une coiffure mordorée, épaisse, abondante, tordue et semblait-il, avec quelque impatience de la peine qu'elle donnait pour la soumettre, bien que plus fine que la soie et souple à miracle." It does not hold together syntactically. First, the conjunction *et* should not separate *avec quelque impatience* from *tordue* , which it modifies; second, it is odd that the third person pronoun *la* suddenly introduces an outside subject, the person presumably for whom "it seems," who experiences impatience but is distinct from the grammatical subject *elle* (the hair); third, the last member of this little monster, *bien que plus fine* , and

— 23 —

so on, brings us back to *elle* (the hair), while we were by then focusing on the "hairdresser." This is an anarchic sentence in which the hair and imaginary person arranging it (Akrivie herself, in all probability) are encroaching on one another's grammatical territory; but the quasi-miraculous effect is that of a tug-of-war in which the "comber" (culture) is defeated by this animalistic, elusive, and triumphant mass of hair (nature). In other words, we have here a definite literary object consistent with the story's main theme, even though Gobineau made it virtually unbeknownst to himself, as Molière's Monsieur Jourdain spoke prose.

Gobineau himself, however, occasionally mounted the hobbyhorse of literary theory and issued dutiful statements about both the necessity for literature neither to improve on nor to imitate life.[29] He once conceded that perfection of form could redeem any subject, however absurd. Nevertheless, he himself did not write one short story that was not closely connected with his personal experience and his observations in situ. He subtitled the *Souvenirs de voyage* with the names of three places he had been. He referred to *Nouvelles asiatiques* as "a way of painting what I have seen"[30] and in his correspondence often dwelled on specific sources and his respect for the truth. Whatever response we may now have to his stories—and they are rich enough to validate a wide range of opinions—he would have resented the hint that his real and fictional worlds are parallel and nonintersecting.

This desire to keep his fiction anchored in the real world partly explains why his tales are always told by a narrator who, as Gobineau proceeded in his career, became not only more and more explicit but more and more complex. Monsieur Irnois "had started from scratch, but that is not what I find astounding," we are told by a self-designating author. However, Gobineau uses the ambiguities of distance that the French *on* allows to create the ironies of voice of the narrator in "Akrivie Phrangopoulo" who undertakes the visit to

— 24 —

the Antiparos cave. *On* is in part the Gobineau who was once talked into entering the cave, where he discovered more vulgarity than splendor. It is simultaneously someone else, possibly the voice of a typical tourist (the kind that would leave graffiti) trying to enlist the sympathy of the listener—a closeness and yet a complexity of distance best conveyed by "you" in English: "*You* have to squeeze foxlike through one of the narrow tunnels. . . .*You* enter an opaque darkness bent over so as not to break *your* head." "A Traveling Life" starts with the warning, "It is irrelevant to wonder at this point

how and why Valerio Conti. . . ." Again, a listener's query is implied.

Of course, this is not an original trick in short story writing, but Gobineau's version of it is remarkable in the way he finds his own middle ground between the typically eighteenth-century narrator of, say, *Tristram Shandy*, *Jacques le Fataliste* , or *Tom Jones* , who is deliberately deceptive and intrusive, and the typically nineteenth-century narrator, who is reliable and the guarantor of clear societal standards but who lacks real presence. In contrast to these two types, the Gobinian narrator is sincere (if not always reliable, as in "Turcomans") *and* present, however subtly. Through him, the author speaks to us with an intimacy that amounts to a signature. Few other writers of short stories make the reader as aware of being singled out for a treat. Gobineau's uniqueness may also have to do with the fact that his stories were conceived, possibly tested, and written in periods of his life when he had a built-in audience (while in Athens, Rio de Janeiro, Stockholm). Moreover, as a young man, Gobineau had adored the *Arabian Nights* and later acquired a copy of the classic Galland translation. To a man not meant for the administrative doldrums, escaping the boredom of uneventful diplomatic jobs might have seemed as pressing as the necessity of saving her neck was for Scheherazade. His contemporaries remember him

as a charming storyteller, an intense and lively reader. At any rate, this assumed friendship between narrator and listener/reader makes Gobineau truer to the oral origins of the genre than many of his contemporaries. Nodier's voice (not his substance) may be the closest to Gobineau's in this respect; what he wrote in defense of his tales, Gobineau could have made his own:

Je suis parleur, dit-on, mais qu'importe le temps?
Je tiens qu'en cet objet c'est la dernière clause,
Pourvu que le lecteur prenne goût à la chose.
Et qui vous dit que je prétends
A conter avec art? Il n'en est rien, je cause![31]

"Those Rogues Who Are More or Less Our Relatives"[en32]"Those Rogues Who Are More or Less Our Relatives"[32]

Although there were other raconteurs in his day, Gobineau felt that with his Asiatic stories, he had "invented something."[33] Unbeknownst to him, that "something" transcended both his literary stature and his scientific errors and prejudices. His comment was probably a response to Barbey d'Aurevilly's complaint about the unimaginative plot of *Les Pléiades* : "By his function, M. de Gobineau frequents and even rubs shoulders with history; let him give us history, then, but living history."[34] Nineteenth-century history is inseparable from a vast anthropological awakening that had begun in the fifteenth century and was brought home four hundred years later by European colonialism. Gobineau's *Nouvelles asiatiques* provided the general public the message the *Essai* had been unable to convey unmitigatedly and positively—the message of human variety. Though his contemporaries, perhaps still unprepared, gave them a tepid reception, their importance has since been perceived. What, indeed, recapitulates the period in these stories is that although the circumstances which underlay them were steeped

in colonialism, they undermine its validity and yield an anticolonial message.

In Gobineau's view, the destiny of the Aryan race had been partly decided in Persia where, descending from the Pamir range, it mixed with disparate (and inferior) racial elements. Gobineau wrote to Prokesch-Osten that, the contemporary world being irreversibly "afflicted with senility," he wanted to show in *Nouvelles asiatiques* "what good and evil meant in the mores of a decayed people"[35] —an effort that none of these stories nor any of the volumes resulting from his sojourn in Persia (of which *Trois ans en Asie* and *Religions and philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale* are the most important) seems to demonstrate. Indeed, his introduction to the *Asiatiques* , written later (1874) than the stories themselves, states:

> Unlike what moralists teach us, men are nowhere the same. . . .It is because men are everywhere essentially different—in their passions, their views, their ways of seeing themselves and others, their beliefs, their concerns, the problems in which they are engaged—that studying them is so diversely and keenly interesting and that it is so important to devote oneself to that study if one wants to understand at all the role men—and not Man—play in creation. That is what gives history its validity, poetry some of its merit and fiction its sole raison d'être.[36]

For anyone interested in contemporary Islam, *Trois ans en Asie* , published in 1859 and unfortunately still not translated into English, remains essential reading. The first and last sections of the volume tell of the Gobineau's ill-fated first sojourn in Persia. The second section is a systematic analysis of administration, religion, and social hierarchy. The tourist's delight in colorful sights has given way to a penetrating observation of the Persian soul. *Trois ans en Asie* and *Nouvelles Asiatiques* are tightly meshed: the talent of the raconteur, who is at the center of the stories, gives the travelogue its special warmth, and all of the substance of the

stories comes from Gobineau's experience of Asia, not all of it firsthand (he was familiar primarily with Teheran and the regions north of it). But it was his spiritual itinerary that was, finally, the most important element.

Prior to the nineteenth century, Europeans knew Persia through Chardin and Montesquieu and through Rameau and Mozart. They viewed Islam through Molière's *turqueries* and Voltaire's *Mahomet* . As a transition between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Volney represents an interesting hybrid of history and literature. In fact, he criticized (in his *Simplification des langues orientales*)[37] his compatriots' linguistic ignorance, which barred them from any understanding of the Orient. It seems that later on the Orient motivated very different kinds of works. On the one hand, oriental scholarship flourished with the cuneiform pioneers: Rawlinson, Niebuhr, Burnouf, Lassen, and Botta (who excavated the Khorsabad inscriptions in Iraq in 1842 and 1851). Gobineau knew of these researches (in many cases through Jules Mohl and the *Journal asiatiques*) and used them in the *Essai* . On the other hand, the *voyage en Orient* became a literary genre to which not only Chateaubriand, Nerval, Du Camp, and Loti, but also less poetic and equally unreliable voyagers such as Morier, Ferrier, and Flandin succumbed.[38]

But in spite of the recent (and legitimate) discrediting of the notion of "Orient" as a European imperialist invention —"a certain *will* or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world"[39] —Gobineau's testimony remains valid. *Trois ans* makes clear why this is so. In the introduction to the second section, Gobineau wrote, "I have tried to repudiate completely any idea, whether correct or not, of our superiority over the people I was studying. As much as possible, I wanted to see things from their various points of view."[40] We find a poetic version of the same guiding principle in "A Traveling Life":

"The art of traveling is no more given to everyone than the art of loving, or understanding, or feeling." Particularly during his second sojourn in Persia, Gobineau put these ideals into practice by means of serious study, which led him to exclaim: "I am astonished, not to say frightened, by the depth of life in these Oriental nations, especially when I compare them to the moral torpor and reckless materialism of European thought."[41] So the Persians, those fallen Aryans, were not decadent after all. Their nobility showed in their sobriety, in their sense of the spiritual dimensions of life, even in their superb roguishness.

The depth of Gobineau's oriental studies remains a point of contention among scholars. His assessments of the Shiite and Sufi philosophies may lack complexity, but the books they produced still speak to the spirit, if not the letter, of Islam. Gobineau was, in fact, prophetic about the future of Iran when he wrote:

> As Persians are Shiite and acknowledge only Ali as their legitimate caliph . . . the Shah maintains himself only by violence. The race [sic] of Imams is considered as still alive. . . .The Imamate can therefore reveal itself at any time in the person of an unknown man. Then this man will be the legitimate sovereign and his right to be so will be unchallengeable.[42]

And he had no less foresight when it came to the future of colonial empires. At a time when Vigny was writing bellicose pieces on the conquest of Algeria and Du Camp was celebrating the steam engine, Gobineau's skepticism in the matter is striking in its sophistication:

> For the last 30 years you have heard much in our country about civilizing the other people of the world. . . .No matter how hard I look, I cannot say that in modern times the French have civilized the Canadians, or the Pondichery Hindus, or the Moors in Algiers; nor that the English have changed the ways of their subjects in India, nor the Dutch transformed

the Javanese people, nor the Russians the Caucasians. Confronted by a failure that persistent, it is wise to suspend one's judgment about success.[43]

"Handle Prose As You Would Verse"[en44]"Handle Prose As You Would Verse"[44]

As a genre short fiction has a voluminous and confusing history[45] bristling with contradictions and overlapping definitions of what constitutes the *conte*, *nouvelle* , and *novelle* , not to mention less ubiquitous forms such as the *fabliau*, *histoire*, *historiette* , and *anecdote* . There is some agreement that the conte is a whimsical, sometimes fantastic, narrowly focused, closed-ended narration, whereas the nouvelle is more complex, sequential, and open-ended. But most critics, it seems, state the definitions only to disprove them immediately. Some of the finest writers in the genre such as Marmontel, Diderot, Goethe, Schlegel, Tieck, Nodier, Mérimée, and Maupassant, did not adhere to these definitions, although they often were the ones who theorized on the subject. Diderot, who categorized the conte as *merveilleux* (fibbing), *plaisant* (entertaining), or *historique* (true to life and moralizing),[46] hastened to entitle one of his own productions *Ceci n'est pas un conte. Adolphe* , now considered a novel, was called a nouvelle when it appeared. Balzac and Maupassant chose the word *conte* for their short stories, and Nodier used indifferently *conte*, *nouvelle*, *historiette*, *anecdote* , and even *roman* . Gobineau always referred to his short fictions as nouvelles. The game of terminology, however, quickly reaches a point of diminishing returns. What is more relevant is to situate Gobineau's short fiction against a historical backdrop of substantial and formal requirements, and not in terms of labels.

The eighteenth century had already elevated short fiction to the status of servant to the philosophical goals of

the Enlightenment. For a number of reasons having to do, basically, with the substance of romanticism, the nineteenth century went further, making the nouvelle—or conte—a major genre. The chasm between the individual and society, one of romanticism's major themes, is perhaps most cogently explained by Lukács as the increasing alienation of the individual in the midst of an increasingly capitalistic economy and as the internalization of the notion of an ordered world.[47] Thus, short fiction would compensate for the apparent disorder of the world by the rigorous discipline required of the form. It may not be a coincidence, then, that *The Decameron* and *Arabian Nights* , those models of models, are supposedly prompted by states of emergency—by the plague in Florence and by the threat hanging over Scheherazade's life.

With the isolation of the individual came marginality, and with it, literature opened its doors to another face of the world—a face that eighteenth-century mystical philosophy (through Swedenborg, Pasqually, and Saint-Martin) had already provided glimpses of. There again, in the romantic period, short fiction was particularly apt at conveying the irrational, or the bizarre, because its tightness forces an emphasis on phenomena rather than on causes, thereby casting an aura of mystery over its various moments—as ordinary as they might first appear. Goethe was the first to assign the short story the task of "accrediting the unusual" when he required that it be based on a paradoxical, "unheard of event which has really taken place" (*unerhörte Begebenheit*).[48] Finally, this "other face of the world" could also be the past or the far away, whence the romantic predilection for the historical and the exotic, which, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, the short story demonstrates.

If this was the literary context in which Gobineau wrote, to what extent did it affect his fiction? Comparatively little, it seems. In his system of values, man was too much part of nature and society, too transient a phenomenon, for

alienation to occupy a central place in his literary world. For one who thought that "man is a newcomer in the world" and that "geology registers his absence from all early formations of the earth and has never found him among fossils,"[49] society cannot command the occult power that it does in the works of Merimée, for instance, where it accounts for the autocratic societal "one." Inasmuch as Merimée's heroes live in the shadow of this "one," as if fallen from some grace, we might say that his fiction, in contrast to Gobineau's relatively guiltless world, has a Jansenist ring. Moreover, there is little

trace of the fantastic in Gobineau's stories, probably because the religiosity on which it rests made little dent in his self-avowed (if not self-advertised) agnosticism.

Gobineau's aversion to the fantastic may also be related to his stand on evolution and the controversy swirling around it, just as the eighteenth century's fascination with monsters revealed a belief that anything could happen in nature. By demonstrating the looseness of the concept of species, freaks betrayed a rampant evolutionism. But, as a disciple of Cuvier, Gobineau postulated the absolute fixity of species. The consequence for his literary world is a lack of interest in marginal beings and happenings. His creatures stay within the type; his behaviors, within that of the species. His admiration for the Moslem mystics (evident in *L'Illustre magicien*) is more an oblique criticism of European materialistic mediocrity than an espousal of mysticism per se, as illustrated by the reunion of the lovers at the end. Their energy counted more than their faith. Finally, romantic primitivism or exoticism leaned on an accumulation of technical details that Gobineau despised, intent as he was on conjuring up mentalities rather than props. It has been suggested that the *Essai* would lend itself to a superb tragicomic strip.[50] Possibly. The subtlety of his short fiction, on the other hand, presents an interesting challenge to film adapters.

— 32 —

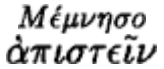
One might praise Gobineau for not adding to the long list of standard romantic tales such as came from the pens of Nodier, Gautier, Dumas, for instance. But his rejection of this form shows his limitations as well as his strengths. For from the same stock came the German *novellen* and the Russian short stories of Gogol, Dostoevski, and Chekhov whose metaphysical dimension is the cradle of modern literature. It is cosmic and unknown forces, no longer societal ones, that surround Kleist's characters and ridicule their rational schemes, thus prefiguring Camus's absurd. His heroes, who reckon with these forces and survive, are no different from Sisyphus. The cosmos dwarfs man's activities, but these activities in turn challenge the blind universe—a contemporary article of faith that is strikingly illustrated in *Waiting for Godot* but that was already present in Gogol's *Overcoat* . The fissured being evidenced in the romantic doppelgänger is further displaced and reduced (but also stubbornly salvaged) in Kafka's beetle and designates the repossession of the self as one of the major modernistic endeavors. Poe, whose obsession with the enigmatic announces the existential renunciation of understanding the universe, represents another shade of this spectrum.

French short fiction writers themselves did not entirely escape this occultation of literature, even though Heine denied that "France was a favorable ground for such ghosts"[51] and that the horrible could be cultivated by French writers. But Maupassant and Villiers (both contemporaries of Gobineau) prove the opposite. By imperturbably pushing logic to its end in *La Maison Tellier* , Maupassant approximates the fantastic in a way that sabotages human institutions. The relentless cruelty of *L'Aveugle* , which is built around an absence (the gap of the blank eyes) and ends with another (the disappearance of the Blind Man's body), becomes a permanent denunciation of a void in our society. Villiers, whose characters have been compared to "wayfarers vainly stirring

— 33 —

amid shadows,"[52] is also a pioneer of the twilight zone. We miss such proximity to the abyss in Gobineau. If the history of short fiction is a vast landscape in which the watershed is the beginning of an "era of suspicion," Gobineau remains suspiciously on its nonsuspecting side.

Gobineau's offering to literature is of another kind and is connected with his vision of the natural world as not inscribed in time. His inability to accept the causal and sequential structure of evolution makes him both a vestige of another era and the rescuer of a synchronistic view of nature lost to the modern world. This had a direct connection with his fiction, as one of his closest friends, Prokesch-Osten, pointed out: "I have been enchanted by your short stories. It is a *novel and correct way to write history* , that is to depict . . . *what in man is essential and stable* . . . and to do so *outside of* these eternal struggles produced by vanity and passions involved in *what one calls history* ."[53] The distinction Prokesch-Osten makes between the two histories of man, the man-made one and the *natural* , seems, in our view, to be as central to Gobineau's fiction as it is to the *Essai* . It can be called classicism. All classicism, especially that of the *grand siècle* , uses the immutability of human nature as an alibi for social and political conservatism, and, on the whole, Gobineau did not escape this rule. Yet, another consequence of this obsoleteness is that Gobineau speaks with a clarity that comes only from an unquestioned universe in which "the words and the things" (to use a contemporary notion) did not intimate their divorce. But today's reader, who suffers under an imperialism of ambiguity, may find the transparency and straightforwardness of Gobineau's stories a welcome relief from Merimée's grim motto: "Remember to distrust" (



)

Gobineau described himself as "a poor fellow from the eighteenth century fallen into ours by a fluke I shall never be able to explain to myself."[54] In his day, he demonstrated a

— 34 —

certain flair in appreciating Heine, Stendhal, and Sand, but he hardly seemed to notice such illustrious contemporaries as Flaubert, Maupassant, Villiers, and Zola. Rather than look to the nineteenth century to find Gobineau's soul mates in the world of letters, we might look to authors with eighteenth-century spirits but presaging the nineteenth century. Diderot (in his tales), Byron (in his poetry and his correspondence) are examples; intuition, scientific and philosophical in the first case and political and aesthetic in the second, carried both writers ahead of their time and, in fact, made them more modern than Gobineau. Yet, like Gobineau, both spoke with the graceful clarity of one who is at ease with the world and himself.

Thus, Gobineau's short fictions succeed where his poetry fails. They have the wholeness of poems. Their apparent lack of sophistication and their matter-of-factness give these stories, paradoxically, the same elusive aura that usually is present in more ambiguous fictions. This is the "margin" Max Jacob found only in some Japanese and Persian poems and (precisely) in Gobineau's stories;[55] it may allow them (as in Archibald MacLeish's famous phrase) to "be" rather than to "mean." The Gobineau who reminded us that "works of art are meant to appeal not only to the mind and the critical faculty but above all, to the heart, the temperament, to whatever those who read them, see them, or hear them are made of" would not, we think, disown this last brush stroke on the portrait.

A. S.
D. S.

— 35 —

Mademoiselle Irnois

I

M. Pierre-André Irnois was one of those money dealers who succeeded best in making their fortunes under the Republic.[1] Without attaining the quasi-fabulous splendors of an Ouvrard,[2] M. Irnois became quite opulent, and, what especially distinguished him from his peers is that he had a knack for preserving his wealth; in brief, he did not imitate Hannibal: first he knew how to vanquish, then to preserve his victory; his breed, had it endured, could have compared him to Augustus. In his sphere, his rise had been even more astonishing than that of Caesar's adoptive son. M. Irnois had started from nothing, though that is not what I find astounding; but rather that he had not the slightest trace of talent; nor did he have the slightest trace of shrewdness. He was at best a mediocre rascal; as for insinuating himself into the company of the mighty or the lowly in order to secure useful favors, he had never given it a thought, being much too brutal, which in his case replaced dignity. Awkwardly put together, tall, thin, dry, sallow, provided with a huge, ill-furnished mouth whose massive jaw would have been a formidable weapon in a hand like that of the Hebrew Hercules, he offered nothing in his person of a nature sufficiently appealing to make one forget the flaws of his character and those of his intelligence. Thus, materially and morally,

— 36 —

M. Pierre-André Irnois did not possess the means to make one understand how he had been able to achieve enormous wealth and to join the ranks of the powerful and fortunate. And yet, he had come to own six town houses in Paris, improved farmlands in Anjou, Poitou, Languedoc, Flanders, Dauphiné and Burgundy, two factories in Alsace, and coupons for all public bonds, the whole crowned by unlimited credit. The origin of so much wealth could only be explained by the strange caprices of destiny.

M. Irnois, I already said, was of very humble birth; everyone, at any rate, believed it, and he along with the rest; but, in fact, nothing was known about it. He had never been aware of a father or a mother, and he had begun his career in the livery of a scullion in the kitchen of a respectable Parisian bourgeois. From there, fired for having let a roast burn that had been put in his care for a gala occasion, he had wandered for some time, a victim of the melancholy ups and downs of vagrancy. The poor devil had subsequently got hold of a job as a footman in the house of a barrister and, soon dismissed for being too impertinent and a bit of a thief, he very nearly died of starvation one fatal night when the watch picked him up, expiring from want of nourishment, under one of the pillars of the Central Market where he had dragged himself after having vainly looked for unmentionable scraps in the neighboring rubbish heaps.[3]

They wanted to send him to the Islands.[4] He escaped, hid himself in the garden of a lady philosopher and philanthropist, and, when discovered, told his story. By chance, that lady had gathered around her that very day several dinner guests, among them M. Diderot, M. Rousseau from Geneva, and M. Grimm.[5]

The ragged vagabond's tale served as a timely text for various considerations, alas only too accurate, concerning the social order. M. Rousseau from Geneva publicly embraced Irnois calling him his brother; M. Diderot also called him

---

— 37 —

his brother, but did not embrace him; and M. Grimm, who was a baron, contented himself with a benevolent wave of his hand, declaring that he saw in him that masterpiece of nature, *man* . The expression of this great truth, acknowledged by the entire company, did little for the poor devil. By the most astonishing stroke of chance, as they dismissed him, they remembered to order a meal and a bed for him. The next morning, the lady of the house had already forgotten him and would undoubtedly have given the order to throw him out if someone had mentioned to her that masterpiece of creation, the man whom she had so philosophically greeted the day before; but an old housekeeper found his shoulders sufficiently square to put there a load of wood, and his arms long enough to saw logs. He made a living that way until the day when he became a footman again. It was a piece of luck, for it was from there that the eagle was finally to take wing.

Within a short time, Irnois left the service of the lady philosopher for that of a pious count, then of a scheming marquise, then of a turcaret.[6] This turcaret, finding him sufficiently inept, deemed him worthy to collect the toll at the gate of a small town. Lo and behold, Irnois is a clerk; it was a handsome position for the wretch. He did not know how to hang onto it; he kept his accounts badly and he was fired. At that point he wanted to return to Paris, and during the trip an adventure, which will seem little likely but which is nonetheless true, happened to him. One should remember in reading about it that Irnois was destined to become one of fortune's favorites.

As he had earned a little money during his management, he had bought a wreck of a gray horse which he counted on getting rid of upon his arrival. One morning when he had left his night's lodging very early, he arrived at a clearing in the center of a large wood at the moment when dawn began to break. It was in the month of October, the weather was foggy, the day very dull, and, wrapped in his cape, his hat pulled

---

— 38 —

down to his eyes, Irnois was not at all warm. Consequently, his spirit, not very manly to begin with, was by no means firm. You can imagine how this former clerk felt when, upon reaching the clearing, he saw directly across from him in the entrance to a path he absolutely had to take a group of men on horses!

In his mind, Irnois did not hesitate; he knew them for robbers, and what is more, highway robbers. He considered fleeing; but if he were to turn on his heels, these rogues would undoubtedly shoulder their dreadful muskets and riddle him with bullets. He shivered with horror and remained planted in his saddle, his horse held firmly.

The horsemen on the other side of the clearing, seeing him poised in this fashion, waited awhile, observing him, but since he did not budge (he would not have stirred for an empire!), they chose a course after an animated discussion, and one of them advanced toward Irnois. The latter thought his last hour had come and was about to take out his purse and hand it over, when the horseman, taking off his hat, said with utmost politeness: "Sir, this wood is not what you think; you probably have been misinformed, kindly believe it; but in our desire to be agreeable to you, we shall offer you five thousand pounds; in good conscience it is all we can do."

Irnois, hearing this curious speech, thought that the bandits wished to add raillery to ferocity and meant to cut his throat with a laugh. His fear redoubled, and if he had not clung with both hands to the pommel of his saddle, he would certainly have fallen from his horse. The horseman, seeing him silent, committed no violence; to the contrary, saluted him and returned to his companions.

Irnois, whose teeth were chattering, soon noticed that now two men detached themselves from the group and came toward him. They approached him no less politely than had the first, and one of them began to speak:

— 39 —

"Come, sir, he said, you are decidedly biased; let us forget about five thousand pounds; let us say ten and it's a deal."

"Oh! The scoundrels!" Irnois was saying to himself at the peak of his terror. "The scoundrels!"

Yet, this time too, no harm came to him. The horsemen, after waiting vainly for his answer, went away, and the discussion started again between them and their companions. Finally, the whole band rode toward Irnois who, this time, was convinced that he had reached his last hour. But imagine his stupefaction when the horseman who had first addressed him said:

"Monsieur, you are about to make a bad bargain!

— Ah! Sir, Irnois answered in a lamentable voice, how grateful I would be to you if you were willing to call it quits!"

The horseman began to laugh.

"I see, sir, that you are a wit, and know the value of things. My partners and I wish to lose no time over this business. Here, he added, taking out his pocket book, twenty thousand pounds; do not ask us for more. This timberland is a good speculation, no doubt; but it would become a very bad one if your withdrawal were to cost us more."

Irnois, in spite of the crudeness of his judgment, understood then that these horrible criminals were wood merchants who saw in him a rival bidder. In fact, they had been warned about one. He hurriedly took the twenty thousand pounds, plus his share of an excellent breakfast, and most willingly he renounced whatever they wanted.

These twenty thousand pounds behaved splendidly in his hands. The abyss of speculation did not swallow the least of his *écus* ; regardless of the imperturbably fearless stupidity with which he forged ahead, everything succeeded for him, so much so that he caused a number of veterans of the King's Revenues[7] to wonder whether he was not a first-rate financial genius.

— 40 —

It was fortunate for him that he still was only a small fry when, in the midst of this good luck, the Revolution broke out. His humble head did not attract the thunderbolt, whose roar he might otherwise have deserved; he went into hiding and with him his pistoles, and he came out of his hole to pilfer the Republic only when the worst of the storm was over. He did fairly well in tampering with the market in promissory notes; however, his triumphs in that line were nothing compared to his exploits as purveyor of shoes;[8] out of cowardice, he had the wit to take cover behind several adventurous spirits to whom he was content to lend money and who, for their part, in their own, individual names used their influence with the government. He watched mountains of gold fill his coffers, and, at the peak of his intoxication, by that time Bonaparte was already consul for life, Irnois still thought of himself as the greatest man of the century.

One fine day he took a wife. The companion he chose to perpetuate his breed was the daughter of a speculator like himself, Mlle Maigrelut; and not the least debt he owed to his good star was that it had given her, simple, silly, enemy of luxury and pleasure, to him, who was the same. With her he, so to speak, married the Mlles Catherine and Julie Maigrelut, her sisters, whom their father's ruin and death soon added to the household. He did not complain about it. He had, as he liked to say, enough in the larder for everyone, and having little taste for gatherings, visits, social pleasures, and feeling that the capacity of mind of Mlles Maigrelut and of Mme Irnois exactly matched his own, he found pleasure in their company, which spared him from leaving the house.

Such was M. Irnois, such were the companions of his solitude. As for the life he led, the time has come to say a word about it. With all of his town houses, his great wealth, his immense income, M. Irnois had never become accustomed to luxury and found himself ill at ease in state rooms. He was accused of avarice, which was unjust; if he

— 41 —

did not spend his money, it was because he did not enjoy doing so. He lived on the third floor of a house situated in the vicinity of Lombard Street.[9] What human dwellings are like in that corner of Paris is well known. All the rooms were uniformly tiled in red, except for a parqueted sitting room; all the rooms were uniformly dark, except for the bedrooms, which were even darker because they overlooked the courtyard. The furniture was of mahogany in the reception rooms, of walnut in the smaller one; yellow Utrecht velvet everywhere reigned supreme, and a few gilded clocks, representing Flora and Zephyr or Love catching a butterfly, under glass, were the utmost concessions to Irnois magnificence. As for art objects, there were none, except an oil portrait of the master of the house, dreadful creation of some sign dauber. The servants consisted of a cook, a fat housekeeper, and a ragged and unkempt youngster who combined jobs of widely varying importance, sometimes wood splitter, sometimes errand boy, sometimes private secretary, sometimes footman. So much for the organization of this household in which M. Irnois could find nothing to change, in which he ruled as despot, talking noisily, scolding loudly or grumbling from dawn to dusk.

But just as in these narrow, sterile, dreadful valleys, which night covers with heavy shadows and where the traveler advances with a staggering and frightened step, a distant light always appears at the end which restores one's joy, thus in M. Irnois's den there was a light, a weak and doubtful one, it is true, but delightful nevertheless, for the eyes it brightened did not need full daylight. In that dark and gloomy apartment, inhabited by disagreeable people, there was, as in all human affairs, a happiness to which the little poetry of these crude brains turned for warmth; a happiness in which all the affections merged. What common bond would have held the hearts of the Mlles Maigrelut, of Mme and of M. Irnois except for this luminous point in their lives? Scor-

---

— 42 —

ing one hundred in piquet, is surely something; reversis as well; but with the best will in the world, it is not enough; and whatever warmth, life and sweetness one hundred points at piquet or reversis were not able to give to this bourgeois circle, it was Emmelina who gave it.

Emmelina! When one had said Emmelina in the house, one had said everything: all day long masters and servants could think only of providing Emmelina with the greatest possible contentment. Without Emmelina they had nothing, with her they had everything. Father, mother, aunts, servants and private secretary laughed, paled and wept in turn according to the tone with which this name, Emmelina, was pronounced in the morning by fat Jeanne, the housekeeper, as she came out of the sacred room.

The passion of all these good people for the cherished being was not identical, of the same value and the same weight. M. Irnois made little ado about his affection, never mentioned it that I know of, but felt it more keenly and more deeply than anyone. The only way he would manifest his love for his daughter was by not bullying her as he did the others. He loved Emmelina without really knowing it. How would he have known it, he who in all his life had never reflected on things or people or himself? His daughter couldn't prevent his being gloomy, but she had the power to make him twenty times more disagreeable than he ordinarily was, and this, solely because in the morning he might not have been awakened by a satisfactory report on the state of Emmelina's health. In short, he loved her passionately.

Mme Irnois, of a placid, what am I saying! glacial temperament, who had never in her life experienced the slightest lively feeling (otherwise she would never have heard of marrying his lordship her husband), Mme Irnois spent a large part of the day holding her daughter on her lap, kissing her, fondling her, telling her any trifle that came to her imagination. These trifles were not pretty, they were not varied,

---

— 43 —

above all they were not witty in any way. Mme Irnois was as total a nonentity as any old, ugly and illiterate bourgeoise can be; but she tried her best to entertain the darling child; she felt her heart melt when she looked at her, and could not look at her without kissing her.

In this regard, her tenderness greatly resembled that of the Mlles Maigrelut, Emmelina's maternal aunts, who were only a little chattier than their married sister. The Maigrelut ladies were the most perfect types of spinsters that one could desire. Had they been let loose, both of them, in the middle of a provincial town, they would have developed with extraordinary energy the viciousness of a tiger and a viper; but the constant solitude and almost absolute claustration of their lives had tamed these dangerous temperaments, and all their ardor had turned into servile and faithful devotion to

Emmelina.

Thus loved, thus adored and served, Mlle Irnois reached her seventeenth birthday; that is the time when the story I have to tell starts. . . .So she was at that beautiful period of youth that is like a golden gate to life. It is time to tell what she was like and to show her surrounded by her retinue, that is to say, her thin and sallow father, her fat and common mother, her dried-out, gaunt, and loquacious aunts, and her maids, who are not worth the honor of a description.

One probably expects to hear a marvelous tale of unheard-of perfections, to contemplate a young woman endowed by the fairies with all the charms of beauty and with. . . .We shall see![10]

— 44 —

II

Emmelina, this angel, this goddess, this subject of so many hopes, was, at seventeen years, a miserable creature the size of a ten-year-old girl, and was deprived by her bad blood simultaneously of growth, of a normal physique, of strength and health. Without being precisely a hunchback, she was lopsided, and, to boot, her right leg was not as long as her left leg. Her chest seemed almost to cave in, and her head, pushed to one side by the flaw in her posture, was also bent forward. Did she at least have a pretty face to compensate however little for such basic faults? Alas! no: her mouth was not well designed; her thick lips gave her a sulky expression; her sickly pallor was not becoming; only her large blue eyes were rather beautiful and moving, and her hair, blond as a fairy's, was matchless. As a consequence, her magnificent hair was often talked about in the house; Emmelina's hair served as the favorite point of comparison for whatever they wanted to praise most.

The poor girl, thus ill-treated by nature, had great difficulty in walking and in moving about; she was a bit like a reed, always folded and collapsed upon herself; and old Jeanne, her maid, who had carried her as a babe, was still carrying her, grown-up young lady though she was. She did not like to walk, she found it too difficult and tiring; and she never had grown used to it; so much so that, when it came time to go from one room to another, one could hear Emmelina's small, sweet voice:

"Jeanne! carry me!"

— 45 —

And Jeanne carried her.

One might think that seeing herself adored, adulated and obeyed in that way Emmelina would be spoiled, very willful, capricious and forever indulging in whims and demands. But not so. She spent almost the whole day in silence and idleness. Her mother would have like to see her busy; but they had never succeeded in getting her to be so. Embroidery, stitchery did not appeal to her; the luster of wool and silk meant nothing to her; she had no taste for finery, never thought of ornament and never wondered if her face was beautiful or ugly. Her temperament was apathetic; she never wished or yearned for anything. She didn't seem to be bored, but she was never gay either. Once, they had taken her to the Opera; it had been a momentous event in the household. M. Irnois, his wife, his two sisters-in-law and Jeanne had been very impressed by the magnificence of the spectacle; Emmelina alone had no reaction and did not say a word about it afterward. In truth, she participated little in life, and at her most active, she would work on a hem, always the same one.

As for the education of her intellect, she had received none; moreover, no one around her had even thought it necessary. However, her Aunt Julie Maigrelut, who, from time to time, enjoyed leafing through a novel by M. Ducray-Duminil, or by Mme de Bournon-Malarme,[11] had taught her to read, and she used this knowledge to take up *The Donkey* now and then, or *Puss'n Boots* ,[12] in Perrault's book; she had started there with her teacher, and she had never risked going going further on her own. At seventeen she still took up *The Donkey* or *Puss'n Boots* , and spent the whole day in their company. She did not find them particularly enjoyable, but not very fatiguing either, and she did not ask for any more than that.

Every morning at eight o'clock, Jeanne, who slept in her room next to her bed, would approach it and inquire how she

---

— 46 —

had slept, a daily question to which Emmelina's daily answer was:

"Well, Jeanne."

But her more or less pale complexion, her more or less hollow eyes were the actual clues that Jeanne queried. The examination over, Jeanne would go running to M. and Mme Irnois's rooms where she would convey her impressions, where she would declare how many times Emmelina had drunk during the night. If the report was bad, M. Irnois would become more bearish than usual, his furious voice conveying terror to the very depths of the kitchen. Mlles Maigrelut knew then what lay ahead of them for the whole day, and would add their yelping to the general consternation. If, on the contrary, Jeanne's declarations were favorable, if Emmelina had asked to drink only twice, M. Irnois was more economical of his curses and invective, and everyone would benefit from his benign mood.

Then Jeanne would go back to dress the girl; we are not talking about charming attire like that of the Graces; they would put any old dress on her, merino in winter or linen in summer, with a bonnet that kept her beautiful hair hidden; and that was it until bedtime.

Once dressed, Emmelina received from the depths of her armchair the good mornings and the cajoleries of the whole family and the rough hugging of her father. After breakfast, it was rather her habit to tell her mother:

"Mummy, I am going to sit in your lap.

— Come, dear angel," Mme Irnois would answer. The poor sickly child would lie against her mother's bosom and would often fall asleep, or stay awake in silence allowing herself to be covered with kisses that she did not return.

It would come to no one's mind, at this point, to ask if Emmelina had an intellect. No, indeed, she did not, the unfortunate! nor anything resembling intelligent activity. What is the intellect if it is not knowing how to guess and to artic-

---

— 47 —

ulate the real or factitious relationships that exist between things? A mind cannot develop in the midst of solitude, or in the company of imbeciles, and there was no one in M. Irnois's house whose contact would have nurtured Emmelina's mind. Moreover, since she had been taught nothing, she had no subject on which to exercise her intelligence; her conversation, therefore, assuming that by chance someone had sought it, would have been nothing but the most banal.

There you have my heroine: deformed, not at all pretty, without wit, and most of the time silent; sickly, and finding her greatest comfort in lying against the maternal bosom like a four year old child. There is nothing in such a picture which is at all seductive. But the portrait is not entirely finished, since nothing has been said about her daydreaming disposition, which was the despair of the Irnois household, and which was not Emmelina's main but her sole character trait.

The poor girl, without being either aware of or embarrassed by her physical imperfections, was, like all ill-formed beings, doomed to a profound and incurable melancholy, in appearance without cause, but only too completely accounted for by the influence of the physical upon the moral. No complaint ever arose from this unreflecting sadness, perceptible only in its having cast a dark shadow over Mlle Irnois's existence; but when her seventeenth year had arrived, and with that age the mysterious unfoldings of the self, the whole swarm of vernal feelings which, at that time of life, rush and gather about the soul, had come to make their quite melancholy drone heard. Emmelina the young woman had come to be even more silent than Emmelina the child. Although she was not aware of the inner ferment of her being, although she was very far from being able to analyze it, it made her ill at ease and unhappy. She yearned for those unknown favors bestowed by the ever-smiling gods of youth, blond Vertumnus and fresh Pomona; but she yearned

---

— 48 —

for them painfully, and would willingly have felt like dying, if she had been able to question herself.

Nonetheless, her melancholy became deeper every day. An exterior cause had brought to this wretched soul more suffering along with a more intense life. We shall speak about it in greater detail presently.

Emmelina had given up seeking refuge in the maternal lap; she now preferred to spend her day by a window of her bedroom which looked out on the courtyard, and hardly ever wanted to go into the sitting room. In a peculiar way that surprised everybody, she seemed for a while stronger and healthier than she had ever appeared. For a few days her cheeks had even shown a rosy hue which, in the delighted eyes of the whole household, had seemed to embody the ideal of Dawn's fingers. And yet she never wanted to leave her room, and, in her room, liked only a corner by the chosen window.

The so sweet Emmelina soon went even further; something unheard of, she had a will; she demanded to stay alone: she mercilessly dismissed mother, maid, and aunts, and one day when Mme Irnois, worried by such strange new behavior, ventured a few timid remarks, Emmelina, frightening prodigy! Emmelina stamped her feet and burst into tears. The whole family was dismayed for two days; but M. Irnois forbade most sternly that anyone dare take the liberty of upsetting his daughter. The sentence having been pronounced in truly dreadful terms, and the judge being formidable, no one challenged the justice of the decision. They proceeded to obey it with an eagerness rarely observed in those who obey. Thus Emmelina remained free to spend long days alone in her room, sitting in an armchair, in her window corner, doing . . . no one knew what.

Nevertheless, she was seventeen. M. Irnois had married, if my memory is correct, around July or August 1794. Those were not propitious times for thinking about marriage or any other joy; but good capitalist that he was, his heart

---

was not very sensitive to his fatherland's perils, and he had wedded Mlle Maigrelut without remorse. At the time that I take up my story, it was then 1811, the former supplier's existence, however secluded, was nevertheless not obscure. The radiance of gold is as evident as that of the sun, and a bulging safe cannot possibly remain unknown, unadmired, and uncoveted by the citizens of a great State. It was in vain that M. Irnois inhabited the Lombard district, in vain that his door, carefully shut to serious men as well as to whippersnappers, opened for hardly anyone; one knew to the last detail how many écus there were in the house at number such and such, one was completely enlightened about the habits of the household, and one was perfectly aware of the existence of Mlle Irnois, who, as the sole heir of the considerable paternal wealth, had the keys of the coffers tied to the end of her virginal sash. Now what fortunate mortal would turn out to be victorious over the dragon (father Irnois) and to possess the golden apples (the great wealth)? It was a question people liked to ask in a few of the most elevated circles of that time.

Our times have a bad reputation; they are accused of loving money to excess; but, to be fair to them, one must admit that a passion for hoarding had devoured many men before our generation appeared on the world's stage, and that even under the Empire one could easily find characters who, set apart from the belligerent passions of the time by their covetousness, indulged in a taste for capital with no less verve than those who the most relentlessly play the stock market. In those days, certain important gentlemen, speculating on national glory, were not above tampering with foreign funds. There were others who tied their hopes of wealth to contracting rich marriages, neither more nor less than the notorious roués of the Regency; and, owing to a circumstance particular to that age, these people often knew how to divert the effect of imperial power to their own profit by recurring to

---

the will of the master in matches that could not have been concluded without this quasi-divine help.[13] To be sure, I am not trying to say that Napoleon lightheartedly made himself into the supporter of such base ambitions; but, in principle, he wanted great fortunes to come to those who served in great offices; and, as often happens on this earth, Where the most beautiful things Are destined to the worst,[14] the most beautiful principle sometimes finds questionable applications. More than one basely greedy individual took advantage of the Emperor's plans, and thanks to them wormed their way into families in which they were not welcome.

There was, in 1811, in the Council of State,[15] a Count Cabarot whose services were much appreciated, and who was indeed a man of merit. An obscure lawyer before the Revolution in who knows which of the King's courts, he had sucked with his mother's milk, in the family of scriveners whence he came, a truly profound legal learning. From earliest childhood, Cabarot had heard talk of chicanery; common law, Roman law, all imaginable laws, Lombard, Burgundian, Frankish, even Salic laws, had been the constant occupations given his mind by the author of his days. Little wonder then if at thirty years he was found to be one of the best educated men at the bar. Though but little eloquent as an orator and a perfect coward, he was sent to the Convention where he had contented himself with quietly handling business. Under the Directory, Citizen Cabarot had made a name for himself in ministerial offices. He had been successfully employed at all sorts of tasks: in those days scriveners must have been somewhat like Michel Morin.[16] Cabarot had been a plenipotentiary, then a commissioner of Heaven knows what, then department head in the Ministry of Justice, and then many other things. In sum, Bonaparte, aware of his expertise, took him up and put him in the Council of State, where his vast erudition in legal matters clinched the master's favor for him. He had been made a count.

— 51 —

Once more, Cabarot was . . . excuse me, Count Cabarot[17] was an erudite and distinguished man in terms of practical knowledge. But he was as depraved as he was learned and clever. I cannot, nor do I have the least desire to, enter into the details of his inner life. It is enough for me to say that the circle he moved in, a gathering of generals, legal colleagues, diplomats, none of whom were prudes, readily laughed at his habits and that Prince Cambacérès[18] included him in his confidence.

However, even with so much merit and with Caesar's favor, Count Cabarot was not wealthy: at the most he had an income of thirty thousand francs, which might have seemed a mountain of gold to his father, poor man, but which was not sufficient for him. Add to this figure about twenty thousand francs of annual debts, and you will agree that it was not enough.

One day when he was working with his Imperial and Royal Majesty, Count Cabarot dared respectfully to touch upon his profound distress.

The sovereign of the world,[19] if I may use an Oriental expression, answered this touching complaint with no more than perhaps deserved reproaches about the horrible thieveries of the Count. The Count apologized as best he could and renewed the attack so well that he was asked what he wanted.

"Mlle Irnois's hand would crown my wishes," answered the Councillor of State with a bow.

Thereupon an explanation of what Mlle Irnois was: how, physically, she was probably not very pretty (he was far from knowing to what extent), but also how morally she had an income of four or five hundred thousand pounds, and how such a union would make the most humble and devoted subject of his Imperial and Royal Majesty the happiest of men, and so on and so on.

Fortunately, Count Cabarot, clever and well-informed man that he was, was quick to act; he vaguely knew that the

— 52 —

girl was seventeen and that with the virtues that he himself took pleasure in discerning in her, it was impossible that within a month the attention of many other suitors of his sort would not be aroused also. In fact, they were already thinking about it, but did not hurry enough; Count Cabarot was more alert.

On his side, the august power he implored proved benevolent. Cabarot did not leave the cabinet without bringing along an order addressed to the aide-de-camp on duty, or any other person who at that moment conveyed the imperial will, to require that M. Pierre-André Irnois appear in three days before his sovereign.

Count Cabarot saw himself in seventh heaven; he had not been so happy since the judgment against Tallien,[20] who had once scowled at him.

— 53 —

III

Count Cabarot was too fine a diplomat to confide prematurely to his best friends the charming hope that he had conceived. To the contrary, he acted with the utmost reserve on the evening of this happy day on which the Emperor had deigned to promise to intercede in his favor. But despite this discretion, he beamed so broadly, distending his ugly visage, broadening his flat face, that his princely highness the archchancellor,[21] as well as M. d'Aigrefeuille[22] and their like, could not but comment on it.

"Please tell me what has so enchanted Cabarot tonight?" some were saying.

The answer was simple: that tender creature, Cabarot, was thinking of his forthcoming match with Mlle Irnois.

At this point a reader might imagine that the Count, having never seen his fair one or heard of her infirmities, was setting himself up for a painful retreat. One might believe that he would not have wanted a young woman in poor Emmelina's state. Do not believe it. At this point one must come to understand the whole Count Cabarot. For six hundred thousand pounds of income, and even for a good deal less, he would without hesitation have given his hand to Carabosse,[23] with all that notorious fairy's crookedness of stature and monstrosity of mood. Count Cabarot was a practical man.

As I was saying, that very evening, in Prince Cambacérès's drawing room, he was charmingly witty and gay. After the throng had left, when there were only a small number of intimates around the

fireplace, he started to tell a host

— 54 —

of stories that were more or less indelicate, with a taste, an attack, a bite that brought him unanimous applause. He was ecstatic!

In the house on Lombard Street, the effect was totally different. When the imperial missive was handed to M. Irnois, M. Irnois had felt a profound terror. The idea of appearing before his sovereign did not arouse in him that feeling of pride that today puffs up the breast of any civil guards officer taken away for the first time from that obscure barrel where his grape juice ferments in order to shine as a new star in the luminous regions of a court ball.[24] M. Irnois was like all the moneyed men in those times: he did not relish contact with power; the word *government* made him shudder; in men invested with authority he saw nothing more than born enemies of his coffers, harpies forever in search of spoils. He almost fell to the floor when the gendarme handed him the *hatti-sherif*[25] that summoned him to the palace.

His face pale and discomposed, he entered the sitting room where his wife and his sisters-in-law were chatting, and although it was rather rare on his part to talk about his affairs or to seek advice, he planted himself in the middle of the female areopagus, and, holding out his letter with a desperate expression, he exclaimed:

"Confound the devil! Look what a paving stone has fallen on my head!"

Six eyes lit up with curiosity; six arms extended; six hands attached to a total of thirty crooked fingers tried to grab the letter that had so upset the brain of the master of the house.

Mlle Julie Maigrelut was the most agile; she seized the letter and rapidly read it aloud, then she sank back in her armchair exclaiming:

"Oh, my God!"

Mlle Catherine Maigrelut caught the precious paper in flight as it fell from her sister's fingers and likewise exclaimed

— 55 —

after having read it aloud:

"Oh, my God!"

Unable to believe what she had heard twice already, Mme Irnois recited the contents of the letter as her two sisters had done, and as they had, gave all the signs of a profound consternation.[26]

The three women briefly entertained the thought that what was going on was nothing less than an attempt to destroy M. Irnois.

The former supplier was, however, braver than his companions and assured them that, in all probability, things would not reach that point. Moreover, it would really be too unjust. He had never spoken ill of any government, and of the Emperor's even less than of any other; he had paid his taxes regularly. There was no doubt that in the past one could have somewhat criticized the way he had shod the army, but all these peccadilloes took place long ago, and furthermore his name had never appeared on the supplies. Clearly the Emperor could not wish him the least ill; what, therefore, did he want?

Mlle Julie Maigrelut was the first one to express an important opinion on this new matter; I say new because the spectrum had changed from black to rose. She suggested that if the Emperor summoned her brother, her brother who was innocent as a lamb, it had absolutely to be in order to reward him; but reward him for what?

"For his great wealth, immediately answered Mlle Catherine Maigrelut.

— She's right, said Mlle Julie.

— She's a hundred times right, whispered Mme Irnois.

— To reward me? exclaimed the Croesus, in what way? Zounds! it would be better to leave me alone.

— I wouldn't be surprised, Brother, continued Mlle Julie, if his Imperial Majesty wanted to make you a Duke or Marshal of the Empire! Really! a man as rich as you, there

— 56 —

would be nothing astonishing in it!

— You are three silly women! thundered M. Irnois. In order to become a marshal, one must have been a soldier; more probably he will make me a baron! Well, who cares! The plague take me if I enjoy preening about in the Tuileries! How shall I dress?"

Here was one more delicate problem. They considered and turned down a number of opinions; finally, they adopted the only reasonable one, which was to call the tailor and consult him. They only had three days left; they could not hurry enough.

M. Irnois's despair knew no limit when he heard that very evening that he absolutely had to put on the ritual embroidered dress coat, kerseymere breeches, white silk hose, buckled shoes, crush-hat, and have his hair curled, and skewer himself with a sword, and wear gloves! Nevertheless, he gave in; and, swearing and struggling like an automaton, he abandoned himself to the care of the unfortunate, the too unfortunate artisan in charge of enhancing his person.

The household was topsy-turvy, and yet Emmelina did not take the least part in the terrible events unleashed around her. When her father had shown the letter from the palace to her mother and her aunts, she was alone in her room, as was her habit; in the evening she heard the talk swirling around her about what was going to happen; she was even told by Mlle Catherine:

"Don't you know, Emmelina? Your father is going to court the day after tomorrow. . . .Isn't that nice, my child!"

Emmelina smiled sweetly, gazing at whoever was talking to her; but she did not answer, and even seemed to have only barely understood what had been said. Her mother looked at her anxiously, then raised her eyes to the heavens with a deep sigh. In that moment, Mme Irnois ceased to be the fat and silly bourgeoise that we know and became a sort of Niobe,[27] such was the true and profound pain in her eyes,

which were turned toward those regions where one so often seeks relief in vain.

From day to day Emmelina was becoming more absorbed. She was not sadder; but she spoke still less often, and was no longer interested in anything at all; neither her aunt's chitchat, nor Jeanne's caresses, nor *The Donkey* , nor working on her hem could do anything more for her; even her mother's fondling did not appear to mean anything to her: formerly at least, she sought it; now she rather seemed to avoid it, for she received it with indifference or even with visible impatience.

And yet, was she unhappy? It was hard to believe, for she sometimes had on her mouth and in her eyes something like a slight smile, like a subtle flame that revealed an infinite well-being. When they looked at her covertly, they saw her plunged into a sort of ecstasy that seemed to intoxicate her with the most ardent delights: she resembled then one of those passionate medieval saints, and if the people around her had known what intelligence is, they would have seen its most sublime expression on this inspired face. The intensity of this exaltation must have been vivid, for Jeanne sometimes fell into a mute contemplation in front of her mistress, and remained divided between admiration and secret terror. When she tore herself away from this condition, so unusual for her, she would tiptoe noiselessly out of the room and would go to the kitchen exclaiming:

"Jesus! Jesus! how much Mademoiselle Emmelina looks like the Holy Virgin!"

The great crisis surrounding the young ecstatic therefore made no impression on this imagination lost in another world, and M. Irnois, in his lofty preoccupations, had to do without filial solicitude. In any case, he did not miss it; he could not be demanding, and moreover was so absorbed, hanging between fear and hope, listening in turn to the conjectures of his privy council and to the important communications from

his tailor, that he did not have the time to give thought both to his presentation to the Emperor and to the too absolute tranquillity of his daughter; in any case, he would have been incapable of pondering two different things at the same time.

Finally that great day arrived when under the dazzled gaze of the whole building, whose forewarned occupants had flocked out onto the various landings, M. Pierre-André Irnois crossed the threshold of his door in full ceremonial dress followed by his private secretary who, appointed footman for the occasion, was descending the staircase by sliding down the bannister in order to reach the hired carriage faster and open its door.

M. Irnois, the rich capitalist, seemed even uglier and less favored by nature in this memorable circumstance as his apparel was the more sumptuous and displayed even more his pretention of

showing off his physical advantages. In passing, I cannot help but cast a disparaging glance on those pitiful hose reduced to enveloping . . . what they enveloped! on those pitiful kerseymere breeches whose awkward folds floated around those undoubtedly shriveled thighs, on this skinny body adorned with a jabot and a silver embroidered brown cutaway, on that pitiful and deplorable sword.

The coach drove away as well as could be expected, considering that it was quite ancient and dilapidated, and arrived at the periphery of the Carrousel. In those days luxury was very much in favor, and the sovereign, who was eager to stimulate commerce, ordered its display. M. Irnois was not permitted to have his equipage advance onto the noble dust of the imperial court. He stepped down and with his credentials in hand perilously made his way through the coaches and horses to the main stairway.

It was a state occasion. Next to the aide-de-camp on duty, who called out the name of each person introduced, was standing a man of approximately forty years, rather ugly but with a sharp, shrewd, and witty face. It was Count Cabarot,

---

very apprehensive over the arrival of his future father-in-law. Having glanced at the letter of invitation and at the individual who had handed it to him, the aide-de-camp looked meaningfully at the Councillor of State. The latter stared fixedly at his future father-in-law.

But rather than attending in this fashion an imperial reception, which would be much too great an honor for this little tale, let us return to the more humble sphere of Mme Irnois's sitting room.

In there, no more splendors; enough of magnificence, no more of this somewhat theatrical pomp, as the Empire conceived it. A lamp is burning rather sadly on a pedestal table in the middle of the apartment. Aunt Julie is knitting, Aunt Catherine is knitting, and Madame Irnois is also knitting. Emmelina is by the fire in her armchair and, her eyes fixed on the embers, probably envisioning there the notion slowly forming in her head, contemplates the burning world whose forms the flames keep changing.

Anxiety is at its peak; everybody is speaking at the same time. For a long time Jeanne has been the messenger between the fears of the sitting room and those of the kitchen, but emotions are too lively, the kitchen goes up to the sitting room, and to hear them talk about king, emperor, marshal, baron, duke, prison, and death, you would believe yourself in a political meeting.

Finally they hear the bell ring violently. A very prolonged Oh! escapes everyone's lips; the cook runs to the door. M. Irnois rushes into the sitting room, pale, no, what am I saying, livid! His eyes blazing and cursing all Olympian divinities except for the Styx,[28] which he cannot name since he does not know of it. Assuredly since the time when the bourgeoise, the count, the barrister, the philanthropic lady, his former masters had dismissed him, he had not put on a greater display of anger and disappointment; but the transports of his language were mixed with a deep feeling of

---

fright that did not escape any of the witnesses of this dramatic scene.

Finally after having cursed a good deal, M. Irnois threw his crush-hat into the face of the private secretary, sat down abruptly in front of the fire, and, having dismissed all the kitchen escapees with a last bellow, he began to satisfy the overexcited curiosity of his family.

"In the name of all the saints, the three women screamed, tell us what happened to you!

— I am a wrecked man, destroyed by horrible scoundrels, M. Irnois exclaimed. That is what happened to me, hell and . . . ! Oh! My God, how terrible my predicament! Don't you know what's happening? Well, then, I enter the Tuileries: you can't imagine the crowd, the noise, the heat! I was in a hurry to see the Emperor to know what he wanted of me and to leave. I arrive in a last reception room; the letter had been removed from my hand by I don't know whom, I don't know how; I was bewildered! A tall man, embroidered all over, with epaulets and a large red sash across his chest, pushes me by the shoulders, for, bedeviled by all this fuss, I was standing like a statue. I couldn't distinguish anything! and I find myself nose to nose with the Emperor!

— With the Emperor? his audience repeated, except for Emmelina, who was not listening.

— Hush up, then, you confounded babblers! M. Irnois shouted, giving the logs a hard kick, whose violence made his daughter start, then sigh. Hush up then! Yes, the Emperor! And he tells me, this Emperor, pointing at a man standing behind him: 'Prepare yourself to marry your daughter off to Count Cabarot; I am making him an ambassador!' Indeed, at first, without really knowing what I was saying, I exclaimed: 'Give Emmelina to this . . .' I went no further, for the Emperor stared at me, oh!

what a stare! I felt as if the earth was giving way under me, as if I were about to be imprisoned, shot, strangled, massacred! I very nearly fainted; it seems

— 61 —

even that I collapsed, because I was supported by the arms of a scoundrel! . . . It was, would you believe it, that scoundrel to whom the Emperor wants me to give Emmelina, who dared to prevent me from falling! I gave him a hard look! . . . the same way the Emperor had glared at me; but it didn't have the same effect. To the contrary, he made a face that was supposed to pass for a smile, and said: 'My dear Monsieur Irnois, our introduction takes place somewhat abruptly; but nevertheless do not doubt my respectful feelings; we have friends in common!' 'I don't believe so, I answered in that way of mine, I have no friends!' He was not taken aback; and said with a bow: 'I will go and present my respectful compliments to Madame Irnois tomorrow, without fail.' 'I will be out!' I exclaimed. 'The Emperor orders you to stay home, whenever I notify you,' he replied staring at me. I was terrified and I came back here. Can you imagine such a situation!

— It's monstrous! the women exclaimed.

— Is he coming tomorrow, the monster? Mlle Julie asked.

— Tomorrow! said M. Irnois.

— Then! the spinster went on, I propose that we give him a bit of our minds: "You will not have Emmelina! you will not have her! that's all!"

— You silly woman! M. Irnois howled; he will go fetch the police, and I will be dragged to prison!

— Would you rather have Emmelina die? the mother asked.

— No, answered M. Irnois; but my being locked up will not stop the marriage.

— Then what shall we do? Mlle Catherine asked.

— Emmelina, the mother said in a tearful voice, kneeling in front of her daughter, Emmelina, they want to marry you off? Emmelina, they want to take you away from here, dearest love! answer me, what would you have me do?"

— 62 —

IV

Everyone was dismayed when, in answer to her mother's question, Emmelina was seen to cock her head slowly and, with an indescribably sweet smile and her eyes shining, to say:

"Yes, Mummy, I am willing to go.

— What, M. Irnois said, you are willing to leave? What does this mean? . . . You are willing to leave us and follow this Cabarot whom you do not know?

— I do, indeed, the poor girl answered, nodding her head joyfully; yes, I do know him! . . . I want to leave with him."

They looked at one another; but the more they tried to understand, the less they succeeded. It did not seem possible that Emmelina, always secluded in the house, as she was, and never going out, could know the husband forced on her parents by the imperial will.

"But, Mme Irnois asked, where did you see him?

— Ah! Ah!" Emmelina answered gazing . . . and then she stopped, thought a moment and continued: "I don't want to tell.

— Do not cross her, Aunt Julie said. She must have dreamed something, and tomorrow will find her more reasonable; for she is full of good sense, this little Emmelina. Isn't that so, my darling, that you will be more reasonable tomorrow?

— I'm willing to leave with him, Emmelina continued. . . .When am I going?

— Oh! Mercy! Mme Irnois said. Don't tell me that one raises children so they can be that ungrateful! This girl, who

— 63 —

is adored here, and who thinks nothing of following the first boor! . . . Emmelina, you hurt us terribly!"

Emmelina remained quite untouched by this reproach; she was smiling, laughing, clapping her

hands; she was overcome by a nervous agitation, the like of which they had never before seen in her. Everybody around her was dumbfounded.

M. Irnois did not know what to think, and was on the verge of spewing out a volcano of curses. Without having much thought about it, he did not doubt his daughter's eternal attachment; on his child's poor health he had built an edifice of expectations that the present moment brought down. To keep her constantly by him had been the happiness on which he had most firmly counted. The present circumstance was most cruel. He paced up and down the apartment; but he said nothing; he was too grieved to talk. The two aunts and the mother were sobbing copiously.

The girl was not paying the slightest attention. It was thus the evening ended in a profound consternation for one side; for the other, a joy that did not try to contain itself. Emmelina had never been heard to sing. When Jeanne came to take her in her arms to carry her to bed, she could be heard warbling indistinct notes as gay as those a bird might address to the trees in the woods.

Emmelina had only barely left when the bomb exploded: M. Irnois was seized by an access of anger and despair that he no longer tried to contain; and the women, even though they were singing in chorus with him, were not unscathed by some of his reproaches. He accused them of having received Cabarot in his absence, of having tolerated Cabarot's stealing his daughter's affection, of having turned the head of an innocent child out of pure feminine stupidity; in brief, he accused them to his heart's content, and they defended themselves as best they could. Down deep they believed themselves to be the victims of a spell, as was also their daughter and niece; because never in their lives had they had even the slightest

---

— 64 —

glimpse of a man named Cabarot, and two hours earlier they still would have sworn that Emmelina did not know him any more than they did. But now, they no longer knew what to believe. There was, therefore, a general desolation mixed with curiosity; for, after all, there had to be an answer to the enigma, and time would certainly make it known.

The next day at noon, the private secretary, fulfilling the function of a master of ceremonies, announced in the sitting room that a gentleman was asking to see Mme Irnois.

"What's his name, this gentleman of yours?

— He says that his name is Count Cabarot.

— Ah! Heavenly gods! exclaimed the whole assembly; Monsieur Irnois, have the gentleman come in!"

Reluctantly, but goaded by a holy terror of imperial power, M. Irnois proceeded to meet his future son-in-law; he found him in the entry taking off his box coat.

Count Cabarot had rigged himself out as a suitor; he had thought that the most fastidious attire would appear an evidence of his consideration to the family he was about to enter; as he knew them to be very middle class, he had also displayed his medals and decorations on his chest so as to dazzle them a bit.

"The fashion in which I have found my way to their daughter, he said to himself, is a bit brisk; now that we are in by means of a bold stroke, it would be politic to soften the resulting effect by a becoming propriety."

He put this system of conduct into play at once, the moment that M. Irnois's long face presented itself to him. His body leaning forward, his head thrown back, his eyes, his cheeks, his mouth, all smiles, his two hands affectionately extended.

"Hah! Good day to you sir! he exclaimed; allow me the indiscretion of bothering you so soon! Yesterday at the palace I had little chance to see you, and, I confess, I had the keenest desire to shake your hand! Would you kindly lead

---

— 65 —

me to your charming family? I am dying to be introduced to them.

— Sir, said the former purveyor, you may follow me if you wish. Madame Irnois, and you, Mesdemoiselles Maigrelut, this is Count Cabarot, about whom the Emperor spoke to me."

The Councillor of State bowed even lower than he had for the master of the house, his right hand fluttering in an utterly gallant and respectful manner. When he raised his eyes, he tried to guess which of these three people was the prey he coveted; but he soon understood that Aunt Julie, the youngest of the three sisters, did not have a sixteen-year-old profile. He resolved to be patient; then he launched the conversation.

"Bless me, ladies, he said in a saccharine voice, you have in front of you a straightforward, uncomplicated man, asking you permission to feel at ease in the midst of a family which he esteems. His Majesty the Emperor, whose wisdom and utmost kindness are equal to his power, deigned to think that I might, in view of my position, my character, my principles, assure the happiness of Mademoiselle Irnois, your daughter, whose wit and grace make worthy of the utmost respect. Do you not think that this august approval, which fills me with gratitude, by the same token gives you an absolute guarantee as to who I am? No, the Emperor, our glorious master, would not wish to sacrifice the happiness of a person as interesting as Mlle Irnois. Please consider me, Madame, as a respectful and devoted son, and, even though our acquaintance is rather new, deal with me as you would with an old servant."

"There, he said to himself after having delivered this speech, that cannot fail to please these rustics. I am harnessing them; we are about to become cronies and companions."

A few overlords of the Imperial Court had a strong tendency to pose as veritable magnates[29] in relation to the other classes of society.

— 66 —

Mme Irnois bowed slightly to the Count and answered:

"You are too kind; I did not wish to marry my daughter.

— Ah! Heavens! why, dear lady? She is sixteen, she must be sixteen; isn't that the age when the heart begins to. . . .

— Perhaps you are not aware of our Emmelina's state of health?

— Indeed I have heard that you had some reasons to worry about her chest, Cabarot continued in the saccharine manner that, he thought, worked so well in his favor. Undoubtedly growing up too fast, developing her intelligence too soon. You should not worry too much, dear good lady; have no doubt how carefully I will tend this beautiful flower!"

The whole family was looking at the Count in dismay. Obviously, he did not know Emmelina; he had neither seen her nor talked with her, and that was a fact: Cabarot had vaguely heard that somewhere in the world there existed a rich fellow named Irnois, and that this rich fellow had a daughter, but he had stopped with this much information and he had in no way inquired about the character, health, and beauty that might be the lot of the wife whose dowry he coveted.

But then, how could Emmelina have fallen madly in love with a man who spoke so blindly of her too rapid growth and of the precocious development of her intelligence? This is what M. Irnois and the three women were inquiring of one another with their eyes.

"Monsieur, Mme Irnois went on, you are not, I believe, well informed as to the circumstances of our poor child. I have to tell you that she is deformed.

— Oh! Madame, what blasphemy is this? exclaimed Cabarot who saw a hunchback outlined in his imagination. I am quite sure that you exaggerate some quite insignificant slight fault. Moreover, even were it true that Mademoiselle Irnois might totally lack beauty, what are the fragile advan-

---

— 67 —

tages of physical charms in the life of a couple? Her grace, her wit. . . .

— Quite, M. Irnois said, but she does not open her mouth!

— The virtues with which she is endowed! Count Cabarot exclaimed with renewed enthusiasm, yes, her virtues, that is what attracts me to her! Believe me, my sole ambition always was to have a virtuous and docile wife! But may I not see the beautiful and touching Emmelina? Shall I not be allowed to lay at her very feet the homage of my heart? You understand my impatience and. . . ."

A sudden fear tightened Mme Irnois's heart:

"I will warn you of something, she said.

— And what is that? exclaimed the Count, anxious to agree to anything, to let no difficulty stop him, to accept any conditions, at least for the time being.

— I beg you to keep in mind that my daughter is a child and that one must not infer anything wrong from the way she might conduct herself with you. She might be a little more affectionate than is customary."

"A plague! Cabarot thought, she appears to be lewd! I'll have to watch out for that."

He added aloud:

"A frank and unceremonious character: it is a promise of happiness to add to so many others.

— I warn you, Mme Irnois went on, that she is prejudiced in your favor, and that I do not know how, since she never goes out, and to the best of my knowledge, she has never seen you.

— The result of sympathy, Cabarot exclaimed laughing; but again, may I see her? We shall talk about all this at leisure. I am dying to be introduced to her.

— Catherine, Mme Irnois said, please go and tell Jeanne to carry her here."

— 68 —

That word: *carry* , made Count Cabarot shiver. Remembering that they had just mentioned deformity, he imagined the worst. Despite whatever philosophy he was capable of, he had a moment of hesitation. Even he was on the verge of questioning this marriage and of conceiving causes for a rupture; fortunately, the crisis did not last. He immediately recalled that he had involved an august power in this business, and that to back out was, in a way, to scorn the master's liberality; that, moreover, he was marrying the daughter only a little and the dowry a great deal; that with wealth such as he would enjoy, he would have full liberty to house his wife as far from him as he wished, and even to relegate her to the country, if staying in the same house ever came to displease him.

Count Cabarot was more or less at the end of the reflection that we have just seen when the door opened, and Aunt Catherine reappeared.

"Here is Emmelina," she said, returning to her chair and her knitting.

Indeed, Jeanne entered in her wake, carrying the girl in her arms. It was a peculiar scene.

At the moment when one saw the old servant and her living burden, the poor invalid seemed as red as a cherry, her eyes filled with an angelic rapture, beautiful, very beautiful, such were the emotion and love diffused over all her features. Mme Irnois had been right in warning the Count, for Emmelina's first word was to cry:

"Where is he? Where is he?"

She was stretching out both her arms, and leaning forward with an inexpressible passion.

"Good God! Count Cabarot said to himself, this unfortunate cripple is horrible, and furiously alive!"

And as he had carefully thought it over, as we have seen, and steeled himself against the probably disgusting aspects

---

— 69 —

of this adventure, he bravely rushed toward his betrothed and meant to take her hands and kiss them with as much fire as he was capable.

But Emmelina did not even glance at him, and withdrawing her hands as one does from a bothersome person, exclaimed:

"Well, where is he?

— But in front of you, said her mother, here is M. Cabarot with whom you want to go away."

Emmelina threw herself back into the arms of Jeanne, uttering a scream of horror and fright.

"I don't know him, she said crying. That's not him, Jeanne, that's not him!"

She started to sob. Her father took her in his arms, she pushed him away. "Leave me alone," she said.

They put her in an armchair, and she went on crying, refusing to raise her head or to look at her future husband, who was careful to keep a courteous and docile smile on his lips.

Deep down in his heart, Count Cabarot was exceedingly exasperated.

"What! he thought, it is not enough to have a wife put together like this one. On top of all her deformities, do I have to find out that she is infatuated with some silly ass. I have my work cut out for me with this little woman if I want to set her understanding to rights. But patience! I will succeed."

Meanwhile, Mme Irnois's sitting room was a veritable Tower of Babel; they did not know what to do next. After a few sobs, after wringing her hands, Emmelina, her face drowned in a flood of tears, had become pale, deadly pale, her eyes had suddenly dimmed, she had fallen back into the chair and had fainted.

"There, my daughter is dying! cried Mme Irnois.

— Hell and damnation!" the purveyor shouted.

— 70 —

The two aunts imitated the parents, rushing to surround the patient.

Cabarot was not less quick. This painful scene was part of what he had anticipated. He had not expected to get off with less, for he had too much sense to assume that the business of his marriage, so suddenly arranged by a higher will, could be brought off without some protest from outraged independence.

He graciously offered his smelling salts to resurrect his adorable Emmelina, as it pleased him to call her; but the salts did no good: Emmelina remained unconscious.

"Dear God! said Mme Irnois with a shrug, looking Cabarot in the face, all these people around her do her more harm than good."

Cabarot felt that he should not turn a deaf ear; he thought that he had done enough for the first day.

"Ah! Madame, he exclaimed in a subdued tone, how unhappy I am that I may not claim my right to lavish my solicitude on her! But the least I can do is to understand your motherly concern and to withdraw. Good-bye, Madame; good-bye, ladies, till tomorrow. Please accept my deep respect."

He seized Mme Irnois's hand and kissed it effusively; he bestowed the same favor on the dry and leathery hands of the two spinsters; slipped a napoleon in Jeanne's fingers; then, turning around, he took M. Irnois's arm and pulled him along toward the door. And it was just as well that he did, for, if it had been up to the future father-in-law, he would not have followed his future son-in-law.

"What do you want of me? said M. Irnois, arriving at the entry in Cabarot's tow. Don't you see that I must take care of my daughter?"

Cabarot adopted a tone halfway between good humor and imperious sternness:

"My dear sir, I have seen Mademoiselle Irnois and she

— 71 —

suits me in every way. It will be very easy for me to obey the Emperor. What date shall we choose to sign the contract?

— The Devil! You don't lose a minute!

— It is my habit. And in any case, the Emperor wants it.

— But the Emperor does not know that my daughter is ill!

— We will take care of her. We must bring the matter to a close. The Emperor doesn't like things to drag.

— But what if Emmelina doesn't want you?

— Those are girlish caprices that must not stop wise men such as you and I. As a father, it should be enough for you to trust completely my integrity.

— But I don't know you!

— And as a subject, Cabarot continued in a loud and solemn voice, you owe obedience to the Emperor."

Irnois felt a shiver of fright go through his limbs. He sensed that he was so utterly at Cabarot's mercy that he almost fell at his feet and asked his pardon.

"Well! the date of the contract? continued the imperturbable suitor.

— When you wish.

— Then I am going to drop in immediately upon my solicitor and order him to work things out with yours. We will have no difficulty agreeing. You do not have any other heir than the future Countess Cabarot? Very good! Goodbye then until tomorrow!

— May all the devils wring your neck during the night, Irnois exclaimed, after the Councillor of State could no longer hear him."

— 72 —

V

Immediately after the Count's departure poor Emmelina asked to go back to her room, and her whole family was truly too affected and astonished to have the strength to oppose, even with a mere remark,

the wishes of one who touched those around her with her martyred appearance.

The fainting had passed as everything passes, but it left the young girl in a physical torpor and a sort of desolation easily perceptible to anyone looking at her. She was much paler than ordinary, and her eyes had lost that special brilliance which had so surprised everyone around her for some time. Clearly, prostration had followed exaltation; a despair whose cause one could not imagine had followed the ecstasy of a mysterious hope. They did not know what to think; and in short, it was almost with satisfaction that Mme Irnois and her sisters saw the object of their affection taken away; for in her presence, they could only accumulate questions which remained unanswered; and, in her absence, at least, they were entirely free to exhaust various commentaries and suppositions never lacking in feminine imaginations. These latter undoubtedly did little to arrive at the discovery of truth; but they did a great deal to alleviate an anguish the ladies thought without remedy, since they did not know its source and could not even hope to discover it.

"With any other than Emmelina, the despairing mother was saying, there would be some way to obtain her confidence; but that little girl is so taciturn that we will never succeed in making her talk. And yet, how can we accept not

---

— 73 —

knowing why she has been so cheerful for some time, why the idea of marrying the Count seemed at first to give her such great pleasure, and finally why, when she saw that same betrothed she was awaiting with such impatience, she was utterly distraught and wouldn't even look at him? Has anyone ever seen parents more unfortunate than we? As for me, I don't think there exist any; and if I had been able to foresee that my very own daughter would lack confidence in me to such an extent, I would already have cursed a thousand times the day she was born.

— Don't be silly! M. Irnois exclaimed, returning to the room at the end of this tirade. This child seems to me sufficiently afflicted without our having to heap insults upon her. I would give anything in the world not to have made a fortune and that the Emperor had never heard of me. I would not be forced to give my money to this M. Cabarot."

While father, mother, and aunts grieve to their heart's content and bicker amongst themselves, let us follow Emmelina to her bedroom. She has hardly entered it, hardly sat herself down in her armchair in the usual window corner, that she dismisses Jeanne, and when she finds herself alone, quite alone, she opens both sides of the window casement a crack, which was almost always kept shut; her eyes look avidly into that space, and as she stares at a point on which all the strength of her soul seems fixed, the flush comes back to her cheeks, the fire and animation to her pupils, the smile to her lips, existence and life to her whole being. The poor girl seems no longer to live her ordinary life. It seems, looking at her, that she is, as it were, transfigured; it is surely the same person, if you wish, but it is not the same being; it is indeed Emmelina, but no longer the lame, hunchbacked, deformed Emmelina, disfavored by nature, the feebleminded, apathetic Emmelina; it is no longer even a body, if I may be allowed to pursue as far as possible the impression that she produces on me, the author, on me who sees her: she looks like those

---

— 74 —

cherubs of whom mystical Church writers speak, who are all love, all passion and who, for this reason, are always represented only as a head surrounded by flaming wings.

Thus Emmelina appears to our eyes; it's a cherub's face burning with tenderness. Yes, tenderness! Since we are alone with her in her room, now is the time to learn everything that has been going on within her for a few weeks.

As we said at the beginning of this story, M. Irnois's house, situated in one of the side streets of the Lombard district, had its bedrooms looking on a rather dark courtyard. This courtyard was, as one can imagine, square and surrounded on its three other sides by quite high buildings that had window openings, as did also the wall behind which the residence of the modest millionaire was hiding.

On the fifth-floor, facing the two windows of Emmelina's bedroom, and therefore three floors above her, was a mansard window of paltry appearance, located just above roof level, which was unlikely to hold one's attention for long. But behind that pitiful window a young wood turner was working all day long. . . .You are beginning, I suppose, to have an idea of what is in store for us.

And, in truth, this young worker was remarkably comely; he could not have been more than eighteen; blond, naturally curly hair, a young girl's face, and the more so as he was very good at looking quite timid and reserved when anyone came by chance to his garret to talk to him, to order something, for example. Moreover, the little worker was as happy as a lark, sang heartily all day long,

and even spent a quarter of an hour from time to time sitting on the ledge of his window, eating his lunch or his dinner, while looking into his neighbors' apartments. He was more a sparrow than a boy, nested high up as he was, gay, singing, quick, and bustling.

Here was the cause of Emmelina's emotions.

It had, of course, taken quite some time for M. Irnois's daughter to lift her listless eyes to the fifth-floor mansard,

---

— 75 —

and when she had done it the first time, she certainly had no inkling of what was about to overcome her heart. This poor stagnant nature did not have enough strength in itself to dream or to desire; an intense passion could not suddenly start for her; such passions are met only in spirited beings, who are always rushed into action by their instinct. Emmelina was not one of those, far from it.

But there are several things: gaiety, youth and beauty that never fail to exercise power upon souls which are only weak but not spoiled. When in her long hours of idleness Emmelina had contemplated her young neighbor a few times, she found, in the sight of a being so different from herself, a sort of satisfaction that in her unfinished nature manifested itself as an unexamined well-being. From the moment that she experienced some pleasure in observing her neighbor, it became her goal, a constant preoccupation, an exquisite novelty; for never before had she ever enjoyed this boon of attaching herself to something; her mother, father, aunts, maid, her sewing and her *Puss'n Boots* did not constitute accidents initiated by herself, and made no more impression on her than the air she breathed. But in the case of her new acquaintance, everything was different. She had in some way created it, imagined it herself. No one had intervened in the pleasure she was forging for herself, and she soon found an infinitely delicate enjoyment, the greatest she had ever tasted, in looking at the young man.

Emmelina never acted out of conscious decision; all her actions were, as happens in beings guided less by reason than by instinct, the outcome of a dim impression that she never could have explained, either to others or to herself. Thus it was neither out of slyness nor out of fear that from the very first moments she strove for secrecy from those around her. When Jeanne, or some other person was near her, she did not open the curtains, usually drawn over her window; and in this respect she carried her precautions very far, for they

---

— 76 —

never would have imagined, even if they had seen her looking all day long in the direction of the mansard, that she found the person of the young worker in the least interesting.

Well! It is, however, what had finally happened. Emmelina's physical development had been more precocious than usual in our climate; this is not rare in people whom nature has otherwise maltreated. It would have been improbable had a more tender je ne sais quoi not soon mixed with the curiosity that attracted Mlle Irnois's eyes to the cheerful mansard. To stare at this blessed window became for her an imperious need, and that is when she began to want to stay alone in her room. In the first days of her mysterious contemplation, she had not wished to confide her pleasure, however small, to anyone; in the fullness of her joy, her elation, her happiness, silence was even more imperatively required by the secret wish in her soul. It became so necessary for her, its opposite seemed so odious, so deadly to the feeling that animated her, that her character took on a new aspect. That was when she had those fits of willfulness that surprised everyone and when she trained her parents and servants not to enter her room before warning her by a knock on the door; then, alerted, she threw herself back in her armchair, shut the window and received the visitor more or less agreeably according to her disposition at the moment, more often less than more for they bothered her; in brief, she was alive for the first time.

This great mystery with which she surrounded her passion is clear evidence that the senses had something to do with it. The soul has its modesty, undoubtedly; but with people in love, that modesty is but a reflection of the fire burning elsewhere in their being.

One day Emmelina experienced a quite unexpected and most singularly obscure impression from an incident that will seem quite ordinary. It was getting late; it was toward eight o'clock of a summer evening, and you know that at that time

---

— 77 —

of day, even though the light is still fairly clear, the crystal of the sky begins to be tinted by some

duller tones. The day had been hot, and all day long Emmelina had seen her wood turner, his face glowing from work, his hair mussed and his shirt half open, without a cravat, offering his white chest to whatever breaths of air might wander amongst the roofs of Paris.

At that moment, the young man was sitting on the window ledge, astride it, busy brushing his Sunday cap with delicate care. Suddenly, from a nod and the accompanying smile that he addressed to the back of his room, Emmelina understood that someone was entering, someone friendly, surely, for the worker did not otherwise stir; to the contrary, he set to brushing his cap with more energy than before, and, when the cap had reached the peak of its luster, he even pulled to him a coat that probably had been thrown over a chair inside the room, and subjected this future ornament of his body to the same operation he had just performed for the ornament of his head.

These minute details mean nothing to the reader, and not more to the author of this tale, believe me; but they were Emmelina's whole life.

The worker was perhaps giving the tenth stroke of his brush to the coat sleeve, and from the movement of his lips, one could see that he was talking and laughing with the person who had entered the room, when that person appeared in turn before the eyes of Emmelina.

She was a rather pretty girl, a grisette. She was nicely dressed, as for a party. Her bonnet displayed a luxuriant magnificence of pink ribbons whose rather lively color competed successfully with the high color of her cheeks. This pleasant girl was laughing heartily, which would lead us also to believe that the conversation with the worker was quite agreeable as well as jocular.[30] The grisette held a pot of stocks in her hand and put it ceremoniously on the window

---

ledge. Then she went back inside the room and returned with a vase full of water with which she generously sprinkled the brown and yellow petals of the sweet smelling flowers, splashing some down the wall. And when the flowers had been taken care of, the worker took his pretty friend's head and kissed her on both cheeks without encountering much resistance.

Emmelina saw everything. She was not jealous; no, it was not a jealous feeling that she experienced. Her pride, her anger were not fired up against the grisette or against the young man; she felt no hatred; she did not experience the cruel bitterness of a love that believes itself unrequited or betrayed; but a profound sadness mixed with a mysteriously redoubled curiosity invaded her whole being. This kiss so joyously given and received contained for her a whole world of secrets to which her innocence and her, alas! wingless imagination could not possibly discover the key. The veil that hid what she would have liked to know was stirred but not torn, and she cried for a long time, through the rest of the evening, without knowing why she cried. Furthermore, she had developed so little resentment and was even so little inclined to ill-will toward the grisette that when she opened her window the next morning, she vaguely wished to see her again.

There is a tale in La Fontaine whose jolly title I am almost embarrassed to introduce into this modest and somewhat melancholy story; but it renders so well, so accurately, what I want to explain, although undoubtedly in a different sense, that I do not have the courage to deprive myself of its help: *How Wit Comes to Girls* .[31]

Many girls let their imaginations run even before love rushes to untie its legs. Emmelina, the poor child, was not of that number, as you know, and even love could not claim to make her knowing. It taught her neither ruse nor reflection; but it revealed to her, as we have seen, the secret of having a will, of desiring something, of finding in herself a keen plea-

---

sure. No, it was not with that Love gave her. Was the gift of the god better or worse? I leave philosophers and women to decide this point. It gave her a soul.

Before that she had none, or, if you insist on disagreeing with me, the soul with which nature had endowed her at birth was so heavy, so torpid, so utterly bound by the wretched knots of a flawed constitution, that it was as though it did not exist. Now that Emmelina loved, that soul had received the fire of life, and had, let us not say, stood up, for it seemed that in this twisted body the vault was too low to allow the soul to develop at ease, but by folding back upon itself, it had acquired energy and a truly ecstatic fervor whose power would have frightened all those likely to observe it, I mean, to understand it.

Once more, Emmelina (I dwell on this point because it is essential to the correct understanding of Mlle Irnois's story), Emmelina in no wise sought to understand the how or the why of what was happening in her. She did not even know the name of the feeling that had invaded her entire being in

such a strange way. Shall we tell the whole truth? Previous to the day when she had, for the first time and in a bloom of happiness, contemplated the young man at the window, she had had no moral life, had been a near simpleton; but from that moment on, she had become a sort of ecstatic.

As indifferent as before to the other events in her life, she existed in an enclave of passion that had opened to her; she did not yearn for anything, did not scheme for anything; her love was like that of a dog for its master, without past, without future, without demand, even without gaiety to tell the truth, for the mighty feeling that dominated her being could not possibly be labeled as one of the ordinary motions or states of the soul. She was not happy; if I said that, I was wrong: she was better than happy, she was alive! Alive, yes! but only in her love; for, in any other respect, more dead than ever.

— 80 —

This is the situation in which we find Emmelina that evening when she accepted the idea of leaving her family and following Count Cabarot with such keen happiness, the singularity of which excited so much surprise.

— 81 —

VI

Thus possessed by a passion of a fervent and quasimystical character, Emmelina ignored more than ever what was taking place around her; and to the remark I made in the previous chapter, that her intelligence did not at all increase in direct ratio to the increasing exaltation of her soul, I might add that in all matters pertaining to ordinary existence, she became even more of a nonentity than in the past. Thus, formerly, in her armchair, on her mother's bosom, in Jeanne's arms, she sometimes participated in communal life. Once in a while an incident managed to make an impression on her; it happened (rarely, undoubtedly, but nevertheless it sometimes happened) that a word caught her attention, and then she smiled or gave some sign or other of pleasure.

From the moment that she was in love, this meager share in their common existence was also taken away from her. She became like those people mentioned in the Gospel who have ears and eyes but who neither see nor hear.[32] M. Irnois and the rest of the Areopagus saw in it an increasing indifference; those worthy bourgeois were mistaken: it came from powerlessness. Love had done everything it was capable of for this befogged nature; it had seized it, had absorbed it, had brought it into its universe, and had completely detached it from everything else.

For Emmelina, the whole universe was the space stretching between her armchair and the artisan's window, vast distance that in a passionate leap her desire crossed twenty times a day, but which her conscious will did not conceive

— 82 —

of, could not conceive of abolishing by material means whose existence her feeble mind could not imagine.

When they proposed to her to leave her father's house and to go live somewhere else with someone different from all the people around her, it did not occur to her that this being could also be different from the one who obsessed her. How could she have thought of that? I have told you what her universe was like. Is it not evident that for her, creation contained only one person? At her mother's words a beatific and infinitely joyful hymn burst in her soul; she did not even conceive that it might be materially possible to change her life and take on another whose sole purpose would not be the artisan. To persuade her of the opposite, if one had tried, would have been impossible at that moment, yes impossible! And how to explain to this crazed girl, who was armed only with a mystical torch, that she was a millionaire's daughter, that a Councillor of State sought her hand, that the head of a great empire was using her to reward political services, and that she must prepare herself to become a great lady? One could have attempted this explanation, but it would not have had any effect beyond striking Emmelina's inattentive ear with a deluge of words, each less intelligible than the others. In order to force reality into this barricaded head, nothing less than contact with fact itself was necessary. Count Cabarot had to appear in person. That is what had happened.

We have seen what resulted. Emmelina's illusion, brutally jolted, rendered, like a brazen vessel, a strident and mournful sound that resonated in a frightening way. But long though it went on, this

sound finally ended; moans, tears ceased, forgetfulness accompanied the disappearance of the object which had brought pain, and, obstinately, Emmelina fell back into her illusion.

When she was back at her window, had drawn the curtain and opened the casement, and when at twenty paces from her the beloved being, bent over his bench, appeared

— 83 —

to her, she stopped thinking about Cabarot and, moreover, as completely as if she had never known him. Her whole happiness returned to her with its usual ardor; and, with the same abandon, the same trust, the same transport as the previous day, she gave herself up to that contemplation which made her poor chest swell with life and whose intensity exhausted the little existence allotted by fate to this disfavored constitution.

You may be curious to know if such a vehement and beautiful passion had produced its effect on the one who was its object. Ordinarily, it seems to me, the reader of a story is interested in the one who has the initiative in matters of love and does not like him to be oppressed or unhappy. Such a benevolent attitude will not receive much satisfaction here. The only impression Emmelina made on her neighbor was that of a very idle and inquisitive little person who, thanks to the immense wealth of her father, could live a sluggard's life (I am practically using the worker's words) and spent her time watching what was going on with her neighbors. He sometimes talked about it in those words with his girlfriend Francine, the young laundry girl with the pot of stocks.

"How's that for good luck, he exclaimed, to be able to spend the whole day arms folded in a good armchair doing nothing but staring into space! By God, it's a job that would suit me!"

Being a woman, Francine thought faster and got closer to the truth.

"You want my opinion? she declared one day to her lover, I wager that Mlle Irnois fancies your good looks!

— Come on! the worker answered. A hunchback like her, and moreover supposed to be an idiot! The devil take me if I would have her even with all her money!"

Frankly, he did not believe in the love that he inspired. M. Irnois was very well known in that part of town and the worker harbored for him that profound respect that in gen-

— 84 —

eral money does not deserve, but most often obtains, and without asking. So the little wood turner would have been very careful not to offend a man that respectable and powerful; but it required no less than such an authority to prevent him from teasing Emmelina. A few times, in fact, when Emmelina looked at him for too long, the boisterous young man loosed the brake on his fear enough to sing a mischievously naughty song, to see if she would leave the window. But much to his surprise, the trick never succeeded. It was for a very simple reason: the girl did not understand a word of this banter, and only responded to the joyous air of the song.

"Upon my word, the wood turner said, she's really rather shameless, Mlle Irnois: I sing her ribaldries that would make your hair stand on end, and she doesn't even raise an eyebrow!

— You child, exclaimed Francine, aren't you ashamed to debauch youth? I'm telling you that the poor hunchback has lost her head over you."

Francine did not like Emmelina.

Thus the love of our heroine is not among those that one could call fortunate; far from it.

A few days before Count Cabarot's wedding, momentous events, however, took place for this love; it was a small matter, but the importance of things is quite relative. Let us tell them as they happened and without rhetoric.

The cook had the misfortune to break a chair in her den. In the deepest recesses of his heart, M. Irnois did not detest such domestic incidents, which gave his eloquence a chance to exercise itself fully. Each morning, in his dressing gown, he used to take the master's tour of the entire house; and when he noticed a faulty detail, such as a misplaced napkin, an uncorked bottle, a log awry, he began a speech *ab irato* which brought terror to the souls of the guilty ones.

To avoid being thunderstruck by one of these oratorical

— 85 —

masterpieces, the cook, after breaking the chair, took the advice of the private secretary and of his

faithful companion Jeanne, then she hastily climbed three floors and went to tell the wood turner of the mishap.

The latter hastened to put his talent, his tools, and his wood at the disposal of the desperate beauty, and thus entered M. Irnois's lodgings, where he had never set foot before. At that moment Emmelina was crossing the apartment, not in Jeanne's arms but leaning on her. She was trying one of her walks through her domain, which she no longer consented to do except when the wood turner was not at his window and she had waited a long time for him. Chance brought her face to face with the young man.

The shock was electric. Seeing him a few steps in front of her, Emmelina experienced a sensation like that of people blinded by a bright light. She let out a cry and threw her head back. In that brusque movement, her loosely tied bonnet fell off, her comb slipped, the innumerable curls of her beautiful blond hair uncoiled onto her shoulders. They saw her large eyes suddenly come alive, and I do not hesitate to say that even with all the imperfections of her person, she became at that moment exquisitely beautiful.

Yes, exquisitely, that is the proper word. One of those triumphs of real grace that might have made her acceptable to the Trojan shepherd for the contest with the three goddesses on Mount Ida was out of the question for the poor child.[33] But if, granted the sublime expression she had at that moment, she had been met at the edge of a spring by some German traveler, he might have taken her for one of those enchanting water sprites[34] whose supernatural charms passed with reason as irresistible.

The young man was almost frightened by this singular apparition. He respectfully took off his cap, hesitated for a minute, looked at Emmelina expecting her to say something; but she said nothing. She was content to stare at

---

— 86 —

him with the most poignant expression that one can imagine. She remained with her head thrown back, her eyes fixed on him, holding onto Jeanne's arm, which she clasped hard, and not finding a single word to articulate. What she was experiencing was not, in truth, easy to say. Even those more apt than the young girl at identifying their feelings, at sorting out their impressions, would not have been up to the task if they had been crushed by the vehement passion that at that moment dominated Emmelina. She was plunged into a situation comparable to that of those ecstatics who, through the sheer force of prayer, seem to levitate above the ground.

Seeing that Mlle Irnois did not speak to him, the wood turner said to himself: "There's a crazy girl for you."

He reached the door, opened it, went through it, shut it, and went down the stairs toward the other wing of the building where his room was.

Emmelina started to cry.

"What's the matter, little one? old Jeanne asked. Why are you crying, child? Why did you look at this boy as you did? Did he frighten you?

— Oh no! Emmelina said, hiding her face in her faithful servant's arms.

— If he didn't frighten you, the latter went on, why did you turn away? Perhaps you would like me to call him back?"

Emmelina fixed her beautiful eyes on the old woman and said with a voice that was intense and trembling with emotion:

"Yes, call him back!"

Assuredly, Jeanne did not understand the feeling that prompted the young invalid to speak.

She ran to the staircase and called the worker. He hastened to return.

"Mademoiselle wishes to see you, the old woman said.

— 87 —

Here, my Emmelina, this nice young man has come back! Do you wish to speak to him? What do you have to tell him? Do you want me to speak to him for you?

— Yes, Emmelina said.

— What should I tell him?"

It was an infantile scene. In the mind of the old servant and of the wood turner, all they were doing was indulging a sick child; but this appearance was misleading and blatantly false! While Jeanne

multiplied silly propositions and remarks, Emmelina gave her whole self over to the passionate contemplation of the object of her love. How long can such a love last in ordinary beings? Not long, certainly, assuming it ever occurs; but that is not what occupies us here. For Emmelina, it was total bliss, total ecstasy.

She had neither listened to nor heard the series of questions that Jeanne had addressed in her name: therefore, she did not answer them. Upon which, the servant herself began to chat with the wood turner.

Jeanne queried the young worker about his age, his status, his situation.

Emmelina paid close attention to the answers. She smiled in a very tender fashion when the young neighbor complained about the hard times and the difficulty he had in earning a living, and when he added:

"Upon my faith, there are moments when being given a little more money than I earn would make me very happy!"

Emmelina spoke up and said to Jeanne:

"Let's go to my room.

— Yes, little one. . . .Well! Good-bye, young man, till next time!

— No! Emmelina said.

— You want him to come to your room with us?

— Yes, said Emmelina.

— 88 —

— Then do come along young man! . . . Mademoiselle has strange ideas today."

When the threesome arrived in the sanctuary:

"That is where I live! Mlle Irnois said, looking at the worker with ineffable tenderness.

— Is that so, Mademoiselle!" the other answered.

Actually, he was quite indifferent about what they were saying, and he did not understand why the millionaire's daughter had brought him thither. The only thing that he could imagine was that this little and quite idle person whose inquisitive turn of mind he was already aware of was trying to alleviate her idleness by detaining him.

Instead of looking at the room, as Emmelina's remark seemed to encourage him to do, he was entertaining such thoughts, which were hardly flattering for their object. Meanwhile Emmelina had gone to her secretary, had removed a little box and taken about twenty *napoléons*[35] from it.

"Give him that, she said to Jeanne.

— Confound me, there's a miracle! exclaimed the latter. . . .Take it, my friend; you are the first person to whom Mademoiselle has ever given anything, for the ordinarily doesn't concern herself with a living soul! . . . Go on! Don't be embarrassed. She could throw a hundred times more into your pocket without any harm to herself. She does not know her own wealth, nor does her father, the poor man!"

The worker fumbled through expressions of his gratitude. Emmelina sat down in her chair, and, resting her head on her hand, she seemed to lose herself in a most delicious revery.

She was not looking at the young man; she was living entirely within herself.

"Mademoiselle is going to sleep, whispered Jeanne; go away!"

The other was very happy to oblige, and he escaped with joy in his heart and twenty *louis*[36] in his hand.

— 89 —

When Emmelina lifted her head and no longer found him there, she started to cry; but without bitterness: her heart felt tired by the excess of happiness. She was undoubtedly crying over this sudden separation; but as she had just tasted the greatest joy she had known in her life, she was not yet open to a true sorrow. The tears streamed down her cheeks, as it sometimes happens after a delicious dream whose illusion one regrets while still savoring some secret pleasure in recalling the vanished joy.

"Most peculiar, most peculiar, old Jeanne mumbled, sitting at her feet; I've never seen her like this."

At the end of half an hour, Emmelina's head tipped forward and she really fell asleep. She was

breathing softly, as a six-year old child might have, and her smooth, unlined and lightly colored brow displayed the most exquisite serenity.

Then a noise awakened her.

A rich array of wedding presents, rapidly improvised and sent by Count Cabarot, was brought in.

Mme Irnois herself carried it to her daughter; but Emmelina did not look at it, turned her head to the other side of the chair with a smile, and tried to go back to sleep. Was she pursuing a dream, or was she resting from her happiness? I don't know.

— 90 —

VII

As you see, the dear Count had lost no time. After the required visit to his solicitor, having nothing to do with his time until dinner, he had called on some shopkeepers. He had made it a point of honor to put together an array of presents both tasteful and magnificent with a rapidity that only the magic of gold can bring about. M. Cabarot enjoyed shopping; he claimed to excel in choosing feminine accoutrements and strove for a reputation as an oracle of elegance and good taste.

M. Cabarot worked wonders in the shops; shawls, laces, beautiful fabrics, precious cloth, jewels and diamonds, he looked at everything; he chose wisely but also promptly, and, as you have seen, in a few hours he was able to send the sumptuous result of his gallant efforts to Mlle Irnois.

You have seen how little his gift was appreciated.

The letter that accompanied it had no greater effect. Yet it was conceived in terms best chosen to move a cruel heart and to show off the Count's reputation as a wit; but in that household, they were too prejudiced against him to be very sensitive to this demonstration of his passion; and his letter, after passing from hand to hand and under the eyes of the three old ladies, was thrown onto a table without them deeming fit to torment Emmelina with it.

"Since she has to marry, the poor girl, said Mme Irnois, let's at least respect the last few moments of her freedom. I do not have a particularly good opinion of this M. Cabarot, or rather my opinion is that he's not much of a gentleman. Unfortunate child! What's the use of M. Irnois having amassed

— 91 —

all this money? If I had known that this money was going to bring down on me so much unhappiness, I would never have been so proud of it!"

M. Irnois had returned before the arrival of the gifts. He had sorrowfully recounted the negative result of his meeting with Cabarot, and like all people whose minds are not very active and whose physical natures are gross, he was more or less resigned to the misfortune that was happening to him. He undoubtedly loved his daughter very much, but this love, however, could not change him. Indeed, one of the most admirable qualities in him, one of the causes of his fortune, had been the ease with which he had bowed his head under all his defeats. When he was overwhelmed by some irreparable misfortune, he never got up in arms, never flared up, never revolted. He bowed his head waiting for the worst to pass. Seeing that the Emperor wanted Count Cabarot to marry his daughter, he had reckoned with the Emperor's great power and had given in; later, the idea came to him that for a consideration, the future husband might let go of his daughter's hand; he had made an approach from that angle, the approach had not succeeded; he resigned himself to it; his mumblings, his curses did not mean anything compared with this fact; as loud as he had shouted, he was henceforth incapable of resisting and poor Emmelina was lost.

As for Cabarot, he was not lacking in mind, that kind of sarcastic, mistrustful, evil, dishonest mind, that is often the lot of people who have spent a life in business; he probably delighted old diplomats, old statesmen, but he was hideously ugly, and could not possibly impress a young girl favorably, the more so Emmelina whose heart as we have seen was preoccupied.

On the day after Emmelina saw the worker in her room, which was a Sunday, the banns were published at the town hall. They were also announced at the church.

— 92 —

From then on the whole of Paris knew officially that Count Cabarot was going to marry Mlle Irnois. The amount of money brought by the bride's dowry, above all the future expectations, turned out to be

more formidable than one would have believed. M. Irnois was immensely rich. "How is it possible, peeved rivals were saying to one another, that this rascal of a millionaire succeeded in hiding in his lair so well, and that Cabarot was the first to dig him out?"

To the good fortune of marrying Mlle Irnois, the Count added that of seeing his reputation as a shrewd diplomat double: this negotiation he had undertaken in his own particular interest had brought him much credit, especially in regard to the discretion with which it had been handled, the august means he had known how to use, and finally the brilliant success he had met with. It was talked about in this light in the right places, and the embassy that had been promised to him was more than ever his.

Every day he went to pay his court to his betrothed. As I have already said, he detested violent means and anything that resembled them. With his intimates, he no longer concealed the impression made on him by everything he saw at his dear mother-in-law's; but once he was in his future bride's house, he acted entirely as if he could not have been happier.

One evening especially, he talked about it openly. It was in a small group, at Baron R . . .'s. It was two o'clock in the morning; they had played for very high stakes, and after supper, the finest flowers among the wits of that society were relaxing with a bit of conversation.

"Upon my honor, one of the guests exclaimed, I do not understand your conduct, my dear Cabarot. For to go and marry Irnois's daughter, in view of what she is, is already madness enough! I have informed myself on the sly, and the poor girl, I was told, would be more fit to lead to the hospital than to the altar! But, besides marrying her, you go there

every day! You show a patience of which I would never have believed you capable."

Cabarot shoved his hands into his pockets up to his elbows, and with one of those expressions that one calls neither fish nor fowl, he risked some casual remarks that might have passed for confidences.

"Well! he said. I deserve praise! I certainly don't lack forebearance, and there are many times when I feel like sending my future family to the devil.

— They are not likable, then? the host said laughingly.

— Quite so, my dear fellow, Cabarot replied; I have just put in a two hour session there, and I almost swore to myself that the first thing I would do upon leaving the church would be to break off relations with my father-in-law.

— And the second? someone asked.

— To do the same with my mother-in-law.

— The third probably to send your wife back to them, another interlocutor quipped.

— Let us not anticipate, Cabarot proceeded; impatience was carrying me away; but imagine me sitting in an armchair for two hours, more or less as I am now, with the daughter in front of me crying; on my right, two aunts whimpering; on my left, the mother bursting into tears; behind my back, the father pacing and grumbling. And for two hours, there I am, a smile on my lips, sweetly reproaching their exaggerated sensitivities, billing and cooing in all directions, and pretending to cry in concert whenever I do not have a benign smile on my lips.

— I am surprised by your meekness, Baron R . . . said, since you are definitely marrying, what need do you have to torture yourself endlessly by visiting these people every day.

— Well! said Cabarot, my meekness has already served its purpose.

— Which one, good God!

— Obtaining the girl's trust.

— 94 —

— They say she never speaks.

— Indeed, she's not talkative, and I shall have no complaint against her in that respect. But she sometimes articulates short sentences, and the proof is that she honored me with a conversation. Would you like to know what she said?

— I would, the baron said.

— This morning, as I was listening to all these lamentations, lo and behold that little girl suddenly dries her tears and begins staring at me. I have, I confess, never been vain. At twenty I was ugly and I knew it; imagine if at forty-five I would pretend to compare myself with Adonis! However, I have sometimes had the opportunity in my life to acknowledge that beauty does not amount to seduction or at least that seduction can easily do without it. Without, therefore, being too frightened by this examination, I quickly gave my face that inviting expression which immediately inspires confidence.

— Yes, one of the listeners said laughingly, the very same one you had the day when Tallien seemed disposed to issue a warrant against you.

— Let's not dwell on the past. Well, the girl did not act like that tribune, and with a most virginal innocence, she held out her hand to me.

— My word! the baron said; she held out her hand to you?

— Yes, and exclaimed. . . .

— Let's hear what she exclaimed.

— She exclaimed: 'Give me money for him! — For him?' I said, a bit surprised. They explained to me then that there was in the building a sort of little worker who had exposed Mlle Irnois to those trivial complaints that such people always make about their situations, and since that moment she has been going around everywhere, asking father, mother, and as you see, future husband, for the

— 95 —

means to indulge in this rather ill-directed charity. I hastened to use this unexpected occurrence to pay my court. I assured Mlle Irnois that not only would I give her all the money she might want for her protégé, but that I would go and inform myself of the young man's situation. As I saw that she was listening attentively, I deemed it useful to venture a dithyramb: 'What is more interesting for a sensitive soul, I exclaimed, than the sight of youth bravely struggling against adversity? Is there anything more admirable than a poor, cheerful boy, contented in the midst of misfortune! Ah! if there is a God who protects innocence, that God, undoubtedly, has no greater delight than. . . .' I confess that I was getting a bit entangled in my sentences; but I did not regret it. Such was the attention my beloved seemed to devote to my words. I was almost extravagant, and to crown this masterpiece, I offered to go inform myself at once of the unfortunate's situation. My proposition was met with a marked eagerness, and I rushed to the mansard.

I did not at all find, as I had expected, some starving rogue, but a sprightly little fellow who looked to me like a true tavern hero.

— Ah! my poor Cabarot! the baron exclaimed bursting into laughter. Had they? . . .

— That was precisely the thought that struck me, the Count replied. Like you, I said to myself: 'Had they? . . .' And I encouraged the worker to talk. He reassured me, as to the past, and he did not leave me without concern regarding the inclinations of my betrothed. When I say without concern, it is a way of speaking; for I assure you, and you will believe me, that Countess Cabarot's faithful love would be a vastly useless good for me. But it appears that the young lady is of a passionate disposition, and that I will have therefore a thousand reasons to detain her privately, or to send her away, as will suit me best.

— 96 —

"You see then that it is not wrong for me to play the zealous suitor, since I have this course of action to thank for valuable information about my betrothed's character."

They laughed a good deal about the conjugal future that seemed reserved for Cabarot: this poor Cabarot! Specific observations on the present case were followed by general observations about women, who, these gentlemen said, all, whether witty or silly, sick or healthy, had a native core of perversity against which education struggled in vain. The occupants of that sitting room had little esteem for the better half of mankind.

The time of the wedding rapidly drew nearer. Emmelina showed no concern at all. She had even

acquired a kind of liking for Cabarot since the Councillor of State's visit to the young wood turner. M. Irnois had inferred from it that his daughter did not dislike getting married; and Mlles Maigrelut fully agreed with him, declaring that after all it was not disagreeable to become a countess and a great lady. Mme Irnois alone, half enlightened by an instinct for which the sarigue is worthy and famous, entertained doubts and even serious worries. Emmelina, once more, was not concerned, and spent her day at the window, busy watching the artisan.

Our story is soon to come to a close; I would like to remove from it any appearance of melodrama. Melodrama is not true; the truth alone is sad.

On the morning of the day set for the wedding, Cabarot arrived very early with his witnesses. M. Irnois had convened his own: two men of his own species. They gathered in the sitting room. Thanks to the Count, a sort of gaiety prevailed; moreover, Mlles Maigrelut had finally found him likable, because of the pastilles he had sometimes brought them.

They dressed the bride in white, with a crown and a bouquet of orange flowers, as is the custom. She became quite

---

— 97 —

impatient because all these unusual disturbances prevented her from sitting at the window. When they had to go out, she felt a great displeasure, and when M. Cabarot walked up to her, in formal attire, and took her hand, when she saw unknown faces and a sort of pervasive solemnity, she seemed to ponder and to understand that something was happening that deserved her attention.

At the town hall she guessed, it seems, what she was being told and the consequences of these words, for she became as white as her dress. When the magistrate asked her to give the ritual yes, she kept her head down and did not answer; but they did not think anything of it, and the ceremony proceeded to its end.

At the church she had to be propped up by others in order to walk; the Count was most cheerful and polite. He was henceforth fully assured that his efforts had not been wasted, and the promises that he made to Mme Irnois to take in consideration, as was necessary, the painful condition of her daughter, made him a gentleman in their eyes.

The moment of separation was rather difficult. As I have said, Emmelina understood what was taking place, and was deeply shaken by it; but she said nothing. They found she had a high fever, and M. Cabarot promptly called for a doctor. The man of science showed his surprise that one had married a girl that unfit, and above all that one had chosen a moment when she was so visibly prey to real suffering.

They put the bride to bed, and a sick-nurse settled by her. The following day, upon half awaking from the torpor in which she had been as though buried, Emmelina called for Jeanne. It was an unknown face that showed up. Thus everything turned into grief for a soul which did not need to be violently shaken in order to be annihilated.

Emmelina wanted to get up. They protested. She insisted and sobbed. Finally they gave in, and half dressed,

---

— 98 —

she dragged herself to the window and lifted the curtain. You guess what she was looking for.

Instead of seeing the mansard and the worker, she saw the garden of her house.

She fell back into the arms of the woman who was holding her up and completely lost consciousness. They cried out, they called, they carried the Countess to her bed. The physician was rushed in and shook his head.

What had taken place since the day before did not create a mortal illness, but rapidly fostered all the causes of dissolution which a flawed constitution had accumulated in that unfortunate being.

In the middle of the day, Count Cabarot came to inquire about his wife. He dismissed the servants, settled by the bed, then after half an hour he called the servants back and left.

The physician had been right to shake his head. The Countess lingered a week longer. Every morning she asked to have the window opened to see if she saw the mansard; then, cheated, she sighed.

She did not utter a complaint or pronounce a single word that might have revealed what was happening in her.

The eighth day she died.

Count Cabarot provided a magnificent funeral. He was inheriting everything she had brought as a dowry. Owing to his prudence and to his civility, he got from M. Irnois the confirmation of the last provisions that Emmelina had signed in his favor before dying.

The mother, the aunts, the father were grief stricken beyond words; but everyone around them thought they were more to be congratulated than pitied.

"She was not really a woman," the neighbors said, shrugging their shoulders.

The neighbors were right. Mlle Irnois was a soul. Her life had not been like the ordinary existence of the children of men. If, by an extraordinary chance, I admit, she had been

---

— 99 —

able to find what her nature required, namely an angelic love like hers, she might perhaps have known an intensity of happiness understandable only by those who know what perfection the crippled can attain in the faculties left to them.

The blind hear better than anyone, the deaf see farther.[37]

All Emmelina had was the capacity to love, and she loved well!

— 101 —

Akrivie Phrangopoulo

Naxos

The Cyclades[1] are one of the places in the world that most truly deserve the epithet "seductive," though many of them can quite rightly be called barren rocks. But on the bosom of these Grecian seas, where the hands of the gods have strewn them, these rocks sparkle like so many precious stones. The light that floods them in the midst of a flawless sky, and the azure seas in which they are set, turn them according to the time of the day into so many amethysts, sapphires, rubies, topazes. In reality, they are sterile, poor, rather barren, certainly melancholy, but these faults disappear under an incomparable majesty and grace. The Cyclades remind one of very great ladies born and raised in the midst of wealth and elegance. None of the lavishness of the most refined luxury was unknown to them. But misfortune struck them, great and noble misfortune; they withdrew from the world with the remnants of their wealth; they no longer pay visits, they do not receive anyone; nevertheless, they are still great ladies, and from the past they retain a sort of supreme refinement forbidden to the parvenu, a charming serenity and an adorable smile.

A few years ago the English corvette *Aurora* ,[2] coming from Corfu under sail in accordance with the prudent regu-

---

— 102 —

lations of an Admiralty miserly with its coal, happened one morning shortly before daybreak to be at the very center of the archipelago in question. The captain, Henry Fitzallan Norton, was asleep in his berth when a quartermaster dispatched by the navigating officer woke him up.

"Sir! Sir! . . ."

At the sound of this familiar voice, the captain had opened his eyes and answered:

"What is it?

— Sir, Naxos is in sight.

— All right," Norton answered; and since he had played whist rather late in the wardroom, he turned over in his bunk meaning to go back to sleep, which he was not permitted to do. Something black and hairy slowly rose up from the edge of the bunk, the noise of a prolonged yawning was heard, and while a huge tongue advanced toward his chin with the obvious desire to cover it with its pink expanse, eyes as intelligent as a dog's eyes can be were looking into his and saying:

"For Heaven's sake, wake up; I've slept enough.

— Well, since I must, the captain answered, I'm getting up, Dido, I'm getting up!"

And, indeed, the captain got up.

Dawn was about to break, but it was not yet daylight. The feeble glow of a candle that presently lighted Henry Norton's hasty toilet fell on the objects accumulated in the cabin in such a way that made them barely perceptible rather than identifiable. Nothing is less cheerful than such an abode[3] although it is fashionable among obstinate landlubbers to rave about naval luxury. If what they have in mind is a French warship, the captain's quarters, designed on a model as invariable as administrative infallibility, are painted white with gilded baguettes copiously reproduced as in a restaurateur's private rooms; and the furniture is red, unless it is a vice-admiral who is being accommodated. Confronted with such a powerful consideration the maritime administration retreats

— 103 —

in order the better to triumph, and so inevitably everything becomes yellow. The laws of the Persians and the Medes or Minos's decrees could not be more absolute. On the table a few journals are neatly stacked, a Navy List, and that is all, unless the officer is a father and has decided to decorate the bulkheads here and there with family photographs.

In the English Navy individual taste is given more latitude. The captain's quarters are not always decorated in the same color: the occupant's desire can determine the matter; there are fewer bulkheads and small compartments, fewer doors shutting off four-foot-wide cubicles; more curtains that permit air and daylight to enter; and, a characteristic and curious fact, one frequently sees there paintings, knickknacks, and, above all, books. In this last regard, Henry Norton's cabin was rich in spite of its small size. Etchings done after old Italian masters, two or three little canvases bought in Messina and Malta, and, wherever it had been possible to mount them, shelves with volumes of various sizes and thickness: mathematical treatises, books on economics, history, German philosophy, recent novels, they all lined up, thronged, trampled, climbed upon one another, and some were still strewn on chairs; Henry Norton was a passionate admirer of Dickens and Tennyson,[4] which did not prevent him from doing his job conscientiously and from knowing everything about it. Having reached his thirty-third year with a pleasant, fair and mild face, he spoke little, thought a great deal, dreamed a fair amount, displayed that mixture of positive and romantic spirit and of energy so common among his compatriots; and, though very advanced in his career, since he already commanded a ship, he did not especially enjoy worldly entertainments. However, no tendency to spleen had ever manifested itself in him.

When he was dressed, he went up on deck and from the deck to the bridge; the regulation washing down was well on

— 104 —

its way; the din of buckets of water vigorously splashed on the deck and the noisy swishing of the swabs were making their usual racket. Norton silently returned the salute addressed to him by the navigating officer, who was wrapped in his greatcoat like any good man who has arrived at the end of his night watch, and surveyed the scenery unfolding around his ship. Dawn was rising and made Norton keenly aware of the wisdom of the ancient poets, who saw and described it as rosy-fingered; in a general way, no other part of the world inclines one to personify natural phenomena to the same extent as the Levant. All things manifest themselves there with such clarity, are delineated with such precision, reveal so much life, clothe themselves with such charm, that it seems natural to imagine the gates of the day opened by an enchanting maiden, and the shining star triumphantly drawn across the celestial field by the fiery and sparkling horses of the most handsome and most intelligent among the gods. The calm, the profoundly calm sea, blue as a periwinkle, not wrinkled but prettily pleated so as to make the sparkling cascades of young light flowing from above shimmer on its bosom, was gathering from very far, from the extremity of the eastern horizon, what was left of the delicate hues of the morning's twilight. With abandon and in larger and larger circles, it took on the saffron or pale pink tinges of this shower of blossoms. Little by little the saffron turned orange, the pink was splashed with scarlet, gold veins ran through it, and a dazzling, hot, imperious light electrified all nature.

Here and there islands emerged, some near, some farther. Soft, round, finely etched shapes outlined the contours of these mountainous lands; there lay Paros, here, her sister Antiparos; farther away in the mist, Santorin; finally straight ahead, Naxos, beautiful Naxos, was beginning to show not only its general configuration but its peaks, its hills, its valleys, its gorges, its rocks; and the town loomed up, white as a bride.[5]

— 105 —

It took a few more hours, however, to reach it. The breeze was extremely weak, and the ship moved

slowly. Meanwhile, the details of the coast showed more clearly moment by moment. They could see the harbor entrance lying deep between the rocks, and, to the right of it, this small, barren islet, still enriched by a few patches of ancient walls, vestiges of a temple to Hercules. The houses bathed their feet in the water, stacked one upon another like the stalls of an amphitheater, and on top of these plebeian buildings there rose, with more gusto than grandeur, the group of dwellings that are called the citadel or castle, a designation that the remnants of ancient ramparts now crumbling or used to build new habitations more or less justify, though it has become a bit ambitious. This sight was fresh, gay, amiable, welcoming. The *Aurora* continued sailing slowly toward this hospitable shore, when an incident occurred that no one had counted on and that almost radically changed this peaceful arrival.

At the very moment when the corvette crossed the entrance to the port, a lively breeze impertinently rushed in off the sea and suddenly filled the sails, which were full spread to catch the light airs they had been sailing in. The ship took off wildly, and since she was not three hundred yards from the rocky shore, she was inevitably going to be dashed to pieces, when the captain quickly gave an order. The whole crew sprang up on the deck, from the deck into the yards; it was executed so promptly that dozens of caps and hats flew off and were strewn upon the sea; but even the smallest canvas was taken in instantly and the *Aurora* came to a sudden stop, not soon enough, however, to prevent a small part of her planking from plowing into the rocks; nevertheless, there was not, properly speaking, much damage, for which they were all congratulating themselves; and once they were certain that the only consequence of the danger they had skirted was the quasi-necessity of stopping at Naxos for five or six days at the most in order to replace a few planks, and since in

any case the engine also needed some repair, the captain and the officers, instead of deploring the accident, were delighted by it. The order was given to drop anchor, and while it was being executed, two persons were seen climbing on board and asking to speak to the commanding officer.

Both of these newcomers wore tailcoats, trousers, black waistcoats, white ties, and held in their hands the felt hat in use in all civilized nations; but this attire, in itself unremarkable, made a strong impression on Henry Norton, for in this instance, it produced the most absolutely archaic appearance this sort of apparel could. The most superficial of observers would not have dated it later than 1820. Their huge bulging collars, gathered sleeves, wide at the top, very narrow at the wrist, very high waists, disproportionately long tails, cossack trousers,[6] and widely opened black silk waistcoats would have moved George Brummell to tears, could he have returned to this world to contemplate these souvenirs of his youth;[7] their ample, wide, fluffed, six-inch-high cravats, adorned with carefully studied knots complicated enough to drive an ablebodied seaman wild, were proudly crowned with two starched shirt collars that must most certainly have been in perpetual combat with the brims of their hats whenever they covered the heads of the owners of these remarkable wardrobes; but at the moment the hats rested in the hands of their proprietors. One should not, however, pity these singular instruments, each one a foot and a half high, equipped with brims of a redoubtable width; they were large enough to defend themselves, and their hairy and bristling appearance gave them a fierce aspect. Norton remained awestruck at the sight of this attire; he was reminded of the heroes of another age, and he had to make an effort to focus his attention on the faces of the two newcomers. They were of a most respectable and dignified kind. They resembled each other in that their hair was cut, like their clothes, according to an old-fashioned taste, so as to form lovelocks not unlike the ornate pavilions

that accompany great monuments, while vast gray toupees, rising nobly on top of their heads and crowning the expanse of their foreheads, were even more reminiscent of those rigid pediments that draw the respectful attention of the populace to courts of the first instance.

So much for what the two islanders had in common; otherwise, they were different. The one walking in front was short, slightly fat, of rather ruddy complexion, smiling and happy; the other, to the contrary, was slender, extremely thin, of almost sallow complexion, seemed suffering and sad, but resigned. Norton could not help finding their features extremely distinguished; their antiquated appearance did not belong to just anyone, and memories of certain types of French and Italian gentlemen he had met in his early youth came to his mind.

Moved by this impression, and eager to know to what extent it was justified, he had the visitors come down to his cabin, and politely inquired what brought them on board. The fat and cheerful Naxiote introduced himself as M. Dimitri de Moncade, consular agent of Her British Majesty. He had come to offer his services, and introduced his friend and companion, M. Nicolas Phrangopoulo,[8]

consul of the Hanseatic Cities. The conversation was of course in Greek; Henry Norton spoke this language fluently thanks to a sojourn of several years in the Levantine seas, and neither M. de Moncade nor M. Phrangopoulo knew the first word of another tongue.

After what has been said already about the *Aurora* 's captain, one can see that he was by nature curious and eager to learn. The appearance of the two characters sitting in his cabin had whetted his appetite sufficiently for him to want to know a little more about them, if only to serve as an introduction to his future observations about the island of Naxos. He therefore conducted the conversation in such a way as to gather as much information as civility allowed,

— 108 —

and his efforts were not fruitless. Here, roughly, is what he learned piecemeal:

The gentleman consul of Her Britannic Majesty owed his position to the fact that his father and his grandfather had already filled it with distinction; naturally, he was rewarded by the glory that was reflected upon his person and not by any sordid financial consideration. He had known Admiral Codrington,[9] and proudly remembered a lunch he had attended on board the ship commanded by that great seaman, about the time of the battle of Navarino. Approximately once every seven or eight years an English warship called at Naxos, much to his delight. In 1836, during a trip to Athens, he had been able to learn a great many interesting things he had never suspected until then. He asked Henry Norton news of His Grace, the Duke of Wellington, and appeared extremely upset upon learning that this illustrious captain was no longer alive. He celebrated this latter's extraordinary merits in a few well chosen, sententious words. This was probably the last funeral eulogy pronounced over the ashes of the victor of Waterloo. Once that sad moment had passed, M. de Moncade ventured a few sarcastic observations against the French in general and against the revolutionary spirit in particular, and without saying so clearly, he let it be understood that as far as he was concerned, he found little pleasure in recollecting the Greek War for Independence in view of the fact that the Athens government deemed it proper to send an eparch to the island, while never, absolutely never, had one seen a Turk of any kind there as long as the Sultan ruled over the Archipelago.[10] As for him, he reserved his esteem for the old families, people of noble race, that is of European origin; he could not for a minute forget that his ancestors had come from the south of France, where their name possibly still existed, and he knew for a fact that no misalliance had altered the purity of the blood flowing in his veins. M. de Moncade, livelier and more talkative than M. Phrangopoulo,

— 109 —

made sure most of the time to talk on behalf of the latter. This is how Norton learned that M. Phrangopoulo was no less a gentleman than Her Britannic Majesty's Consul in spite of his Greek-sounding name, which was moreover one more evidence, since it meant: *son of a Frank* , the real name of his ascendance having unfortunately been lost and forgotten. All of M. de Moncade's political and social opinions were shared by his friend, who approved them by nodding; but that same friend fell far short of knowing as much about the matters of the world.

In his whole life he had never left his island. He represented the Hanseatic Cities in the same hereditary way that M. de Moncade did Great Britain. But, less fortunate than the other, he would never have set his mortal eyes on a citizen of the German powers to which he belonged, if, in 1845, a merchant brig from Hamburg with a cargo of lumber had not been blown off its course by a squall and driven on the rocks of Antiparos. A wreck had resulted in which the cargo had been lost; but the crew had been rescued; and after a one-month sojourn in Naxos, the skipper, Peter Gansemann, had handed M. Phrangopoulo a certificate to be used as might be thought proper by which he informed the most distant posterity that M. Phrangopoulo was the most honorable man he had ever met and that he had fed him and his crew during their forced stay on the island, a generosity the more meritorious, the grateful captain added, as this worthy consul had seemed to him to be living in a condition bordering on misery.

Without being overoptimistic, one is allowed to believe that many good deeds find their reward in this world. At any rate, M. Phrangopoulo found his inasmuch as Captain Gansemann's sojourn was a landmark in his existence. Since the latter spoke only German, he did not communicate many new ideas to his host; but he remained a hero of the capital event in the annals of the consular establishment, and the old

— 110 —

gentleman's mind embroidered on this theme in such a way as to make of it rather a tale from the

Arabian Nights .[11] He appreciated his certificate the more for never having found the opportunity to have it translated and for having no more idea of what it said than if the four books of Confucius in their original version had been put in his hands.

Henry Norton's imagination did not need much stimulus to be aroused. In this circumstance, it was excited by contact with such singular characters. An island of the Greek archipelago in all its marvelous grace represented by two old relics of European nobility, these two relics able to speak only Greek, and, in these gossiping days when everyone is more aware of his neighbor's business than of his own, completely ignorant of what was going on in the world outside, as though they wished to prove by their rare ignorance that their island, though only a few hours from Athens, was in fact farther from civilization than the central regions of the Americas: this was the kind of violent paradox that the captain of the *Aurora* adored. However, this one seemed so extreme that before savoring its charm, he wanted to see it demonstrated, and his impromptu friends did not need to be entreated to do so fully.

No mail boat travels between most of the islands and continental Greece for the excellent reason that these tiny territories, having neither commerce nor industry, neither import nor export, do not occasion any exchange of correspondence. Each fortnight a schooner sails from Syra[12] for Paros carrying the few letters and packages addressed there, and when by very rare chance there are any for Naxos, some boat or other casually takes charge of them; this mode of traffic is perfectly sufficient. By this means newspapers get to the island; but what interest can they arouse in a people confined at home and with no desire to leave, who never read, know nothing about the events of this world and do not care to know anything about them, whose only posses-

sions are a few vines, some olive, orange, or pomegranate trees, and here and there a few sheep, and who, like the man in Horace's ode,[13] live in a kind of simplicity that, by the way, is anything but golden? However much these practical philosophers might learn in this desultory fashion, they retain at most a few unexciting subjects of conversation; and so, too poor to need anyone, clad and fed well enough under an amiable sky not to suffer in any way from this charming poverty, self-assured in their indolence, proud of the past and able to preserve the dignity necessary for the present, the Naxiote gentlemen live peacefully and believe themselves to be not one grain beneath the most frantic men of the most turbulent modern society.

Naturally they have in common with all inhabitants of Hellas a solid veneration for the origins of their country, and they claim as their own a share of the shining halo hovering over their heads; but it is especially the time of the Crusades that they like to recall. It is then that the French duchy of the Cyclades was founded and that the knights carved fiefs for themselves out of the islands. Most Naxiote gentlemen trace their genealogy back to those times,[14] but in this regard many are mistaken. The French duchy has since then known many ups and downs. One by one the conquering races were extinguished and replaced by others actually not any less Frankish, but less ancient; the Venetians brought the Italians there in great numbers; seventeenth-century French and Spanish adventurers contributed their share; some Greeks as well. In brief, when the last heir of the European ducal house had been forced to relinquish his power to the Turks, the latter, in truth, did not change anything in the political constitution of the island, and did not dispatch representatives of Islam there. They went even further; they installed a duke of their choice, who happened to be a Jewish physician of the Sultan.[15] But since that son of Moses had no successor, and as he had never resided on the island, his palace,

which had become the nominal property of the Sultan, was abandoned and little by little demolished by the nobility who found it convenient to avail themselves of cheap building material from structures that were neither reclaimed nor protected nor repaired. And from then on the local government became completely municipal and republican in the hands of the old families. Nobles and commoners, the one as poor as the other, accustomed to coexist, forgotten by the rest of the world, with no reason to quarrel since they had nothing to quarrel about, lived and are still living together in perfect harmony. The Catholicism of some and the Orthodoxy of the others, the presence of two bishops of opposite persuasions, a convent of French Lazarists who had come heaven knows why to buy land there, the founding of another convent of Burgundian Ursulines,[16] nothing had been able to prevail against the obstinate amiability of this population daring to live in the nineteenth century in a more or less Edenic state.

Once the conversation of his two guests, whom he had invited for lunch, had made this situation clear to him, an enchanted Henry Norton prepared himself to go ashore and take a closer look at such

interesting things. After giving his orders to his second, he boarded his gig with M. de Moncade and M. Phrangopoulo, and followed by Dido, no less pleased than he to go ashore, he headed toward a small wooden wharf where a substantial portion of the population, that is a dozen fishermen, was awaiting him in a state of cheerful curiosity.

A few women held beautiful infants in their arms. They all greeted the stranger good-humoredly; and flanked by his sponsors, he walked up a narrow path through all kinds of ruins, rubbish and empty patches and after a few minutes of a fairly steep climb, he reached a low door, the last remains of the citadel. This rather dark entrance brought him to a narrow street paved with flagstones. It was the main street; it serpentined upward between two-story houses that imitated eighteenth-century Italian architectural forms. On each door

a coat of arms was embossed.[17] This dark and cool street was so little used that it resembled more the courtyard of a private house than a public thoroughfare. Now and then a mule loaded with wood, vegetables or fruit made its way, gingerly choosing its footing.

M. de Moncade stopped in front of an arched door whose keystone, like the others, bore a coat of arms, and with a deep bow to the captain, he begged him do him the honor of resting a moment in his house, a kindly request as soon granted as made, and pushing open a worm-eaten leaf of a double door, Her British Majesty's Consul in Naxos introduced Henry Norton into a large, vaulted room, similar to one of those cellars in which rich European abbeys liked to gather their casks and barrels filled with the pride of their vintages.

Daylight entered this solemn place only through a wide opening in the middle of which the door had been situated, and whose wooden frame also enclosed a row of three windows. The walls were whitewashed. The floor was paved in the same fashion as the street, of which it was simply a continuation, being on the same level with it. At the back of the dwelling an old and extremely worn carpet was spread, and a few pieces of furniture were scattered there: a wooden cabinet carved in the Venetian manner, two or three armchairs covered in yellow Utrecht velvet, straw chairs and a table adorned with Florentine alabaster vases. Portraits of Queen Victoria and of her Consort, evidently executed by a mortal enemy of the Hanoverian dynasty, were pointed out to the captain with no little pride. Few such masterpieces existed on the island.

No sooner was Norton seated than he was overcome by a strong desire not to spend his day looking at the rounded white vault above his head; consequently, he consulted his friends on the best way to use his time. It was taken for granted that they would not leave him for a minute, and he

realized that for him to demand solitude would both pain his hosts and grievously hurt their feelings. This first point was therefore discussed only to the extent that discretion seemed to require it. Norton realized then that it was out of the question for him to shroud his sojourn in a futile incognito. The appearance of a warship in the port of Naxos was such an extraordinary event that the entire social life of the region was affected by it; it was talked about everywhere; the great news flew on the wings of fame with such prodigious speed that before long it had gone from one end to the other of the most solitary vales. From then on nothing was more necessary than satisfying the just curiosity of the notables and going to show the bishops and the two or three representatives of the greatest families of the country what an English captain was like, a sort of entity about which the most learned had heard, but which none had seen. Once this duty was done, they would go to M. Phrangopoulo's in the country and would pass the rest of the day there.

With this program settled upon, Henry set about complying. On the doorsteps men, women, children were gathered and greeted the stranger with the warmest smiles in the world. These good people gave an impression of nonchalance and calm that comes from leisure and from the absence of want. The beauty of the majority of women was stunning. A magnificent sky, an excessively picturesque town, very small and self-contained, and quite similar to the nest of a single family,[18] an unfailing peace, many extremely charming faces, good humor on all of them, such was the newcomer's greeting, and he was not the kind of man who would not be stirred and moved by it. It had not been two hours since the two gentlemen had shown up on the *Aurora* , and Henry Norton no longer found them ridiculous or even strange; he no longer perceived anything other than their exquisite politeness, their desire to be agreeable, the true distinction and the native nobility of their manners.

— 115 —

During all their visits, coffee and cigarettes were offered. Questions regarding the state of Europe ran their legitimate course, and once these indispensable preliminaries had been taken care of to the satisfaction of all, especially that of Dido, who was in a hurry to see them end, the three friends left the walls of the fortress and the field of ruins covering its slopes and passed behind a hovel where they found three mules sent for by M. Phrangopoulo, which were to have the honor of transporting the voyagers.

In Naxos, following the paths bordering the sea on foot would be, if not an impossible task, at least a difficult and tiring one. Sand is everywhere, a drifting, fine, deep sand; high, thick, flowering hedges hold this unstable soil and cling to the rocks that surround it. The way is like that for several hours. The sky laughs, the sun burns. Then the mountains loom up one after the other, rounded, cut by deep ravines. A few live oaks, lentisks; at the foot of the slopes, delightfully cool brooks and masses of oleanders. A few cattle wander here and there. On the hills little square castles of a dazzling white, with few windows, and at the corners four round-roofed watch turrets rise like graceful and unruly children. A few are crenellated. These miniature, quite feudal manors make a singular impression on a Greek island. They are vestiges of the time when the Barbary pirates sailed the neighboring seas, attempted bold landings, and, kidnapping fair lasses, went to sell them in the markets of Constantinople, Alexandria, or Smyrna, thus giving birth to a quantity of romances,[19] most of which remain unpublished. Reluctant to be made the raw material of these poetic incidents, the inhabitants did not dare dwell on the beaches; and that is why in the whole Archipelago, the habitations always tower from the highest peaks and whenever possible from heights that overlook the open sea.

Nothing could be prettier than these castles; they are surrounded by vines, enormous orange trees, figs, peaches,

— 116 —

and by plantings of all kinds, carelessly kept undoubtedly, but even more lush, free, and hardy for that.

After traveling two or three hours, they came upon one of these little castles on a hillside. Whiter than the others, more attractive, more elegant, more stylish, its four towerlets rising more exquisitely, surrounded by greener, denser trees, bearing more lemons and oranges, more intricately garlanded with vines, it immediately drew Henry Norton's attention and held it. It was a kind of fascination; and when M. de Moncade, who did most of the talking, had announced that it was the goal of their excursion and that, after crossing a small bridge over the brook, they would arrive at his friend's property, the English voyager felt as if he was about to cross a Rubicon of sorts and leave his former life on one bank in order to start a new one on the other. Such visions happen sometimes and are deceived; they depend on the mood one is in, on the weather, on a better awareness of physical well-being. Not only are high-strung natures set in motion a thousand times by almost anything or by nothing at all, but, what is worse, they tend to give in to the belief that their oscillations are of prophetic importance and reveal the future to them. It happens, therefore, that they are misled; but to take as axiomatic that they always deceive themselves would only be a special kind of superstition.

In this case, this much is certain: Norton approached the little manor with a wide-open heart, a soul exalted by an inexplicable joy, and a mind abandoned to the caresses of a thousand ideas, a thousand thoughts, a thousand feelings, each keener, gayer, more animated than the other.

Naturally, Naxos being a mountainous island, one is constantly climbing or descending. Here the travelers ascended one more winding, rocky, and very steep path, and were thus guided through a few courtyards and in front of peasant houses to the top of the rise where the manor perched; and dismounting at the bottom of a narrow stone stairway, they

— 117 —

reached an equally narrow terrace that led into a room very similar to the one Norton had already admired in town in M. de Moncade's house. It was likewise a long whitewashed cellar, vaulted like a chapel, flooded with light, and more simply, or if one prefers, even more meagerly furnished. A low sofa covered with calico dominated one end of the room, and at the other end, a very light wooden stairway climbed to a gallery leading to a small low door that gave access to the family's living quarters. One immediately gathered that in ancient times when, out of fear of raiding pirates, the castle had been built on a peak, they had taken the further precaution, in case these fearsome invaders managed to land unnoticed, of being able to abandon the lower part of the dwelling by taking

refuge in the upper, easily isolated by merely kicking down the stairway. In all, the manor had only four or five rooms, and, flanked by four turrets, was surmounted by a flat roof on which at present the crop of maize was drying.

All this was visited and examined by Norton in the greatest detail, and when he had got his fill of the beautiful landscape surrounding the old Venetian abode, he returned to the great hall, where a scene of another kind was awaiting him. The feminine portion of the family was gathered on the sofa. There was the mother, Madame Marie Phrangopoulo, a respectable matron rendered little mobile by her sheer weight, who was gravely turning the beads of her rosary between her short, round fingers. She had the great black eyes common in the region and an expression of total repose; not a trace of animation, but some twenty years earlier she must have been what is called a beauty. The lady sitting next to her, whom Norton understood to be her daughter-in-law, was a brunette; she had strong features, with wonderful lustrous black hair, eyes of a depth that made one ponder. Perhaps that depth contained nothing, but it was a mystery not to tamper with: she was Madame Triantaphyllon Phran-

— 118 —

gopoulo. Two little boys were hanging on her skirts, one with chestnut hair and the other dark like her, both as beautiful as angels and both staring at the stranger with that look of implacable mistrust and profound admiration always so beguiling in children. The young woman held a third baby in her lap, and it squeezed between its small pink hands an orange, the focus of all his faculties; a little girl a few months old was carried in the arms of a young Syrian servant, and on that subject one must say that the entire past of the islands is very exactly reflected in their present. In ancient times, the Cyclades saw more Asiatics settle on their shores than Greeks, more Phoenicians than Hellenes, and the antiquities found on them reproduce more often the monstrous idols of Tyr and Sidon than Athens's elegant divinities; things have remained about the same nowadays. Athenians are in no hurry to end on these shores where the seductions of nature vainly compete with the attractions of the great Constantinople, the bustling Smyrna, the opulent Alexandria: on their side, the peoples of Canaan have not forgotten the old routes, and that is why one encounters servants of their race in Naxos, where they mix with the descendants of the knights of the Crusade.[20]

Norton was turning these things over in his mind when he heard the door of the upper gallery open. So little did he expect to see the person who came out of it that he at first believed himself the victim of a dream. It was a young woman more than plainly clothed in a brown cotton dress with white polka dots, most certainly cut and sewn by herself which not only did not enhance her appearance, but barely passed as a garment. Full sleeves gathered at the wrist; no lace, no voile: nothing could have been more austere. A slender, strong, firm, healthy figure, the complexion of one of Rubens's Nereids;[21] marvelous eyes, as bright as blue sapphires and with the same limpidity as those stones, and her hair, golden, thick, abundant, coiled with some impatience,

— 119 —

it seemed, over the trouble it took to tame it, although it was much finer than silk and miraculously supple; the pinkest of mouths, the most generous of smiles, teeth most worthy of the ancient comparison with a row of pearls; and an adorable and flawless candor that was evident at first glance; above all, a serene charm that comes from security.

Does love start with the first blow, or only after several wounds? It is a kind of question discussed by learned doctors. But it would seem that love must work in the same way as death, which, according to the Holy Scriptures, is the weaker of the two.[22] When one has not been killed by the first stroke, it is because the blow was ill directed; but the thrust that knocks you down for good does not need the previous ones. In the same way, when love does fell you, it can do so because its aim was right, and thus one is indeed in love from the very first moment. Norton would probably have challenged that axiom. Proud people never like to see themselves overcome at the first encounter. Still, when, having reached the bottom of the stairway, the young lady crossed the long hall to come and sit by her mother, the captain felt it necessary to call to his aid all his civilized rigidity to hide his emotion, and he forced on himself a cold and starched air worthy of the British flag. He was not in the least to blame if the supple, noble and extraordinarily graceful walk of the newly arrived brought to his mind the hemistich from Virgil on the way the goddesses move;[23] even less to blame when, once the young lady was seated, he saw the eyes of the whole family fixed on his and all their mouths smiling with the most open pride, while M. de Moncade was saying to him, with the air of a man exposing an incontestable truth:

"I take it that you have never seen anything as beautiful as my Goddaughter, Akrivie?"

They all seemed to await the captain's answer in absolute confidence. The object of this remark smiled without any embarrassment, and seemed convinced herself that

— 120 —

it was impossible to dispute what had just been said. Dumbfounded by so unconscionable an offense against all custom and against the most sacred conventions, Norton assumed an embarrassed attitude and bowed. It would be impossible to swear that he did not feel rising in some corner of his brain one of those ugly suspicions that the cultivated do not lack. But if such a disgraceful thing did occur, it must be said in his praise that he did not permit this shameful notion to become a conscious thought, and the only result was that much to his credit he brushed British cant aside and answered M. de Moncade unperturbedly:

"I did not believe that anything as perfect as the young lady existed.

— It is not, the British Consul continued, that my Goddaughter has no worthy rivals on our island. When you come to mass on Sunday, you will see that our girls are pretty; but you won't find another like her. It's an incontestable fact, and she is not sorry about that. Do you want a cigarette?"

Tobacco was passed around. Norton said to himself:

"I am crazy or on my way to becoming so. She is pretty; why deny it? But as dowdy as can be! She seems graceful to me because I am on Naxos and I see her through a tangle of orange trees and oleanders; in a London drawing room things would be different. I can already hear Lady Jane's kind observations. What a massacre! And what's more, what sort of upbringing has this unfortunate child had? She must be utterly silly! I must make her talk."

In the Levant, people who are well disposed toward one another and happy to be together willingly enjoy that pleasure hours on end without opening their mouths. They stay seated, they smoke, they look at one another, they are contented, they do not say a word, and they do not have the slightest desire to be witty. It is what explains why the inhabitants of those countries are never bored. Norton would therefore have prolonged indefinitely his self-absorption with-

— 121 —

out it seeming out of the ordinary. The master of the house, helped by a young servant, was expertly preparing lemonades. Madame Marie was beatifically telling the beads of her rosary. Madame Triantaphyllon gently rocked the fat baby, who, having succeeded in making a hole in his orange, had fallen asleep sucking it, and the two boys had left with the Syrian servant and the infant. The beautiful Akrivie openly looked at the stranger, and without malice she contemplated him as though he were a human specimen different from any she had ever before seen. As for M. de Moncade, he was smoking with a gravity quite worthy of respect from a Mohican chief sucking hard on his calumet.[24]

Condescendingly pursuing his plan, Norton tried to strike up a conversation with Akrivie, with the immediate aim of inventorying the furnishings of her mind before going on later to those of her heart. It was the remedy he had found against the too sudden commotion he had undergone. Her mind appeared singular to him; he saw none of those things that usually adorn a young lady's imagination in those happy countries where good upbringing and distinguished salons flourish. To tell the truth, she knew nothing at all and did not seem to have the faintest idea about the use of being other than she was. By chance Norton discovered that she thought Spain bordered America, though, other than that it lay in a part of the world in all probability rather distant from Naxos, she had no idea where it was. He was pedant enough to try to correct her notions on this subject. She let him talk and did not seem to pay the least attention to his words. He found her responsive to the prospect of seeing the Christians retake Constantinople, and, contrary to her father and godfather, was quite vehement against the Turks, whose total eradication she ardently desired. She did not doubt for an instant that those monsters eat children alive and believed them on the verge of making new raids on the island. Seeing that her political understanding was strongly imbued with

— 122 —

the stuff of poetry, Norton tried to put her on the subject of literature; there she displayed a total vacuum: she had never read anything apart from her prayer book, and had never thought about it. He was astounded that this imagination, which was capable of conceiving such singular things on the subject of the future conquest of imperial Stamboul and of staging it with such rich inventions, did not seem to find the least charm in the printed pages of a book. He tried to fall back on an analysis of the picturesque beauties of the island and of the sea. Akrivie seemed flattered that the English gentleman

found the country to his taste. Since she did not know any other, she was utterly convinced that it was the most beautiful and lovable in the world; but precisely because she was lacking means of making comparisons, she seemed indifferent and unresponsive to his enthusiasm on the subject. Thus she talked about nothing, knew nothing, had thought about nothing, and had not had what one would call a conversation on anything. Meanwhile, she smiled, opened wide her beautiful eyes; and she was ravishing.

Norton was not able to find her a simpleton. In fact, what happened was totally the opposite. Flashes of the most faultless judgment, of the most self-assured and absolute conviction, an obvious vigor, a decided health in this practically uncultured mind gave him more food for thought than would have the most flowery outpourings which, in a mind as sophisticated as his, would for the most part have done little more than revive old memories and stir up stale quotations. The conversation carried not across a sterile plain but onto uncultivated land, which is a quite different matter for one trying to survey the resources of a country. He did not find there what he was looking for; but he sensed things of which he knew neither the name nor the use, nor the intrinsic worth, but which however were precious. The more frankly Akrivie laughed, and the wider she opened her large eyes (while looking at him) seemingly disposed to let him gaze into the depth

---

— 123 —

of her soul, the less he understood her. So it soon happened quite naturally that to the pleasure of seeing such beauty was added that of finding her the more mysterious for her being truly unaware of it.

She showed her femininity on an essential point. By chance and as though from an inspiration, he had the idea to talk about clothes. Here Akrivie's interest was visibly aroused, as well as her sister-in-law's, and even her mother stirred out of her lethargy. But Norton realized that to be really understood he could not aim too high; Akrivie and Mme Triantaphyllon sincerely considered a velvet dress as the acme of human elegance and gold bracelets as likely to gratify all the wishes of the most demanding woman on earth. As for fashion, strictly speaking, they had only the vaguest notion of it. Nonetheless, Norton was not bored; he even became more and more involved as intimacy increased, so that it came as a surprise when his host told him that if he wanted to go back on board that same evening, an intention he had firmly expressed several times, it was time to start. But they begged him so warmly to come back the next day that he willingly gave his word.

People in love, like spirits animated by a god, probably enjoy illuminations refused to other mortals. They tend to make momentous incidents and extraordinary revelations out of facts that sober heads would consider insignificant. Ordinarily a sensible man, Norton was noticeably preoccupied with Dido's behavior during that memorable day. When Akrivie had made her entrance at the top of the stairway, Dido had left the spot she had chosen at her master's feet, where, with her head resting on her two forepaws, she had visibly meant to recover from the rigors of the excursion. Staring at the young woman during the whole time it took her to descend the steps, she went over to her and, seeing her advances ignored, had followed her affectionately to the sofa, had sat down, and from then on kept fixed on her

---

— 124 —

her large black eyes that shone like carbuncles in the midst of an even blacker fur. She did not lose sight of her for a moment during that long visit; two or three times, she had placed a heavy paw on the knees of the person who inspired in her such a lively sympathy and had succeeded in being petted, much to her obvious contentment. At last, when it was quite clear that they were leaving, Dido had to be called three times before she obeyed her master, who was deeply struck by such strange behavior on the part of his favorite. Nothing like that had ever happened; up to then Dido had not let anyone distract her from her absolute affection for Henry, and even Thompson himself, the great and powerful Thompson, in charge of the details of her domestic life, who thought he had always held a distinguished place in her esteem, had not been able to inspire in her anything resembling such favor. Norton was almost frightened seeing Dido as little sensible as he himself was.[25]

It was late when the captain, after taking leave from his two kind and excellent hosts, had returned to the *Aurora* . Climbing the ladder, seeing the duty watch, who met him with a lantern, answering the officer's salute, he reentered his everyday world, one where he was accustomed to feel comfortable. But this time he did not experience the same impression, and he dealt with the realities as rapidly as he could so as to immerse himself again in the dream. Still he had to listen to the mate's report. All was well on board the *Aurora* . The very light damage was on its way to being speedily repaired; the officers had spent the day ashore and had found an admirable place to stage a cricket

match, which had been most exciting. They planned to have another the next day. According to the cook, fine mutton had been bought, also fresh vegetables whose exceptional flavor had been appreciated at dinner time. The mate assured his captain that Naxos was a wonderful part of the

— 125 —

world. Norton was much afraid that he shared this view of things only too much, although for other reasons; he went below to his quarters, followed by Dido in whom he perceived, not without some fear, preoccupations similar to his own.

But he was not able to remain lying down. He lit a cigar, went back up on deck, and began one of those monotonous pacings that sailors are given to, in which they generally work out the unmanageable part of their reveries, their suppressed desires, their unrealized plans, their most burdensome worries. From the extreme stern to the foot of the mainmast, he went back and forth, his spirit a thousand leagues from the world of planks and ropes in which his body moved. The night sky was of a limpid depth, the moon glittering, each one of the thousands of stars ablaze; and indeed his soul was not less ablaze in himself.[26] Like a general, it was reviewing a strange array of charming creatures to which, since it had been capable of self-examination, it had devoted, if only for a week, a feeling of tender imagination. The fresh, finely chiseled features of the Irish girl, the object of his daydreams after he left Eton; Molly Greeves, who had cried so much when he left her uncle's house at the end of his first leave; Catherine Ogleby, to whom he had been engaged, and who had married an officer of the guard while he was in China; Mercedes de Silva in Buenos Aires, Iacinta in Santiago, Marianne Ackerbaum in one of the Baltic ports. In truth, he had loved the lot of them, more or less, but he had loved; he had hoped, he had believed, he had been moved, he had experienced pleasure, grief, fear, boredom, sorrow, intense joy, sincere sadness. All that was left were ashes, but he had loved, and those ashes gathered together in a new hearth now helped to rekindle the fire, and in the middle, above, from fresh logs, from a new flame higher by far than all those that had formerly made him burn, his love for the girl from Naxos was soaring.

— 126 —

The comparisons he managed to make between the feelings that had successively occupied him and the one that had just invaded him, brought him to the undeniable conclusion that this time he loved in a new way, a stronger, more prevailing, certainly deeper, way that grasped the uttermost fibers of his being. Was it due entirely to Akrivie's beauty? That beauty, it is true, was incomparably superior to anything he had ever seen, even in a dream; yet it would not have been sufficient to perform the miracle. Nowadays one no longer loves a woman only because she is beautiful; that happened long ago, in ancient and barbaric times, but minds as sophisticated as those of our day could no longer tolerate it. When David, Ruth's energetic son, wanted at any cost to possess a certain Bathsheba, of whom he knew nothing except that she had beautiful shoulders, he had his best servant killed to accomplish that end, piled iniquity upon iniquity and almost fell afoul of Jehovah forever over that business.[27] In the same way, Paris, son of Priam, driven by the mere vision of one day possessing the most physically perfect creature in the world, upon whom he had bestowed an instantaneous and unreserved adoration without ever having seen her, eventually incurred all kinds of calamities. But those are not modern feelings, and Norton, keen analyst that he was, did not need to consider the state of his heart for long to convince himself that the tumult he saw in it did not result from sight only. From whence, then, did it come? Akrivie was not witty, showed a baptismal ignorance in all things, and devoid of the least coquetry, she had made no attempt to please or displease her admirer; if he had inspired in her any feeling at all, it was one of curiosity, and the chances were that the only trace it left in this beauty's imagination was an impression of the singularity of foreigners in general and captains in the British Navy in particular. And yet Norton sensed something more in this nature so different from that of the other women he had more or less loved; that other thing attracted

— 127 —

him, charmed him, in a phrase that sums it up, had made him fall in love, as he had. It took him some time to discover the secret; finally he succeeded, and that was to his credit.

The conditions of life that were Akrivie's, being exactly those of women three thousand years ago—isolation, a limited sphere of affection, total ignorance of the outside world, the same factors had worked on the girl from Naxos as one had formerly observed working on those superior characters from remote times. The young woman's native qualities had not been suppressed but concentrated, and instead of spreading luxuriously in multiple tendrils covered with leaves, flowers, fruit, they had

grown straight up in strong, smooth branches, soaring toward the sky, with some charm but even more majesty, with some seductiveness but even more grandeur.[28] The whole thrust of her spirit had been concentrated on her surroundings, with no desire or even inclination to look beyond. None of her mental energies had been diverted from what she was supposed to love, and no instinct had moved her to enlarge that circle. Again, Akrivie was a woman right out of Homeric times, living, existing, finding the sole justification for her existence in the milieu in which she moved, exclusively a daughter, sister, until the time when she would become no less absolutely a wife and mother. Autonomous being is little present in such natures;[29] they are mere reflections; they cannot, would not be anything more, and their glory and their worth, which are not small, reside there. Nothing resembles less the perfect woman, such as contemporary societies have invented her and more or less created her; the latter wishes, strives, succeeds or fails at her own risk; at any rate, she is quite different from the other, and it would be unjust to compare the two. In any event, for better or for worse, this is what Akrivie was, and Norton could see it. She reminded him, for good reason, of one of those beautiful girls painted on Athenian vases, filling their amphoras at the city's water fount and, so long as the

— 128 —

outcome of the fight had not awarded them to the winners, impassively watching the heroes fighting and dying for their prizes.

Strangest perhaps of all was this: Norton, man of the world par excellence, used to the best and most brilliant European society, kept at the bottom of his heart, in a latent form, of which, lacking the occasion, he had never been aware, a powerful attraction for that kind of feminine temperament. At first he was surprised by it, for up to that day, he had always been attracted by the opposite qualities. On closer examination, however, he easily recognized that the charm had never lasted long; parting had taken place without causing as much pain as would have befitted a perfect love; the extreme liveliness of one of his mistresses, the sparkling wit of another, the languid tenderness of a third, had left an aftertaste—a regrettable disposition bordering on ingratitude, of which he secretly accused himself. And now he caught himself loving a sort of grown-up child, a stranger to his habits, his tastes, his way of life, his ideas, and this without any better reason to give himself than that she was visibly the exact opposite of everything that he had halfheartedly liked until then; from that he concluded that she had been born and meant for him.

It was because he was English, and English to his fingertips, English in his soul as well as his blood, that things had turned out this way. This Norman race, the most dynamic, the most ambitious, the most turbulent, the most practical of all races on earth, is at the same time the most inclined to acknowledge and practice the renunciation of things.[30] Born into a social situation that permitted him to expect a great deal, Norton had never relied on the privileges that surrounded his youth, and, out of pride as well as out of natural energy, he had worked as hard as any man without advantages would have to climb the ladder of his profession as fast as possible. He had sailed, worked relentlessly, read

— 129 —

an enormous amount, thought a great deal, and every time a chance to act had come up, he had never missed it. One has already seen that he had an infinitely poetic turn of mind; but he had never permitted revery to come between him and action; the world around him had only known the practical side of his mind and his judicious, honorable but undeniable aggressivity in pursuit of success. And it was precisely at that moment when, still quite young, having reached a high position on the professional ladder, when everything had become easy, that he looked upon all this with disenchantment and questioned himself about the intrinsic worth of the advantages for which he had struggled so stubbornly until then. Such was the question he had asked himself many times for several months already, and at each reckoning he found it more difficult to resolve the problem, or, speaking more plainly, he descended one step closer to a contemptuous answer. It was at this turning in his life that fate brought him to Naxos, where nothing of what he had contemplated in his past existed, and there it sent him to Akrivie.

The young captain understood it all. During his nocturnal pacing, he took a lucid look at where he stood. He saw himself tugged by divergent forces. Still yesterday's man, already tomorrow's, judge and referee between the two, he channeled the total energy available to his soul into not rushing a solution. For, he said to himself with some regret, the card I am about to put on the table in this game will be a decisive one; and I am not about to play my hand under the influence of a sublime night and a disturbed heart.

He was a logical and supremely self-controlled man. To Dido's great pleasure, who slept uncomfortably on the planks and who for a long time had wanted to stretch out on her bearskin below, he went to bed. Early the next day he was up and found most of his officers breakfasting in haste so as to resume their cricket game and to don again their strange costumes, which any true Englishman loves for such occa-

— 130 —

sions: high boots or colorful half-boots, tight white jersey trousers or gaudy breeches loose at the hips, red or sky blue or variously striped tunics, open-necked and sleeveless, in some cases suede gloves, outrageous caps, beribboned straw hats, and the huge bat, the game's tool, on their shoulders. It is in such attire that the self-respecting gentleman must present himself to an admiring public! Whether the scene be an English field or an Australian savannah, whether it be in sight of a Chinese pagoda or on an icy plain near the North Pole, an Englishman of good name and reputation who is going to play cricket could not possibly dress differently without being compromised. Norton wished his companions a jolly time, and having rapidly reached shore in his gig, he found there the faithful Messieurs de Moncade and Phrangopoulo already waiting for him, still wearing their antique garb and their high white cravats;[31] he exchanged two hearty handshakes with these respectable persons, and jumping on the prepared mule, he set out in their company for the manor.

The day did not go well for Norton, although actually no tangible incident took place. But people in love have their own way of assessing what happens. The English sailor's reception by the ladies, however, was more cordial than it had been the day before if only because they knew him better. Madame Marie was no more loquacious, but she seemed more at ease. Madame Triantaphyllon enjoyed seeing her youngest child in the captain's arms tugging handfuls of his hair, obviously without any fear. Akrivie acted as unconcerned as before, but Norton, and that is what hurt, had wisely concluded that this great calm showed only too clearly that he had made no impression on her and that there was reason even to believe that he could never make one. This word, "never," is bound always to occupy an important place in the vocabulary of people in love.

Again, nothing happened except that Norton was more confirmed in his convictions regarding the beautiful Naxiote's

— 131 —

character, and as there was clearly a struggle going on inside him between the civilized man who wanted to be loved and felt that he wasn't, and the bored and quasi-jaded man quite tempted to burn what he had adored and to adore what he did not know, he went back on board on the one hand contrite, swearing that Akrivie was a silly girl, without soul and without warmth, and on the other, disposed even more than the day before to find her a noble soul, quite worthy of being his initiator into a better, more rational and more truly masculine life than any whose ways he had followed until then. He did not take his walk on deck, went to bed instead, but Dido was the only one to sleep. As the cricket game had had its share of incidents well worth comment, Norton heard animated discussions going on late into the night in the officer's wardroom. He had not slept a wink when daylight got him up, and after giving his orders to the mate and listening to the various routine reports, which, perhaps for the first time in his life, seemed to him completely ridiculous and sovereignly insupportable, he went to meet his two hosts, more than ever clad in their immortal black suits.

The third day was marked by a momentous event. Norton proposed an excursion at sea to his friends, and the occasion for it was provided by the pretext of going to see how things stood with the volcano that had recently appeared on Santorin.[32] This grand phenomenon had started, or rather resumed, only a few years before, and the captain praised the prodigious character of this spectacle in order to pique the curiosity of the manor's inhabitants. Mme Marie shook her head disdainfully, and was unshakable in her resolution not to budge; Mme Triantaphyllon confessed that she would be very pleased to see what the English corvette was like; that is all she was interested in. Akrivie showed a little more interest; like her sister-in-law, it was principally the corvette that attracted her; but she did not dislike the prospect of a voyage. As for the volcano, she could not have cared less; a

— 132 —

blazing mountain seemed to her a pure paradox that left her indifferent. The two old gentlemen seemed infinitely more excited. They accepted the invitation eagerly, and, after a great deal of discussion it was agreed that the fair Akrivie would occupy the captain's cabin; her father and

godfather would take the wardroom; Madame Triantaphyllon would accompany her sister-in-law on board and have lunch there, and after being given the complete tour, would return to the manor, while the corvette would take an excursion of three days at the most.

These discussions took forever; the most naive and infantile questions were asked on the subject with an extreme gaiety; but Norton was disappointed to see once more that he had not stirred in Akrivie even the most fugitive trace of emotion.

The next day everything took place as had been arranged. At six o'clock in the morning the Naxiote family was on the ship's deck. Breakfast was served and every corner of the vessel was shown to the visitors. Mme Triantaphyllon found this spectacle quite extraordinary and she forever remembered it as a strange jumble of ropes, masts, sheets of tin, copper pistons, and black smoke. What she declared absolutely beautiful was the large stern cannon, which they could never persuade her to touch even though she was dying to. When the moment came for her to return on shore, she had already been yearning to do so for two hours, for it was the first time that she had left her children for so long, and she was excessively worried. Nevertheless, she became aware that she worried almost as much about what might befall her relatives during this unheard-of adventure, and before leaving the corvette she hugged Akrivie tightly, shedding a few anguished but quiet tears on her sister-in-law's neck. Then she left, and the *Aurora* , having weighed anchor, began to move, and slowly sailing out of the harbor, gained the open sea.

— 133 —

As the ship proceeded toward Paros and as Akrivie, paying more attention to what was going on around her, was gradually losing her impassivity, Norton noticed with extreme interest that she was not as unshakably indifferent as until then it had appeared. What could be seen on the horizon or what was happening on board made her eyes shine. Henry was watching her the way a gardener follows the progress of a bud opening into a flower. She seemed to try to understand the people around her; they in turn did their best to obtain a glance from so adorable a person, for you can easily imagine that the *Aurora* 's officers were dazzled. The first officer stuck his chest out, displayed his white trousers, the gold buttons of his impeccably ironed shirt and his watch chain to their best advantage. The navigating officer, as busy as he was with his duties, still found the time now and then to offer an interesting remark while twisting his red side-whiskers with coquetry. The junior officers eagerly brought all sorts of chairs onto the quarterdeck and prepared drinks made with the strangest of ingredients. Only the doctor, who remained calm thanks to his sixty years, was trying to obtain a bit of information about the flora of Naxos by means of the little Greek he knew, which he used in a way quite sufficient to give Demosthenes a fit, if that famous orator had heard it. M. Phrangopoulo was answering with the description of a tree while his interlocutor was under the illusion that he was getting a monograph on a microscopic blade of grass. M. de Moncade was awed by the screw, which was making seventy-five turns a minute. What most captivated Akrivie was the midshipmen, particularly the youngest of them. Her presence made them bubble with excitement; but regulations forbade them from venturing onto the quarterdeck, and they satisfied themselves by devouring the young lady with their eyes. She, however, did not ask any questions; but Norton sensed that she was looking at everything and enjoyed seeing her do this.

— 134 —

When they came to Antiparos and were engaged in the channel between the island and a brush-covered islet, Akrivie pointed admiringly toward the high cliffs on shore and said to Henry: "It's marble!" It was marble, white marble, and its effect was wondrous. Sea, wind, rain, storm have vainly tried to defile these enormous masses of divine matter with their blasts; they keep their majesty and their beauty intact and display its full magnificence along these shores.[33] A few travelers have already remarked that the very fact of being built of marble, even unpolished marble, is enough to make Genoa worthy of the glorious name, Genoa the Superb. What can be said of an island whose rocks are marble and of a marble similar to that from which Venus emerged along with such a multitude of divinities which won the admiration of the world? Akrivie did not analyze her sensations and could not have found the means of doing so with her limited and virgin intellect; but Henry could see that since all expressions of beauty have something in common, she perceived the proximity and the effect of the splendid landscape rising before her eyes as through a magnetic power.

They decided to take a walk on the island, and to sail for Santorin only at night.

Everyone was in a cheerful and high-spirited mood. Agreeable as it is to sail with a pretty woman, it is even more so to take a walk with her on shore. The sea air, the unusual liveliness of conversation, the appearance of so many new things, had heightened the color in Akrivie's cheeks, and laughing

heartily, she accepted the officer's joyful eagerness to take her ashore. The closer they got to the beach, the more they saw it as it was, that is rather less attractive than with its colors heightened at a distance by the purity of the air; it was now an austere, pebbly, barren spot, and the sole vegetation on it consisted of bushes and here and there a meager tree. As soon as they touched the sandy beach, Norton sent several midshipmen scouting, and almost immediately one of

— 135 —

these youngsters, Charles Scott, a Scotsman, came running back to tell his captain that behind a little knoll about three hundred feet from the beach, a rather large dwelling could be seen. The caravan at once started walking in that direction; and M. Phrangopoulo, after reminiscing with M. de Moncade, explained who was the owner of the domain toward which they were heading.

Five or six years earlier, a Greek from the Ionian islands, Count Spiridion Mella,[34] had come to plant and cultivate vineyards on Antiparos with the intention of competing with the wine of Santorin. Whether he succeeded or not, no one knew; in any case, in this peaceful corner of the world he represented the omnipresence and the omniagitation[35] of European industry. Before that, he had represented many other things. During his youth he had served in Russia in the cadre of a regiment; a general's aide-de-camp, he had acquired a bit of a reputation in the smart society of Moscow. Then leaving his epaulets behind, he had set out for Constantinople, where politics got the better of him. Praised by some, denigrated by others, he had painfully threaded his way through a good many adventures, and after enough long years of intrigues, he had been seen doing business in Alexandria. There he had contacted merchants who had taken him to the Indies. The profits from the voyage had probably been thin, for Count Mella returned to his country with a very modest retinue, and settled down in the Peloponnesus, where he spent a few years. Meanwhile he had aged; the seventy or so years ringing in his ear told him to be wise. He took advantage of the advice and married a very young woman, and after two years of the blessed state, he had come to Antiparos to try his fortune once more. Thus, a Russian officer, a Turkish or Greek politician, Egyptian merchant, and Indian courtier in succession, the Ionian count now found himself a winegrower in the Cyclades. One cannot refuse to give this type, which is not at all rare in the Orient, credit for its amazing activ-

— 136 —

ity, ingeniousness, adaptability and philosophy in the face of adverse fortune.

Norton saw the islander at some distance walking toward the arriving guests; at least he assumed, and with some reason, that on the whole island of Antiparos, the description given by the two Naxiotes could fit only the person walking at that moment at the other end of the path. The Count was a man of average size, poorly clothed, though not unpretentiously, who did not look so old as M. Phrangopoulo had said. He behaved very hospitably, took the group from the *Aurora* to his house, which was built in the midst of rocks, pointed out for their admiration four pitiful six-foot-high trees that formed a hedge in front of the house, and that could not fail to grow some day and even to bear leaves, if only the wind would grant them life; he showed with a mysterious and self-satisfied air a half-dozen horribly mutilated fragments of marble he had discovered while laying the foundations of his house, and launched into a long description of the ancient masterpieces he had no doubt he would unearth some day.[36] Meanwhile, he had only very poor fragments from the worst period. The famous discovery of the statue found on the island of Milo in 1821[37] had become the favorite legend in the Cyclades, and there is not in the whole archipelago a rock pile so small that it does not make inhabitants dream of the exhumation of some Venus in the near future.

Antiparos is not a large island; it boasts, however, a few fishermen's huts and even a village; but that is not where its attraction lies. Count Mella advised his guests to avail themselves of this excellent occasion to visit the famous cave[38] situated at the summit of the island. All the officers displayed great enthusiasm for the expedition; and Norton, delighted by the prospect of roaming about the countryside in Akrivie's company, eagerly acquiesced to the wish of the others. They sent back to the ship for more men, for ropes, ladders, and torches, and they were on their way.

— 137 —

No Greek island is so absolutely barren that it does not have some greenery inland, and, like beautiful girls for whom the slightest ornament is enough, the smallest bush suddenly gives an inimitable grace to this or that corner of the landscape. The region they were going through in their excursion was extremely hilly; it still consisted of large masses of white marble, here specked with black, there tinted with a rusty color that became an almost vivid orange. In hollows where topsoil had painfully been

able to form, thorny shrubs twisted their gray branches bristling with thin, pale, spear-shaped leaves; along the ravines, filled in winter with angry and tumultuous torrents but where at that time not a drop remained, beautiful, luxuriant oleanders grew in thick clumps; still this lushness revealed itself only to those who took the trouble to look for it, just as glory is not found on easy paths. Charles Scott, the Scottish middy, managed, however, to pick two bunches of flowers. Blushing to his ears, he offered the first to Akrivie while they were going through a narrow gorge where he hoped no one could see them; as for the second, she found it that evening at her bedside, the culprit having given it to Thompson with the dreadful lie that the young lady had picked it herself and that he had agreed to carry it for her. So that during that day Akrivie made two suitors and a crowd of admirers among the *Aurora* 's officers. Norton saw that he had a rival, but he did not mind. Far from begrudging it, he felt his former sympathy increase for the bold youth, who had all along been his protégé. Charles Scott's mother, the penniless widow of a clergyman, had two children, an elder daughter Effie, more or less Akrivie's age, and Charles. Raising him and getting him into the navy had required a sustained effort and long resignation to much drudgery. Charles knew it not only as a fact, but in his heart; and living for his mother and sister was his main motivation and a goal ever-present in his thoughts. He had no other ambition than to succeed in making life as good as possible for

---

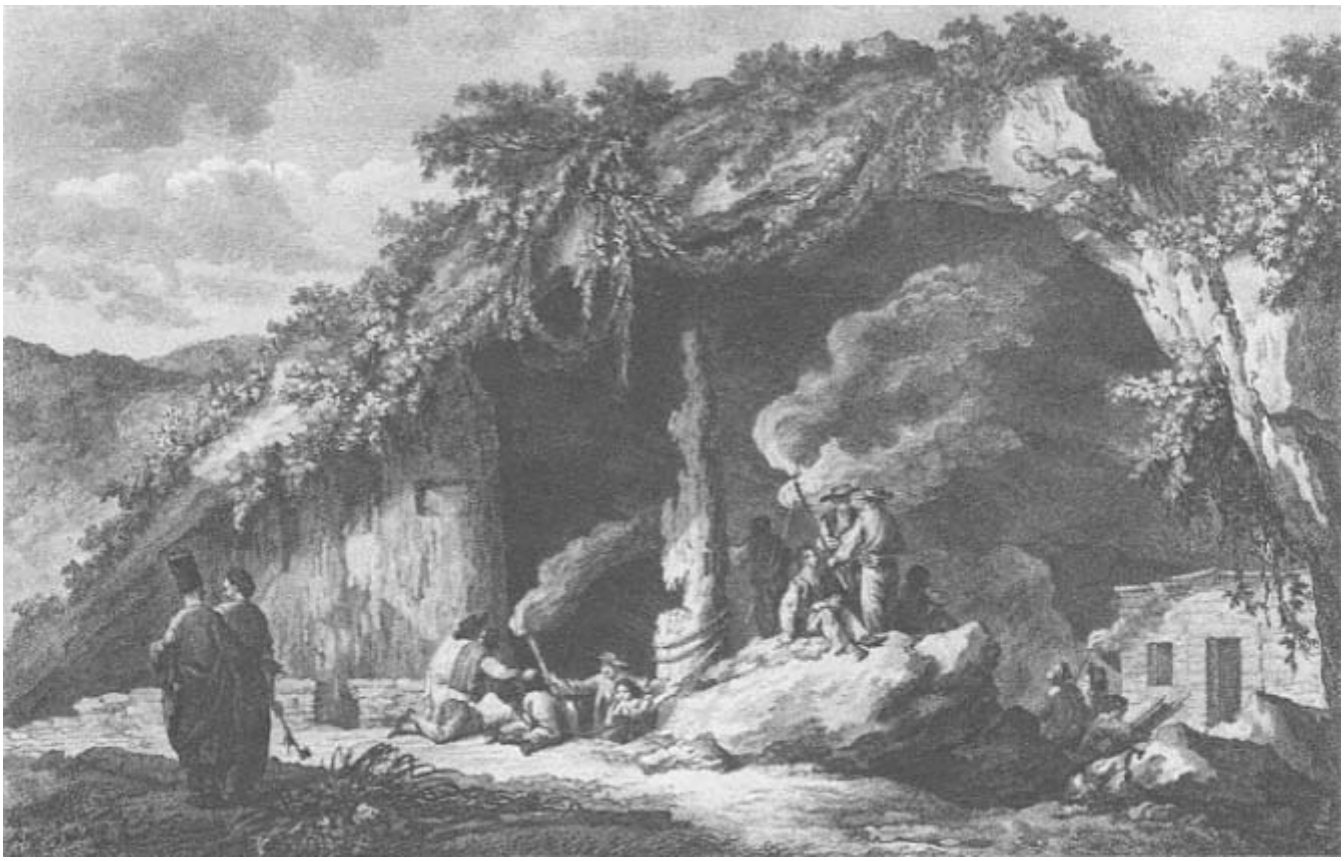
these two cherished beings. There was no mansion that he would not examine with a critical eye and promise himself to buy if it was good enough to house his idols one day. He did not think of himself as repaying a debt, he simply wanted to give them everything. As for himself, he was determined not to marry in order to make Effie's children his only care once she had married the youngest, the handsomest, the richest of the members of the House of Lords. To tell the truth, Akrivie had just impressed him in a way that changed all that; but he found that the young Naxiote resembled Effie. Norton guessed as much and said to the young man:

"Scott, don't you think that this young person reminds one of Effie?

— Oh! yes, Sir," answered the middy, blushing to his ears.

Things would have proceeded in this jolly way if during the excursion another middy had not indulged in a few audacious jokes about his comrade's preoccupation. The result was a boxing match, with Charles the aggressor, and he put so much hot anger into his punches that they had to tear his unfortunate adversary out of his grasp, his two eyes blackened and his mouth bloody. The doctor, the only one in on the secret of this row, which they were able to hide from the first officer, made the judicious remark while bathing the victim's face, that wherever Venus showed herself, Mars was never far behind. The old doctor was a damnable classicist; but he nevertheless told the awesome second without batting an eye that this awkward George Sharp had fallen on some stones.

Meanwhile, they had reached the highest point on the island, and the cave opening, already glimpsed from the foot of the previous rise, displayed itself in its full majesty to the gaze of the visitors gathered under its arch. Nature had carved out of solid marble this immense dome whose depth one does not suspect largely because of its height. Ropes



Entrée de La Grotte d'Antiparos

— 139 —

were prepared, the torches lighted, and the sailors, unrivaled in the world for this kind of expedition, began to prepare the descent under the expert supervision of one of the lieutenants who knew the place.

If forced to, one can understand that geologists or naturalists, who claim expertise in these matters and who are professionally trained to see light in black holes, are permitted to descend into such godforsaken places; but the rest of mankind has no business there.[39] Scientists hope to find there some booty; and if they break a neck or limb, it does not seem utterly ridiculous, though one cannot say the same about their ignorant imitators. To descend into the Antiparos cave, you have to squeeze foxlike through one of the narrow tunnels that open at the end, right and left of the main entrance. You enter an opaque darkness bent over so as not to break your head against the rock above you. You drag along painfully and in the most absurd position over a sweating and slippery rock, and you grab the end of a rope. You hang onto it and let yourself slide, which works tolerably well as long as the surface you are moving along slopes downward; all of a sudden it angles inward and then, with the hand not holding the rope, you cling to the crags, trying not to fall into you do not know what since you cannot see a thing. So much for the first chapter; this fun stops when you feel ground under your feet. Do not, however, rejoice prematurely; you are on a narrow cornice and should get off it as soon as possible. The second chapter is about to start and, drawing the torch to you and leaning against the wall along which you have just been sliding, you arrive at an opening where a rope ladder is attached. You can see the top of it, but nothing below as it is a black and gaping void; no amount of light could possibly make you see more of it, for your eyes have not yet had time to adjust from the dilation normal in the sunlight where you were only a moment before.

— 140 —

So you are on the rope ladder; you go down with the caution your natural instincts inspire. The stone wall against which you are working is sufficiently slanted for the ladder to adhere to it, and if your hands have little hold on it, your toes have even less; however, it is in your interest not to let go, for you have no idea where you might fall or of the conditions awaiting you when you land. It is only after you have succeeded in plunging into this abyss without mishap that you can appreciate the fact. You

are then on a sort of scanty platform where water oozing from the rock trickles; it is as chilly as in the bottom of a cellar, and the humidity takes you by the throat. You feel less and less comfortable, the air is heavy and swollen with vapors. The torches glimmering here and there and the fact that you have already adjusted to the darkness make you discover soon enough that you have not arrived at the end. You bend over, you grasp another rope tied to a stony crag, and again you let yourself slide. This time you have done with dangling in the void as a means of locomotion. You have reached a steeply inclined terrain bristling with sharply projecting angles, that is to say you have to move across the cutting edges of huge marble blocks fallen from the vault and scattered all about; and the challenge is to keep your balance while walking along these sharp points. You utterly exhaust yourself, and in that way reach the very end of the cavern; there you raise your head and are properly rewarded for so much inept effort: you are not looking at anything worth taking three steps to see.

The substantial elevation of the vault lacks character, first, because it is from that very place that you have just come down, and you resent it, which radically spoils that element of sympathy that enters any admiration; second, because the eye can easily look all the way up to the very top along successive piles of debris and endless circumvolutions of chaotically broken cornices. The space contained under this ill-arranged cap might be vast, but it does not seem so;

— 141 —

it is interrupted in the middle by rock slides large enough to form a multitude of rather small compartments, and along the rocky mass, hanging, tumbling stalactites have formed here and there a series of cubicles, quite similar to those niches in the depths of a cellar where the most precious wines are stored. As for the stalactites themselves, they are trite horrors that nature lovers everywhere dote on, imitations of sugar candy sticks that congealed outside their mould, shapeless, awkward spills, wide at the wrong place, thin where they should not be, and pretentiously tear shaped. The only thing that consoles you a bit from your growing boredom is the discovery of inscriptions that quite eloquently reveal the organic stupidity of the human species. One is especially memorable. At the bottom of a nook, at the back of the stalactites, is written out the following phrase: "Hélène de Tascher, incomparable woman! treasure of the Marquis de Chabert!—1775."[40] The Marquis de Chabert must have fought, though against an irresistible natural indiscretion, only to see himself forced to give into it at the bottom of Antiparos's cave. Unhappy bravery knows few examples as touching.

When the English officers had looked long enough to see that there was nothing to see, they climbed back up, and incidentally, if the descent was not easy, the reverse operation was even more laborious. Fortunately, any accidents were limited to a few harmless falls and compromised trousers. Norton had felt duty-bound to sacrifice a few moments that he might have spent sitting at the entrance to the cavern next to Akrivie, in order to give the appearance of not abandoning his crew. He was somewhat rewarded by the frightful effect Count Mella's account of the venture had succeeded in having on the beautiful Naxiote's imagination. The Corfiote gentleman laid it on so thick that as he finished depicting the crushing to death of twenty-two people, including a Turkish pasha, by rocks falling from the vault, Norton, reappearing

---

— 142 —

with his companions, cut a hero's figure and was received the more enthusiastically since Akrivie, who took for granted the loss of the staff with its captain at its head, was already wondering how she could ever get back to Naxos. She displayed such joy that Norton, who did not suspect its real cause, felt a vague hope stir in him, and already inclined to exaggerate his progress in this sleeping beauty's[41] heart, he began to lose a bit of his sangfroid. From that moment on, he believed in the possibility of becoming something in Akrivie's eyes.

The immediate effect of his self-deception was exalting, and his mood became charmingly communicative; but it is not always fortunate to be fortunate. One lets down one's guard and one regrettably neglects one's precautions while traveling through this world's thorny patches. Whatever the case may be, Henry was henceforth in that state of mind in which everything is seen under such a brilliant light that for a long time after the experience takes place the smallest details, the slightest incidents, the most minute facts are recalled as the most delicious happenings of an entire lifetime.

The visit to the cave had taken a considerable time, and once back on the beach, they had to take hasty leave from Count Mella and return on board in order to partake there of a dinner prepared with the full magnificence that the officer's cook was capable of producing; for at the staff's request, Norton had consented to accept for his guests and for himself the hospitality of the mess.

Naval officers' morale is influenced in two ways by life on board. During the first years of service, the boredom of long, monotonous days is successfully defeated by love of the profession; however, it sometimes weighs heavy, and at those times anything that can change the ordinary regimen is eagerly welcomed and enjoyed to the full. Later, love of the profession has gone by the board; an officer continues to serve only out of necessity; he is disenchanted but resigned, and in this pitiful spiritual condition, which is none other

— 143 —

than the discouragement that comes of a hopeless servitude, the only solace and unique relief is found precisely in this morose monotony that formerly was the disadvantage of the calling. That is why older officers have a marked horror for anything that might modify or interrupt the orderly course of life at sea; and they resent the presence of strangers, and even more particularly of women, in their midst. It disturbs the peace of the lair and forces them willy-nilly to think.

By a singular chance there were no old officers aboard the *Aurora* , so that repellent feelings of the sort I have just described were absent. Charles Scott, the middy, was not the only one to entertain secret, tender thoughts about Akrivie's perfections or to heave a sigh. It was later claimed that during the night following that memorable day the old doctor himself dreamed that he was discovering a new variety of plant on the Milo beach and that he heard a celestial voice ordering him to bring his discovery to the attention of botanists under the name *Akrivia incomparabilis* . In a word, it was fragrant with the most private and the most delicious sensations that Her British Majesty's ship floated on the sea.

Either in response to the general sympathy or because little by little she felt more at ease, Akrivie, in truth, at every instant, revealed to Norton's eyes or to his imagination more grace and merit. He became aware that there was a touch of delicacy and of enthusiasm in all of her comments. She knew little; to tell the truth, she knew nothing; but her instincts were correct and just, and her conversation was full of observations that sometimes made one smile, but that were singularly pleasing. She did not bother with small matters; but she confronted the important ones, and without always understanding them, she was willing to face them. More and more, Norton compared her to Priam's generous daughters, who were in no way humiliated by having to lead a horse to the trough or to mix water and wine in the amphoras. This disposition of the daughter of Naxos to be exalted by what

— 144 —

was beautiful, or seemed so to her, found a natural occasion to display itself toward the next evening. Night had fallen, and a relatively dark sky, although aglow with starlight, cast a uniformly soft blue tint over the sea, when they spotted a blood red flush on the horizon.

"There is the Santorin volcano!" Norton said while pointing to it, and he looked at the girl, curious to see what impression would be reflected on this charming face.

His hopes were not deceived. The effect produced was instantaneous and sublime. A profound admiration spread over the beautiful features he was passionately observing; Akrivie seemed to grow at the sight of the wonder offered to her. Nothing petty, no banal curiosity, no awkward pretending to fake emotion, no silly exclamations of admiration passed between these beautiful closed lips.[42] Everything was sincere, frank, worthy of the cause itself. There is nothing indeed to be seen more absolutely beautiful than the sight that soon unfolded in its full magnificence before the eyes of the *Aurora* 's spectators.

Darkness made the land mass of Santorin and the neighboring islands invisible, or at any rate its veil covered them so well that they were barely adumbrated in the midst of the waves, and against this background of the same darkly soft hue, the immense cone of an incandescent mountain rose majestically, reminiscent of a theophany and surrounded by a luminous limbus. Down its rough slopes glowing lava flowed in vast sheets. It was a purple mantle that endlessly loosened new folds; as the blazing fabric reached the bottom, it separated into almost silky fringes, and their changing colors went from the most vivid red to various shades of orange, bright yellow and vermilion. A few of these thin strips advanced much farther than others, and, upon reaching the foot of the mountain, plunged into the sea, where they were extinguished, not without a shower of millions of sparks, a permanent fireworks fittingly answering the constant explosions

— 145 —

at the top, where huge phosphorescent sprays, constantly being hurled skyward, made the torrents of

thick smoke whirl, at times bizarrely lit and gradually sinking into the darkness only to be lighted again a moment later in a new way. Terrible roarings provided a basso continuo for the strident explosions that accompanied this abundant outpouring of the magnificent substance. Some came from the bottom of the slopes, from the hidden foot of the mountain; others seemed to shriek in the crater. This whole spectacle was awesome, as if Jupiter was displaying his power, but of such force, of such greatness, so imposing, so grave that it commanded veneration rather than fear. Akrivie spent half the night on deck unable to free herself from the emotions that so powerfully held her. She never stopped asking about the causes of the phenomenon and its probable effects. Norton did his best to explain it all to her, and tried to put the simplest conclusions of scientific theory within her reach. He had little success and was soon aware that Akrivie accepted somewhat disdainfully the exposition of causes that were too pitifully disproportionate, too humble to match the extreme impressions that possessed her soul. He easily inferred that she would much more willingly have believed his explanations if he had talked of guilty giants buried under the waters in order to expiate their crimes, and hurling skyward their despair, or of gods laboring to astonish the universe. Probably, good Christian that she was, she would even have preferred that all this display come from Saint George's or Saint Dimitri's power. The inevitable result of this disharmony between feelings and explanations was that the enthusiastic beauty forgot the latter as fast as she heard them, and in the back of her mind made up for herself some sort of vague, obscure but very accurate and very poetic notion of what a volcano was. Actually Norton was delighted to see that she was true to herself. Logical personalities like their kind and have less trouble with absurdity than with inconsistency.

— 146 —

They slept little that night, and the next day at dawn the corvette anchored off Santorin, below the cliff capped by the city of Thera. Santorin is nothing other than a fragment of the broken ridge of a former crater. Abruptly springing from the depths of the sea and continuing to the east and to the south in a sort of sloping plain that soon joins the other shore, it is a serrated half-circle that formerly, long before man came on earth, formed the top of the mountain. The interior of the ancient chasm was completely invaded by the waters, so deeply that even at the very edge of the shore soundings of sixty, seventy and eighty fathoms can be taken. Alone, a few hundred yards off, a rocky needle sticks out; it is the only place where ships can drop anchor; across, at some distance, successive volcanic eruptions, either before or after our era, have pushed up several small contiguous islands. A volcano, extinguished for a few hundred years, occupied the center, when the new commotion[43] suddenly stirred and redesigned the configuration of this uncertain terrain. Such is the general aspect of the Santorin roadstead. When the weather is bad, it is almost impossible to go ashore, for the launches would be mercilessly dashed against the cliffs.

That day it was fortunately not the case, so that without difficulty the gig of the *Aurora* 's captain came alongside the narrow ledge that served as a dock. They mounted horses to climb to the top. By following a path whose numerous hairpin turns cling to the crumbling rock and where slides frequently occur, one succeeds in hoisting oneself to Thera after at least half an hour's expedition. M. de Moncade, as well as his friend, had a few relatives to visit there. Santorin was formerly a part of the Duchy of the Cyclades, and like Naxos, has a few families of Frankish origin. But fate was more favorable to this territory, enhanced as it is by its famous vineyards, than to its former capital. In Santorin people are wealthy, have frequent communication with Syra, if not Athens; and constant trading with Constantino-

— 147 —

ple and even with Odessa, where almost all the local wines are sold, draws the population closer to the ways of the rest of the world. One should not, however, exaggerate this aspect of things.

The houses resemble those of Naxos; they are built in the same way and to meet the same needs. You find the same large, vaulted halls, accompanied by one or two small rooms, the same precautions taken against the sudden interruption of pirates, and the same way of life, which turns the street into a common courtyard. They were received with the warm and affectionate hospitality customary in all Greek islands. They had to taste and admire the wine, the region's main resource, to listen to complaints about the harm done to the vineyards by the volcano's exhalations, and the perils it represents for the inhabitant's health, for by filling the air with a very fine dust, a mixture of pumice and sulfur, it caused many eye infections. They also had to sympathize about the gusting winds, the turbulent masters of these heights abandoned to their full fury, and after performing these various duties and hugging relatives, close and distant, and those friends who had turned out, they hurriedly clambered back down to their boat in order to land at the other side of the roadstead, the principal

reason for the visit and the one that promised the most amusement.

Soon everything about this expedition took on a novel, strange, attractive aspect. The sea, totally yellow, golden yellow, carried large masses of floating pumice, which replaced the huge quantities of dead fish seen floating on it in the first days after the eruption; the few traces that remained of the small houses that were used as bathing stations had been gradually submerged under the waters or buried under volcanic matter; a jetty had just been built, but it now plunged under water; finally, black rocks giving off a sulfurous steam stirred perpetually, and, pushed from beneath, they sometimes rose in a vertical upward movement, and some-

times, ill-supported, they tumbled down, rolled into the sea, thus widening the base of an evergrowing islet[44] that might become very large some day, provided it does not disappear all of a sudden. All of that was as black as ink, fuming, hot enough that you could not touch it, and all around the water was boiling so that one would have been scalded had one fallen in it.

To climb on the fiery cone would have been impossible. Moreover, the fact that the base itself was composed of glowing cinders and streams of fire that ran in all directions would have made the undertaking inconceivable. But there was a way to observe the giant from a relatively close distance by climbing to the top of the previous crater just across from it. That is what Norton immediately proposed to the gentlemen. Akrivie felt her courage so high that her habitual passivity did not prevail and she begged her father's and godfather's permission to accompany them. So all of them set out, Akrivie leaning on her two natural guides in the most difficult spots, sometimes accepting the help that Norton, always at her side, was eager to give her; sometimes also unthinkingly dispensing this favor to Charles Scott, who savored its sweetness to the core of his being. This climb is not what one would call painful, but it is tiring because for two-thirds of the way up one walks on fine and shifting ashes into which one's feet sink deep. The slope is spotted with a few bushy shrubs that would provide a hold if one happened to slip; and one should jolly well avail oneself of them for, like the Thera cliff, the mountain plunges straight down into very deep waters. And one must not forget, moreover, that the water all around is scalding.

Once the ashy slopes had been climbed, there were some flat stones to cross, next, sharp needles to go around. The party found itself then on a large tormented plateau, pitted with hollows, fissures, holes from which volcanic matter used to spew. Here, everything is burned, roasted, scarred

with red or yellow plaques, tumbled every which way; the rocks displaced, hurled against one another, show the brutal effects of an incredibly violent scene; large and small fragments of primal sulfur cover the ground as if to demonstrate that nature has not finished and that what has been might well happen again. Here and there, from behind two charred walls of rock, a thick column of smoke rises, threatening and dark, its flakes disappearing into the blue of the atmosphere.

But there was more to see than past and future; at a few yards distant, straight across from the plateau, the splendors of the present displayed themselves alive and turbulent. If one leaned over the northern ridge, one found oneself looking out at a huge valley, a hellish chasm, gray, somber, disjointed in every way, darkened by the sinister reflections of the great shadows spread all over by the pall of smoke hovering above the summit of the nearby volcano, which now freely unleashed itself in full sight of its previous works. It could be seen cracking and splitting with new rivulets of fire. The din was so frightful that in order to talk they had to shout into one another's ears, at least when the monster was not singing falsetto, in which case one was forced to wait until it had finished its screech. It continually fired random volleys of pumice stone, of semicharred rocks, of pebbles drawn from the depth of its entrails; and one had to watch out for its deadly liberality. Nothing could be more imposing or more majestic. Hours sped by in this contemplation. As a daydreamer sitting on a beach endlessly awaits one wave to follow another wave and is not aware of time's flight, here too, Akrivie, Norton and most of their companions could not stop watching the powerful explosions unfold their huge columns and drop their shower of projectiles on the open sea; and each time the crisis had climaxed, they would wait for the next one. One must mention, however, that a few of the officers, in a more prosaic mood, had long before talked M. de Moncade into going back down with them, and that

this group of realists was found later, sitting in the shade of a shrub not far from the gig, eating plumcake and drinking ginger beer with keen satisfaction.

But everything has an end; they had to return. Norton thought sorrowfully that they only had a few hours left before they would see Naxos again and before Akrivie would return to her house amid its oleanders[45] and that he would continue to live on board the *Aurora* as he had until then; but he would carry away memories that would make him painfully aware, even more than in the past, of the boredom of his existence. By reviewing his impressions of Antiparos and of Akrivie's increasing openness, he had succeeded in multiplying the reasons he thought he must be, if not loved, at least noticed. Norton was not vain and was not easily lured by this sort of self love; but since he was in love, he assumed that he had been singled out. He compared what he thought was the young woman's state of mind with his view of her character, a character that pleased him as much as her person; and after mature deliberation, he brought himself to a proposal that the aggravating circumstance of premeditation made romantic to the most supreme degree. Only an Englishman is capable of such things, and in order fully to appreciate what Norton did, one has to understand that he was only trying to put into practice the inclinations of many of his compatriots.

In the most distant countries of the globe and especially in those most off the beaten path, one is almost sure to meet such an individual, bravely settled down and availing himself of the most complete solitude permitted by local circumstances. Rarely is this solitary person of common extraction; most usually he is a man of the world, well born and well connected, who once was or may still be wealthy; in most cases, he comes from the military, the law or the navy. He always has a cultivated mind and refined habits, which have compounded into a need for an almost primitive but never

vulgar simplicity. By probing my memory I could draw up a list of these deserters of high society;[46] I have known one at the far end of Nova Scotia, in the forests near Sydney; another in the mountains of Mingrelia, not far from Koutais; a third in the utterly wild region situated in the northeast of Greece, near the Turkish border; I could mention many of them in less extraordinary countries but just as uninhabited and spiritually as remote from British society. It is enough to repeat that this taste for exile and self-deprivation is so strongly pronounced in this race of powerful personalities that it even affects the women: Lady Esther Stanhope and Zanthe[47] have not been the only ones to prefer either the Arabian deserts or Damascus to the steady frequentation of drawing rooms. Norton was therefore fully living up to his British characteristics when, seeing Akrivie sitting in a large armchair on deck, alone for a moment, he sat down by her and said gravely:

"Mademoiselle, I love you, and I would like to know from you whether I can hope that you will share this feeling."

Akrivie looked at him with an enchanting sweetness, and answered.

"Yes, Sir, certainly, I love you very much."

Norton was strongly suspicious of the surprising compliance of this declaration which, made so promptly and without the slightest embarrassment, did not seem at all to convey what he wished. With some urgency he insisted:

"I am infinitely grateful, Mademoiselle; I would however like to know if you love me enough to allow me to ask for your hand."

And as, with a smile, Akrivie was about to extend her hand, he clearly saw that she had understood nothing, and he added:

"I mean to ask you to become my wife.

— No!" Akrivie answered abruptly, and then she blushed deeply, tears came to her eyes, she rose and went

down to her cabin. Norton was left on his feet, facing the wreck of his house of cards.

The blow was severe, and the captain had not expected it. But it is at times of crisis that great characters prove themselves. He gravely confronted the situation.

"If she loved me, he said to himself, she would betray what I love in her, that is the daughter of antiquity and the simple life, unfamiliar with the storms of the heart. Akrivie must love only her parents, her husband, and her children; beyond these, the world should not exist for her. I have let myself stray into the cursed paths of my modern upbringing. Let us get back on the true path. Far from blunting my resolution, the test that I have just failed must sharpen it only the more, for I can see how pure and unalloyed the treasure is that I have discovered. I do not intend to seek the turmoil

of an affection in the European fashion; what I am after are the elements of a special kind of life. My error would be irreparable if I were not to get back on the right track at once."

Noticing M. Phrangopoulo and M. de Moncade who were on deck having a lecture on how to aim a cannon, he walked to them and asked them for a moment of their time. He looked grave, and his two friends immediately matched their expressions to his.

"Gentlemen, he said, it is my intention to leave the navy within a very short time. Naxos agrees with me, and I will settle here. In all probability I shall take up some form or other of farming; in any case, I will reside here permanently. Since it is woeful for a man to be alone,[48] I wish to marry; a foreign-born wife would perhaps not easily accustom herself to my new country; I therefore prefer to marry a daughter of the country. If you do not object, I would be obliged to you if you would grant me the hand of Mademoiselle Akrivie, your daughter and goddaughter."

This short speech was delivered in the coolest of tones. M. de Moncade opened his eyes wide. M. Phrangopoulo drew

---

— 153 —

himself up in a dignified manner, and, contrary to what ordinarily took place, he did not let his friend speak, but himself answered the captain as follows:

"Sir, I am honored by your proposal, and I thank you for it on behalf of my family. But I must point out to you that my daughter has no dowry, and yet our birth imposes certain duties and a great deal of caution on us in the matter of alliances.[49] I do not doubt your merit and have no qualms whatsoever, believe me, as to your honor; but I know nothing of your worthy family, and I would be chagrined if there were in its past circumstances, such obstacles to your plan as could not be overcome with the best goodwill. In a word, Sir, we are gentlemen, and my daughter shall marry only a man of our rank."

Norton was not long in assenting to this statement. He was quite satisfied with the turn his negotiation was taking. His future marriage, if it was to take place, although desired by the most fervent love, was being handled with the strictness, the formality and the absence of any outward manifestation of feeling that are assuredly the major components of the proprieties and their triumph.

"I am prepared, Sir, he answered M. Phrangopoulo with suitable detachment, to provide you with the information you are entitled to ask about my family and myself; and if you would glance at a few documents and then deliberate between yourselves, I shall be happy to have your answer this very evening, for we are about to reach Naxos, which, as you can see, is in sight, and it seems to me fitting to know your ultimate decision."

That said, the captain briefly explained his social position, and documented it with an entry from the *Peerage and Baronetage of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland* ;[50] then he brought the *Navy List* , in which his name appeared between the designation of his rank and that of the ship he commanded, on which this conversation was taking

---

— 154 —

place. He had taken note of the fact that not a word had been said about his wealth; he tried to bring it up, but the others did not seem to pay much attention, and the two arbiters of his fate withdrew to deliberate. During that time, he paced the deck, his hands behind his back. He did not have to wait more than half an hour, after which, M. de Moncade came to tell him that Akrivie's hand had been granted, and that M. Phrangopoulo had gone down to the cabin to inform his daughter of the decision regarding her. A little more time went by; then M. de Moncade, who had gone to see how things stood, came back up and begged Norton to come and enjoy his good fortune. He had been accepted, delightful news that he received in a properly phlegmatic way.

When he joined Akrivie, he saw tears on her cheeks. He pressed her hand:

"You do not love me?

— It is not that, she said shaking her head; I would have preferred that you were a Hellene."

What followed need not be told. The wedding was set for a few months from then. Norton was to take this time to relinquish his command, resign his commission and come back to Naxos. These affairs were taken care of even sooner than he had hoped.

He had been married a week when he heard the noise of a lively argument between Mme Triantaphyllon and Akrivie. The latter maintained to her sister-in-law that the English were as good sailors as the Hellenes, and since she lacked arguments to prove her case, she repeated stubbornly: "I'm English, I am!" and put infinite pride in these words.

"Dear daughter of Priam! Norton said to himself. She's beginning to understand that she has a husband."

Akrivie learned her new language very quickly; she learned still other things, read a little, but paid little mind to all of that. Her husband took her on a trip to England; she was very well received, and with all the honors due a

— 155 —

beautiful oddity. There even happened to her in a Yorkshire castle where she was a guest a sort of adventure likely to make her aware of her full merit. An exquisite young man confessed to her the true truth about himself; he spent his nights crying over the sad fate of a superior woman whom a barbarous and blind destiny had united with a man incapable of understanding her. It is not indeed certain that Akrivie understood Norton very well, but it is unquestionable that she understood even less the charming young man; and she was so bored in England and so visibly so, that Henry, who was not having a good time himself, brought her straight back to Naxos.

Today she has two lovely children who play amongst orange trees; she does not lose sight of them, and holds as no less certain than the Gospel the absolute superiority of her husband over the rest of Christendom.[51]

Patissia, August 1867.

— 157 —

Adélaïde

Mme de Hautcastel[1] arranged her pretty head comfortably on the back of her armchair; the room fell silent and the Baron began to speak:[2]

The very year Frederick Rothbanner[3] left the military academy and joined the light horse cavalry,[4] Elisabeth Hermannsburg[5] singled him out. It was quite theatrical. Nothing had prepared their world for anything that outrageous and at the outset there was a great clamor. Fat Maelstrom, for years a declared suitor of the Countess, and above all Bernstein, whose follies on her behalf were well known, follies that she had undeniably encouraged, raged and fumed and did not lack sympathizers. The Grand Duke himself condescended to be touched by the general indignation and addressed the culprit an epigram of such sharpness that it should have transfixed her; but she answered His Royal Highness tartly, though under the cloak of such respect that the laughers came over to her side. In short, what had happened remained unchanged and no one was able to do anything about it. At the end of six months everyone, except the two unrequited and now supplanted suitors, had got used to it, and no more was heard of it.

However, in appearance at least, nothing could have been more absurd. Elisabeth was thirty-five years old and at the peak of her radiant beauty, with a reputation for wit that grew every day and was impossible to exaggerate. On his side, Rothbanner, to justify his good fortune, had only his twenty-two years, his handsome figure, and nothing yet

— 158 —

of that intrinsic worth that has since been recognized as his; but at the time that pearl was hidden in its shell. To bring it off had required a depth of reflection and an astute selfishness, precious talents of the Countess, the most accomplished of creatures in all things and especially in that wisdom of a child of the century which leads those who possess it to a well-deserved eternal damnation. Elisabeth Hermannsburg had reasoned that being at the peak of her glory she was also at the edge of the slope that would lead her down from it. She had ascended amidst flowers; she would soon have to descend amidst thorns. In order to know what usually befalls an adored woman, she had only to look around her and the garden of Armida,[6] over which she reigned, had shown her an abundance of green lawns inhabited by aging cicadas whose prophetic voices were understood by no one but herself. She examined the destiny of each of these sad changelings and she felt it possible to accept that the cause of their misfortune was to be found in the carelessness with which each one had linked her happiness to a man who controlled it, and, who, therefore, could destroy it as soon as *his* heart advised him to desert her.

She said to herself: I shall make a man happy. I shall have a slave who will owe me everything — his first success, his first happiness, his first glory, his first experience. He will adore me and if I adore him, I shall not tell him how I feel, and I shall reign over him; I shall lead him where it pleases me to go, and I shall know him totally, head and heart, good and evil, vices and virtues. I shall flatter those vices which will serve me, and I shall snuff out those virtues which might stand in my way. I shall have him all to myself, first, because he will be very young and will give himself unreservedly; and I shall take advantage of this moment to knead and reknead him in such a way that, should he ever consider rebelling, he will have neither sinews nor muscles left to serve his intention. In that way I shall realize

— 159 —

one of the most beautiful of romantic fictions. I shall have created one of those hypothetical loves which last forever, and, to my last breath, if I so choose, I shall be served, I shall be loved, at any rate, the world will believe that I am, which is the main thing; finally, assuming that this is a chain likely to grow heavy, I and not he, my will and not his, shall decide when to break it. When she saw Rothbanner for the first time, she was sufficiently taken by him to brand him in her mind with the mark of her possession. She took just enough time to convince herself that he was tenderhearted and everything went as she had decided. It goes without saying that Rothbanner judged himself the happier as he did not doubt that he had compromised her reputation and that he had been given everything one had to give.

Things went along very well in this way for five years and everyone can bear witness to the fact that the lover did not betray a single moment of distraction, a single sign of boredom. Mme d'Hermannsburg had just turned forty and things were going splendidly, when her husband, as absurdly and unseasonably as everything else he had done in his life, decided to die, which was an omen of catastrophe, for mysteries were uncovered which no one would ever have ventured to suspect.

After a year of mourning, the Countess who, for about eighteen months, had often appeared preoccupied and of a slightly forced gaiety, pressed Rothbanner to acknowledge what she had done for him by putting an end to the notorious irregularity of their situation with a marriage. Rothbanner was surprised and, rather ineptly, one must say, displaying more good faith than love, let it be seen. Moreover, there was ground for astonishment; the Countess, a free spirit by nature, had never bothered much about matters beneath her. Her rank in the world, her self-control, and, in a word, her audacity had always commanded and obtained respect, and it

— 160 —

was understood that one could and had to forgive her many things. To the lady's whim, Rothbanner objected that his delicacy would absolutely not permit him to satisfy the desire she had expressed; he was poor and he would appear to have taken advantage of her influence for less than honorable motives; it would be the more believable for the fact that in the final analysis, a very large difference of age existed between him and the Countess, and matches contracted despite such obstacles are always matter for gossip. Moreover, he was a Catholic, the Countess a Protestant and his own family, always ready on the quiet to overlook many things, would certainly take exception and very loudly at that to a sort of public disowning of hereditary principles.[7] Finally, and that was his ultimate argument, he repeated endlessly that he did not see why a happiness so long, so lasting, so deprived of clouds, should be disturbed, manifestly disturbed, by the mania for making good better.

All this was well stated, well argued; however, the Countess remained firm in her intentions and deigning to take seriously only one of the objections, she went out one morning, without saying a word to Frederick, and met with the Bishop of B***. She announced to the prelate her desire to convert. The prelate, who saw no harm in it, was of course touched, delighted. The neophyte could put herself into precisely the frame of mind that she thought necessary; she was always a step ahead of the lessons, dazzled all the priests that she was given as masters by the variety and the orthodoxy of her theological knowledge, and, lo and behold, one Sunday, the third after Easter I believe, in the Cathedral of B***, to the profound stupefaction of the public, she quietly forswore her faith. The next day she renewed her attack on Rothbanner and commanded him to marry her.

The conversation between the two parties was affectionate at first and quite tender; then it became a bit dry and when the Countess was quite convinced that victory wouldn't

— 161 —

come of its own, she made up her mind to put the sword to her adversary's throat.

"So, quite clearly, she said to him, looking at him with a sharp and resolute expression he had not seen in her eyes before, so you do not consent.

— I cannot.

— You cannot?

— I told you why.

— Well, give me your reasons again!"

And not without a hint of anger, he ran through everything he had already repeated twenty times.

"Those are your reasons?

— As you can see.

— Why don't you give me the only true one?

— What do you mean by that?

— I am asking you why you are not telling me frankly the serious motive that prevents you from giving in to me.

— I do not know what you mean by this.

— I mean your liaison with my daughter.

— Oh! Madame!

— With my daughter! I repeat; here we are, at last, in total good faith, and that is the way we are going to have it out."

One might imagine the posture of two fighters, for lovers they unquestionably were not at that moment: Elisabeth, pale with that warrior's pallor that comes solely from the rage to triumph; Frederick, pale, but with the pallor of an animal caught in a trap from which he sees little chance to escape.

"Monsieur, the Countess said, I will not reproach you for anything; calm down, have no fear. It is not for me to judge you. I lost that right the moment that I forsook all dignity. It is I who introduced you into this household, who saw that you ruled over it, who by heaping total power on you gave you total license. It is natural that you would

---

have abused the situation to a criminal extent. Oh! do not protest! As things stand now, if I can and must spare you my reproaches, it is at least natural that you consent to face the truth. If it is not pleasant, admit that in this regard I am not the one to blame. You came upon a very young child, one incapable of understanding, knowing, foreseeing anything. . . .But let us put the past aside and think of the future. We have created such a scandal in the eyes of society that I confess my unwillingness to add to it. Perhaps you would condescend to marry Mademoiselle d'Hermannsburg if I urged you; but our relationship has been so public that I abhor the very thought of such a monstrosity. Such arrangements are common enough, I am not unaware; but they run counter to my temperament and I see only one thing to do: to regularize our mutual position first; to send Mademoiselle d'Hermannsburg away for a while and marry her off. In this way it is possible to set things straight, and I cannot imagine that it could enter your mind to refuse the only reparation in your power."

In what Elisabeth had just said—and which held together rather well—some part was true, some doubtful, and some false; and that is what Adélaïde Hermannsburg's sudden entrance into her mother's boudoir put in such a brilliant light. Adélaïde had just reached her eighteenth birthday. She was blonde, extremely so, dazzlingly fair, of regal stature, admirable arms, nothing of the young girl about her, much of the empress, with, at the very least, her mother's wit, and her boldness and implacable haughtiness, and with an advantage that cannot be disregarded: the perfectly clear sense that she had the upper hand as the one who was loved vis-à-vis the one who was no longer and as a beauty in the bud vis-à-vis a rose more than half blown. As to any notion whatsoever of filial or maternal feelings, not a shadow.

One must admit that between these two Olympians, poor Frederick Rothbanner, so sweet, so polite, always so af-

---

fectionate, so witty when nothing was at stake, looked rather pitiful. I like to imagine him, his elbow on the mantlepiece, in his always elegant and correct attitude, but without the slightest word to say.

Elisabeth was somewhat surprised by her daugher's entrance, and, in her hesitation, she lost the

advantage of the attack. Moreover, she did not know what the young lady had in mind.

"Madame, Mlle d'Hermannsburg said in a cool and detached tone, I beg your forgiveness for entering in this manner; but since I assume that the gentleman has already spoken to you, you will understand that the question concerns me and that I have reason to take care of my own affairs. For the last fortnight, M. de Rothbanner has been telling me of his intention to ask you for my hand; I have consented, but every morning and evening he alleges one reason or another for having done nothing yet. I want to end this situation, and if the gentleman has made known to you our intentions, I insist upon knowing it. If he hasn't said anything, I demand that he explain himself at last.

— Mademoiselle, answered the Countess, you will not marry M. de Rothbanner.

— Why, Madame?

— Because M. de Rothbanner belongs to me and is marrying me.

— Answer, Frederick," Adélaïde said, turning haughtily toward the young man. The latter found himself facing two pairs of eyes that were targeted on him, and one could not swear that he was at ease. He was trying to condense something conciliatory into one sentence that would not cause an explosion, when the Countess spoke out.

"Dear me. I do not understand this discussion very clearly, and it would be a ridiculous one, you must admit, if your lack of experience did not somewhat excuse it. Go back to your room and think of other things.

— 164 —

— Madame," Adélaïde pursued violently, crossing her arms on her breast and alternately glancing stormily at her mother and Frederick, "since I need not mince my words, I demand what is mine; and you, speak up! she said stamping her foot. You well know what you have to say!

— And I even more! Elisabeth exclaimed. See here, enough of this and no melodrama! I abhor scenes and vulgarity. You two can rest assured that I will not let myself be trampled by either of you, but I will, perhaps, trample you both. You, Mlle d'Hermannsburg, you are not of age, and I shall put you in a convent, stating the reasons; you, M. de Rothbanner, I shall leave you to deal with public opinion which, perhaps, will ill understand that in a household, my household, you have permitted yourself such license. I am not giving you an hour to choose; I am giving you one minute. Either me, or what I have just told you! Answer!"

Adélaïde uttered the words that follow between clenched teeth but quite distinctly, and at the same time, she was looking the young man in the face: "The convent, the most complete dishonor, your forsaking me, anything! But do not let this woman triumph!"

At the end of the minute the Countess returned:

"Well?" she murmured.

I am not saying that Frederick's part here is pretty; but fate does not always give the choice one would want in casting the comedy of life. To choose! In this case not easy, and I would give one chance in a hundred to the cleverest; it was clear that by obeying Adélaïde, Frederick won neither the young lady's person, nor any of the advantages of love; but by disobeying the Countess, he was dishonored forever, lost to society, without question expelled from the army, forced to expatriate himself; and he did not have a farthing, which singularly aggravated his situation, keep this well in mind. Thus, though his perplexity might well be little heroic, it is nonetheless quite conceivable.

— 165 —

Naturally, having no idea in the world which choice to make, he chose to be out of countenance, and his nose reddened slightly, his eyes moistened and he pulled his handkerchief from his pocket to blow his nose.[8] These different symptoms produced quite opposite effects on the two women. Adélaïde smiled disdainfully and left the room; the Countess placed herself in front of Frederick and grasped his hand.

"In exchange, she said, I forgive everything, forget everything, I take back none of the blind devotion that for so many years I have shown you and that you know so well! I am neither a fool nor a bourgeoise. Indeed, Frederick, at my age a woman redeems herself only through kindness and indulgence. You were young . . . you were led astray as much as you led astray . . . everything will be forgotten."

She spoke in this fashion for half an hour in a tone of the most motherly affection. Any other kind of tenderness would not have befitted the moment, and she understood this in the way she understood everything. Don't you admire also with what consummate art she had from the first

assumed the game won and the city conquered? Frederick certainly thought of answering, but he wasted time pondering the best way of trying out his dissent and at the end of a quarter of an hour he found himself so neatly entwined, packaged, wrapped up, nailed in his box that . . . he had moments of spasm and convulsion, mind you; but to no avail. Elisabeth, that angel, understood everything, excused everything, she was no longer the provoked lover, not even the future spouse undemanding about her theoretical rights, she was an Ariadne who has made it up with Theseus through the intermediary of Bacchus,[9] she was a sister of Charity! Finally, to make a long story short: Mlle d'Hermannsburg, who had, it is well known, adored her father, left to spend three months with one of her aunts at the time of her mother's marriage with Rothbanner; but since it was equally well known that she adored her mother as much as her father, the three months

were hardly over than she was stirring heaven and earth in order to rejoin her, which, considering the resistance thrown up against her wish, signaled the opening of a strategic campaign in comparison to which the most skillful maneuvers of generals ancient and modern could only pale.

The Countess was telling all her close friends:

"My daughter is a wonder of devotion and abnegation! That she might not much care for her stepfather, I could not resent and I begrudge it the less that in all the letters she writes me, she is perfectly correct and proper on this point; but it is not difficult for me to see through her mind. Adélaïde is too pure and too innocent to know how to dissimulate. If she presses so much to be with me again, do you know the thought that motivates her? She supposes that my young husband will not make me happy and she wants to be here to console and support me. She has made up this fiction in her little head and thus far she has not given it up; but this caprice will pass and I insist that Adélaïde remain with her aunt Therese until the time of her marriage. She is perfectly happy there; and you will understand that the very extent to which passion enters her tenderness forces me to a sacrifice, assuredly the greatest that I can make! that of separating myself for a while from a child so dear and who until now has never left me."

On her side, Adélaïde was telling whoever wanted to listen: "My mother will undoubtedly be unhappy with M. de Rothbanner; she shouldn't have married again; but it is not I, her daughter, who will blame her; I can only look on, and I see nothing but these perils! She is the best of mothers! Whatever she may do out of an exaggerated sense of affection, I know that I am necessary to her. I will sacrifice myself for her sake! I want only her! I love only her! I will return to her side and will never marry!"

She set about keeping her word. Perhaps you remember that Philippe de Rubeck was introduced to her: sixty

thousand florins[10] in revenues from landed property, noble name, thirty-five years, pretty face! She rejected him. In his wake two or three other suitors who were hardly less desirable were brought before her. They were turned down in the same way. The Grand Duchess interfered and summoned Adélaïde for a sermon. The latter wept excessively, asked for her mother, wanted her mother, had a fit of hysterics, so much so that our excellent sovereign, utterly hoodwinked, sided completely with Adélaïde and said once or twice that Madame de Rothbanner was wrong.

The latter began to feel some embarrassment, but she soon fell into an even worse perplexity. She had the rather judicious habit of keeping track of everything. Principles are admirable things; unfortunately, in the state of imperfection in which human nature moves about, they have to be applied in ways that are seldom irreproachable. Elisabeth was given to carrying out searches of her husband's room when he was out. One fine day she stumbled upon a note from Adélaïde, and, although the text was insignificant or, actually, incomprehensible, it could be inferred that this note had older brothers and would certainly have younger ones in indefinable quantity. This discovery having led Mme de Rothbanner to scrutinize Frederick's conduct more closely, she could not be quite sure whether, using the pretext of military business, he kept leaving town, but she had grounds for suspecting it. The fact is that the gentleman's horses were overworked. So that pressed from all sides, criticized by the Grand Duchess, intent above all else upon preserving her reputation as a peerless mother, the key to the tactic that she was following, seeing herself flanked by the enemy, what am I saying! suspecting that enemy of having the most effective intelligence within her fortress, she set about shifting the battlefront, wrote to Adélaïde that her supplications had won her over, went herself to fetch her at Aunt Therese's and brought her back triumphantly. It is nonetheless true,

— 168 —

that though she had won the first round, she had just lost the second, and she had too much good sense to attempt to hide it from herself. She showed no rancor, neither in public nor in private.

But I realize that having given you a long enough look at the succession of events, I have not given you a long enough look at Adélaïde herself. It is, however, essential to acquaint you fully with this remarkable creature for you to assess correctly, as you might want to, both what I have just had the honor to set forth for you, and what is going to happen. Very beautiful, very intelligent and with an adventuresome and totally unscrupulous intelligence, outrageously spoiled by her imbecile father, for whom she had the utmost contempt, not only completely abandoned, but ignored by her mother, who was absorbed by occupations of all kinds, Adélaïde had had a unique guide in her life: her English governess, Miss Dickson, very sentimental, quite addicted to hazy philosophy, fond of sherry, not averse to grog, and secretly saturating her mind with French novels capable of making ruffians blush and that she made sure to pass along to her ward.

From the age of fourteen, Adélaïde had known what M. de Rothbanner was doing in the house and since Miss Dickson did not spare her comments on this point, what her young mind had not yet been able to conceive was easily spun out and conveyed in its most authentic reality thanks to the superior knowledge of the English Miss. Let us imagine for a moment that Doctor Gall[11] had been able to examine Mlle d'Hermannsburg's charming head; I have no doubt that he would have detected the organ of combativity developed to a supreme degree and, indeed, that a love of contest by far dominated all of Adélaïde's other penchants; and during the entire life of our heroine, these penchants having, with the help of God, turned into passions, in time her love of battle predominated over all other kinds of love. Toward her sixteenth year she fancied that it would be the most beau-

— 169 —

tiful thing in the world to oppose her mother's feelings and to divert to her own side and to her sole advantage things that must have had great value since they were seemingly so highly prized. Beyond the desirability and glory of conquest per se, beyond the regret that her sixteen years had not yet drawn attention to her, beyond the fact that that which belongs to others is necessarily more to be coveted than that which belongs to no one, as her mother was ultimately the most powerful being she was aware of, she could see nothing so chivalrous, so brave, so bold, so worthy of admiration as opposing her mother and, if possible, vanquishing and despoiling her. Filled with such a generous plan, she did not waste a minute in pursuing its realization and, suddenly, from one day to the next, Frederick Rothbanner saw himself the object of the passionate attentions and soon of the burning declarations of this little monster, the prettiest, the wittiest, the most seductive of the daughters of the Residence.

At first, he was prodigiously astonished. He refused to believe it. He tried to flee from the enchantress, but that was difficult since he had to spend his life in the house. Perhaps he ought to have warned the Countess; but he was so gentle, so polite, so little given to anything resembling rashness that in any case he would have found it hard to undertake a step whose consequences terrified him. Terrified, he was soon to be even more so when endearments, meaningful glances gave way to heartrending scenes and wild threats of suicide. One evening, the Countess, who had been forced to remain late at court owing to a reception for a princely traveler, came back unsuspecting to find that the greatest of calamities had been consummated. Frederick had behaved ignominiously, his despair knew no limits, he blamed himself unsparingly, he understood very well, too well, that defying all the patriarchs of the Old Testament and especially the most proper of all[12] to resist such a temptation was no excuse; the fact is that he was wrong. But if he was wrong, there was no way to undo it

— 170 —

and, the sin committed, remorse, instead of smothering love, gave force to what had hardly been a whim, so much so that he became madly smitten with this angel of darkness whose claw held his heart.

As for Adélaïde, she too fell madly in love with him. You understand that I have no intention of making a plea for this little Satan; but neither should one be unjust. Appallingly raised, totally abandoned from her earliest infancy, never having found in her mother anything but the most glacial indifference, and beginning to realize that to the extent that her beauty was growing, she was going to elicit hatred from her, gifted as I mentioned, with a passion for fighting, a passion that is per se admirable and that is not the mark of a common soul, everything she had done so far was

blameworthy, but none of it was vulgar. If it had been possible to give her Frederick as she wished, she would certainly have started to love him in earnest; and I see no reason to think that she could not have turned into an excellent and worthy wife, if only she had been even a little separated from the deplorable milieu in which she had lived till then. I will add, however, that it would have taken the guidance of a wise, firm, and high-minded husband to bring such a vehement nature back to the fold, and I do not know anyone to whom I would have recommended undertaking such instruction.

This necessary observation could, I am only too aware, reduce all my theory to nothing. Rothbanner, as we know, is assuredly what is called a distinguished man; those specialists, the military, will tell you that he is responsible for a remarkable improvement in the construction of the howitzer breech;[13] he has, and rightly so, the reputation of being a good administrator; he is well liked in society where he exhibits only the best manners and a tone of universal benevolence. But with all that, he makes me think of a Paris hat: it is delightful, cleverly trimmed, has an exquisite look about it, costs a great deal, and when one looks into it, it isn't worth

---

— 171 —

a tuppence of good coin. People like Rothbanner resemble a velocipede:[14] they only go on the pavement. Beyond the pavement, the damned things fall. Personally, I prefer people who are ill at ease on the pavement, but who can walk very well in the woods.

Be that as it may, here is Adélaïde back where she wanted to be and settled at the heart of her conquest. Elisabeth had not even two hours to spare to organize the barricades. As soon as the two women had embraced in front of the entire misty-eyed household, Adélaïde followed her mother into her bedroom, bolted the door, sat down and spoke as follows:

"Madame, since it pleased you to ruin my life, you will not find it extraordinary that I will do the same for you. You must be aware that it is not an even match between us!

— You are the stronger?

— Assuredly, and I have no intention of giving you any quarter.

— I expected that and that is why I give in to you entirely. M. de Rothbanner is here and I will have him fetched."

The bolt was opened, Elisabeth range, asked for her husband, the latter appeared. She went out and left him alone with Adélaïde. Assuming a dignified and cold manner, M. de Rothbanner gave back to the young lady the letters he had received from her since her stay with her Aunt Therese and plunged into the truest, the most irrefutable reflections on the present and the future. He showed without difficulty that his gentleman's conscience was committed to ending a situation that was unjustifiable in every respect; that he would consider himself the worst of scoundrels if he were weak enough to deviate from so obvious, so natural, so necessary a duty; he painted vividly and with sensitivity the gratitude that he, a penniless younger son, was and should be filled with for a woman who had made his fortune; he condemned himself for what had taken place and begged Adélaïde to get married.

— 172 —

He spoke very well, very well indeed! And when he had finished he rose and, seeing that Adélaïde was staring in front of her and not answering a word, he went out. She had lost the third round.

Upon my word! barely a week had gone by before Christian Grunewald had become her suitor. You know, that young Christian, my cousin, who owns such a handsome horse out of the late King of Wurtemberg's stud farm. You do not remember? . . . Well, never mind; what is sure is that he started, as I was saying, to court her, and was quite welcomed by her. All kinds of people began to talk about it. At Mme de Stein's it was even said that the wedding presents had been ordered from Paris. If discreetly questioned, Mme de Rothbanner did not exactly answer, but hinted that what they were saying was not impossible. What society could see in the clearest of fashions is that Elisabeth's health, which had been fairly fragile for some time, was restored from one moment to the next, and the look of perfect bliss on her face was such as to encourage all women of a certain age to marry lads. It was in the thick of this intrigue, which occupied the whole of society, that the Minister of War gave his annual grand ball.

A few people soon noticed that Rothbanner, in his full dress aide-de-camp's uniform, which by the way became him marvelously, did not leave the embrasure of a door where he was half hidden by a curtain. He was as pale as death. Toward one o'clock in the morning, Adélaïde, beautiful enough to turn everyone's head, dazzlingly gay, having sown left and right a thousand charming *mots* which everyone repeated, had not for a minute left the arm of Christian, who was wild, delirious with

happiness (happiness oozed from every pore of this good fellow, the camelia he wore in his buttonhole seemed to breathe it!). As a waltz had just ended, the happy couple strolling about here and there, gathering smiles from everyone, arrived at the door where Rothbanner stood lean-

— 173 —

ing against the paneling. Adélaïde stopped in front of this man, who turned from pale to livid. She examined him an instant without speaking, then in a penetrating voice, she said while looking deep into his eyes in a singular fashion:

"'Do you want me to dismiss him?

— Yes," Frederick answered.

Bless me! It's not much of a thing, a *yes* , nor is a *no* , and it takes hardly any time to utter such monosyllables. But if you will imagine a little Frederick's pliable and weak nature, and the tortures it had cost him to rise to so clear and so absolute a voicing of a desire, you will be of the opinion that no human word ever contained more passion than that *yes* .

It had barely been pronounced when, turning toward her partner and disengaging her arm from his, Mlle d'Hermannsburg exclaimed:

"Heavens, my dear Christian! How tiresome you are! For a month now, if I count correctly, evening after evening you repeat to me the same thing! Do you know the consequence of this? It is, and I have heard it tonight by chance, that people say I am marrying you! Nonsense! Be kind enough to leave me alone in the future, and until these inept rumors have completely stopped, I forbid you to speak to me. M. de Rothbanner, give me your arm, if you please."

Georges de Zevort happened to be there, and along with a score of others, he heard these words as distinctly as I tell them to you; he barely had the time to stretch out his arms to catch poor Christian, who fell as though thunderstruck. He was given a glass of water and carried home; he was taken ill, by I don't know what, and some even claim that he contracted an incurable nervous tic. When Mme de Rothbanner heard the news, she immediately inquired what had become of her daughter. No one knew. However, she had been seen taking Frederick's arm. They were no longer at the ball, either of them; what with the time to verify it, to call her carriage, to get through an interminable line, all that added

— 174 —

up, and at least two hours passed before an exasperated Elisabeth was able to return home. It was impossible for her to know where her husband was, where her daughter was; all the doors were locked except hers, and she was not a woman to take her servants into her confidence. Now, I will let you picture her alone in her bedroom during that night. Imagine for a moment the predicament of that soul ruled by domination, power, pride. . . .So much hatred, don't you think?

The next day a paradise of delight opened up for the two culprits. All their passions satisfied at the same time! Victory, vengeance, love, a game well played, all that made up Adélaïde's prize; Frederick's consisted of jealousy obliterated, atrocious suffering abolished, passion driven by resistance to the last degree of insanity but which now had nothing more to desire! We peaceable folk cannot easily imagine what can be, what must be, what are bound to be the transports and pleasures of such lunatics. However little physical laws apply to love as they apply to the rest of the things of this world, it is clear that the force of expansion is in proportion to the obstacles it blows up and that the most affectionate lass in Auguste Lafontaine's benign novels,[15] at the very moment when before a notary she marries the most candid and the most beloved Chancellery clerk, could not possibly love as an Adélaïde does! It remains to be seen if an Adélaïde's love would not cause even us to explode like a badly built steam engine. From morning to night, Frederick and Adélaïde were inseparable. They could be seen in the woods, fastened arm in arm. This singular girl had a taste for everything, a talent for everything. She read poetry as no one else, she sang as La Sontag[16] used to, gave music meanings no one had thought of. By these means, along with some others, she intoxicated Frederick, and together they picked periwinkles and germanders! They returned late for supper. They did not restrain themselves at all in front of Elisabeth, and everyone in town knew that dear Adélaïde had definitely got used to her step-

— 175 —

father; she displayed great friendship for him; people congratulated the fortunate Mme de Rothbanner who, as proud as an Indian chief lashed by his enemy to the torture stake,[17] received these

compliments with the sweetest of smiles.

At the end of a month, the scene changed; Frederick said to himself: I don't deserve to live!

Between you and me, I think that he was a badly built steam engine and not really capable of bearing the love of an Adélaïde. He began to grow somber. Perhaps he had said a few offending words to her ladyship his wife during the time of his felicity. He became as gentle as a girl. He found her an angelic victim and was thanked tearfully. Adélaïde responded very haughtily and unrestrainedly abused both of them. Hers was not a nature given to concessions. Seeing which, Frederick enunciated a few moral truths of great moment, which produced a violent quarrel in Adélaïde's room. One word leading to another, they grew heated, and that morning Frederick breakfasted en tête à tête with Elisabeth. However, during the day he wanted to go up to Mlle d'Hermannsburg's room to seek her approval of an entirely new course of conduct that had crossed his mind; but he learned that his stepdaughter had gone to spend the day at one of her friends. This game continued for four or five days. Frederick became disturbed and worried; and Elisabeth, forever stalling, always hoping, at any rate always struggling, but feeling cruelly enslaved by the fate she had engineered for herself, continued, by exercising a will of iron, to preserve the mantle of gentleness in which she had deemed it necessary to cloak herself.

On the fifth day, the mother of Adélaïde's friend asked Mme de Rothbanner if she would be agreeable to the inquiries that Count de Potz, Secretary of Legation, planned to conduct concerning her dear daughter. For five days, the young pair had been seeing each other at her house and appeared to be compatible. Elisabeth was not mistaken for one minute as to the meaning of this new interlude and she had both the

---

courage and the admirable prudence, first to express doubts as to her daughter's acquiescence to a marriage, second not to say a word to her husband. In this way, she absolved herself ahead of time in the eyes of the world of whatever eccentricities Adélaïde might plot; and she herself did not arouse in Frederick the jealousy that she had learned to know and with whose consequence she was already familiar. It is curious that passions of this latter order are more energetic and cruel, and those who experience them are weaker.

The exact counterpart to what had occurred with Christian happened with M. de Potz, namely that by means of the most delicate attentions Adélaïde set about turning his head, and did so thoroughly. Their match was talked about as a sure thing. Rothbanner heard of it and, for a few days, seemed disposed to help it along. He teased Adélaïde herself about it. However, the two women, who had an interest in following the motions of his heart, shortly saw him become somber, worried, absorbed; both of them, with emotions assuredly quite different, foresaw that his malady was coming to a crisis.

Indeed, one morning he entered Adélaïde's room, sat by her and took her hand. She offered no resistance and looked at him coldly.

"Do you understand me? he asked with sorrowful sweetness.

— Perfectly, she answered; you have the strength neither to want me nor to give me up.

— Is it possible for me to want you?

— Certainly not.

— Is it possible for me to give you up?

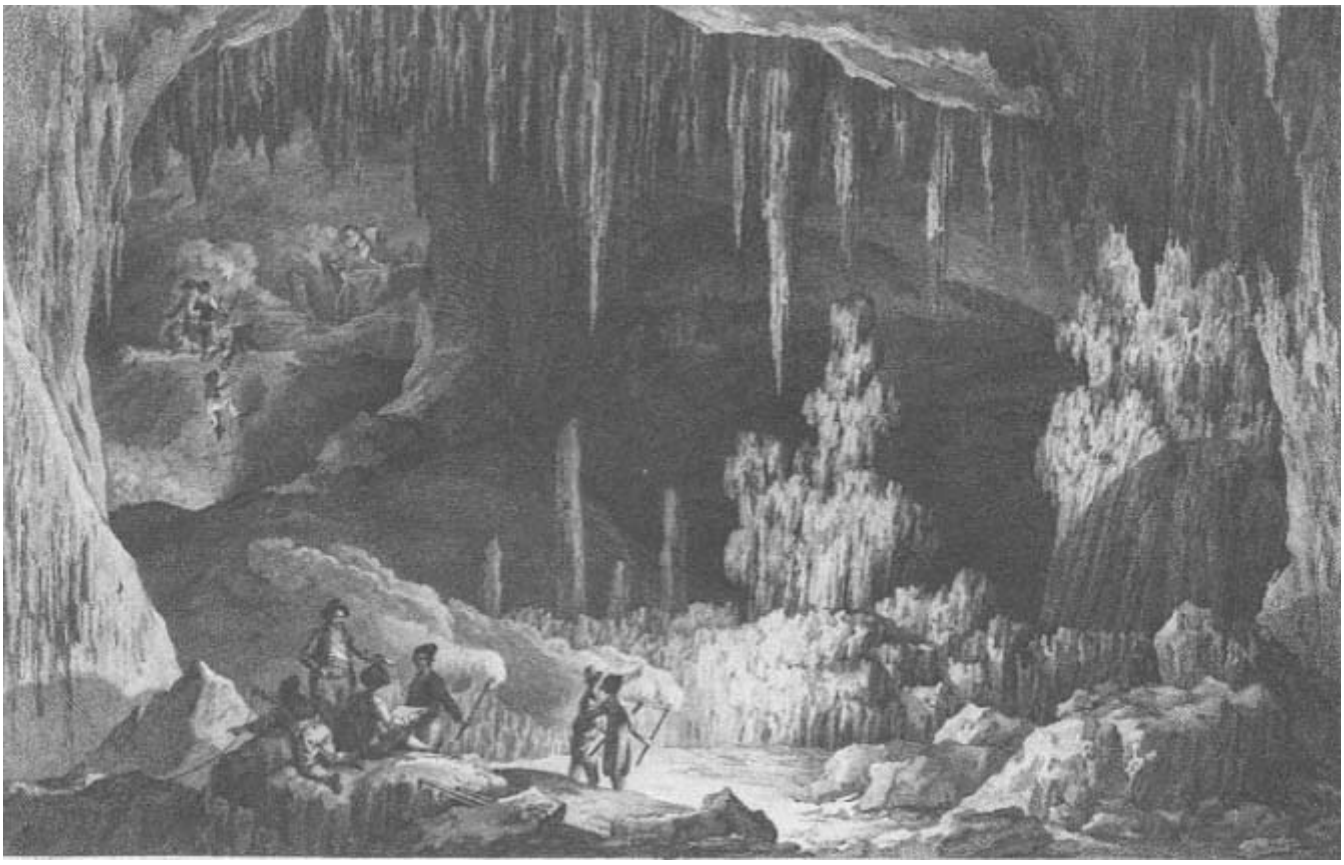
— I can give you up and have done so.

— You have?

— I am getting married.

— And you dare tell me. . . .

— First, you know that I do not find it hard to dare; as



Vue de l'Interieur de la Grotte d'Antiparos

La Séparation: The Separation

— 177 —

for you, you do not know how to want. I do know how. I am getting married, do you hear me, to a man I respect, a man I love and, really, as things are now, I do not know why I should not be frank, to a man dearer to me than you ever were. I have said it, and I won't take it back."

While saying this, she glared at Frederick, for knowing him as she did, she well knew what dagger she was plunging into the depth of his heart. That blow suddenly reestablished him in perfect equilibrium with himself. Once his jealousy was awakened, that domineering passion made him swim the deep waters of will that it aroused in him and that nothing else did. Furious, he seized Adélaïde's arm:

"Love him, don't love him, if you see him again, if you take one look at him, I will slap him and kill him!

— If he lets himself be killed; but in any case, he is worth more than you. Enough of this, M. de Rothbanner! What is it you want? Do you presume to force me to spend my entire existence in the odious situation that we have created for ourselves, you and I? Does the love I have felt for you grant you this unheard-of prerogative of condemning me to eternal unhappiness and isolation? Is that what you call love?

— I will explain nothing, justify nothing. . . .Look, Adélaïde, I was wrong, I love you, I love only you, I cannot, I will not lose you! Set whatever terms you wish, I will subscribe to them, I swear that I will abide by them! . . .

— You will abide by nothing! I do not want to deceive you, I lied to you, I do not love that man, I love only you, will love only you, as long as I breathe, as long as I live, there will be no one else in the world for me! But I despise you, do you hear, as much as I love you! You will betray me, abandon me, sell me to that woman whom you loath as much as I do and all that for neither a good nor a virtue . . . of which you have neither! But out of shameful fear of a few phrases of which you don't believe the first word! You have to know, however, and I will have the sad and poignant joy to tell you

---

— 178 —

so once in my life: you have ruined me and you have made me into what I know full well I am, not because you took me, since it is I who took you, but because you did not know how to keep me, and you are going to take me again and you will reject me again and you will always take me and you will continually reject me and all that in order to be honest in your own eyes, and you are not inept enough ever to be able to believe that you have become so!

— I swear to you!

— Do not swear anything, or swear anything you want. Really, Frederick, you are nothing but a coward, but coward though you are, I love you! I surrender and will always surrender!"

Your guess is correct: the unfortunate girl saw the situation only too clearly and spoke only too truthfully. That scene, that reconciliation, was followed by a dozen scenes taking the opposite course which led to a dozen antithetical ones. The house was a hell, although appearances were always maintained. On the outside, people indeed suspected something, and I would not have advised any bourgeois to lead that cozy sort of life; but since there was never any obvious outburst, proper society protected its own and the Grand Duke, who had been rather fond of the late Count d'Hermannsburg, would never tolerate the least criticism of his daughter. Mme de Rothbanner was sublime in her way; she gave in, for want of anything better to do, and never grew discouraged. Something rather bizarre and which would have surprised equally both women came out of the situation. As a result of struggling together and finding each other equally inexhaustible in resources, hatred, courage, they acquired that secret esteem for each other which energy inspires in energetic people, even the most antagonistic, and furthermore, they discovered one fine morning that they were completely united in the intense contempt they shared for this poor Rothbanner.

— 179 —

I knew them all at a time when the poor fellow dared not come to the table, even less to appear in front of his women at any time of the day; and, when he was not on duty and therefore forced to spend time out of the house, he managed to sleep the whole blessed day and to be up only while the two ladies were out visiting or were resting in their beds. He became a kind of a ghost, and that is the way the years of his youth were spent, as well as those of Adélaïde, who was absolutely disgusted by her idol.

If I were narrating a novel, I would at this point quietly have both of them die of exhaustion,

confusion and sorrow. There would be reason enough. But not at all. In real life things rarely end that way. After that devil of a Rothbanner had put forty years behind him and a respectable belly in front, and above all, after he had invented his famous howitzer breech, his jealousy in regard to Adélaïde had become quite manageable. As for love, this feeling had long ago disappeared for him as for her. In brief, Mme de Rothbanner could be considered victorious all along the line; she was the exclusive owner of a husband who, from then on, was neither better nor worse than another. I cannot guess by what spinster's whim Adélaïde wanted to marry at this point. They found a chamberlain for her; but before the end of a year, she dropped her husband and came back to live at her mother's. These women were so used to detest each other, to use the wit heaven had given them to sharpen their cutting words on each other and to torture Rothbanner by common agreement (a last and sole mark of attention they had not taken away from him) that they seemed to be inseparable. There are people who claim to be in love who are not so strongly bound together.

I had supper the other day with Colonel Rothbanner; the reason for it was that he passionately wants the Louis the Pious Cross.[18] I think that I can get it for him. That's what reminded me of all this business, and having nothing

— 180 —

better to offer, I have told it to you.

During the Baron's tale, the lovely Mme de Hautcastel had once or twice assumed a scandalized look from the depths of her armchair; then she let out a deep sigh and maneuvering her fire screen in her divine hand, she placed her little foot on the andiron, without saying a word. Georges de Hamann, looking at the clock, realized that it was time to drop in on Princess Ulrique-Marie and, after glancing at his cravat, he left discreetly.

As for M. de Hautcastel, he had been asleep most of the time; he rose with a visible effort, and in a single stroke drew the moral conclusion of what you have just read:

—That confounded Baron is really the worst gossip that I know! All this twaddle does not prevent Mme de Rothbanner from being a charming person, and she plays whist as no other woman ever did!

Rio de Janeiro, 15 December 1869.

— 181 —

The War with the Turcomans

My name is Goolam-Hossein. But as that was my grandfather's name and as, naturally, my parents, when speaking of him, always said "Aga," that is to say "My Lord," they called me Aga[1] only out of respect for the head of the family, whose name should not be pronounced in vain; and so it is my name, like the innumerable compatriots I have in the world who answer to this name of Aga for the same reason that their grandfathers were called like them, Ali, Hassan, Mohammed, or anything else. Thus I am Aga. With time and when fortune smiled on me, that is, when I had a tolerably clean coat and a few shahis[2] in my pocket, I thought it proper to give myself the title of "Beg."[3] Age Beg looks good. Unfortunately, I had so little luck that my title of Beg has been dropped on many occasions owing to the pitiful appearance of my outfit. In such a case I have become Baba Aga, Uncle Aga. I'm resigned to it. Since circumstances totally independent of my will, I confess, have permitted me to visit the Imaums' tomb in the holy city of Meshhed[4] and to partake of the mosque's soup as often as I could, it seemed at least natural to me to enhance myself with the title of Meshhedi, Meshhed pilgrim. That makes one look like a religious, grave, and poised man. Thus I have the good fortune to see myself generally known, sometimes by the name of Baba Meshhedi Aga, or by one I prefer, Meshhedi Aga Beg. But God disposes of all things as it pleases Him.

— 182 —

I was born in a small village of the Khamseh, a province that borders Aderbijân. My village lies at the foot of the mountains in a delightful small valley with many murmuring streams that babble joyfully as they run through growing grass and leap over polished pebbles. Their banks are almost overgrown with willow thickets whose foliage is so green and so alive that it is a pleasure to look upon it, and flocks of birds nest there and make such a stir and twittering as to put joy in your heart. There's

nothing more pleasant in the world than sitting under these cool shelters while smoking a good kalian rich in fragrant fumes. Much wheat was grown in our country; we also had rice fields and dwarf cotton whose delicate stems were carefully shaded against the summer heat by castor beans planted in alternate rows; their broad leaves served as umbrellas above the white flakes of their companions. A mustawfi,[5] Councillor of State in Teheran, a rich and respected man named Abdulhamid Khan, received the village revenue. He protected us carefully, so that we had nothing to fear, either from the Governor of Khamseh or from anyone else. We were perfectly happy.

As for me, I confess that work in the fields did not agree with me, and I preferred eating grapes, watermelons, melons, and apricots infinitely more than cultivating them. So I was barely fifteen when I had already embraced a profession that attracted me a good deal more than farming. I became a hunter. I felled partridges, hazel grouse, francolins, I tracked gazelles and roebucks in the mountains; now and then I killed a hare, but I did not like it much. Given this animal's bad habit of feeding on carrion, no one likes to eat it; and since selling it is difficult, to shoot it means wasted powder.[6] Little by little I expanded my forays quite far, going down into the Ghilan forest; from the sharpshooters of that country I learned never to miss, which gave me as it had them the confidence to ambush tigers and pan-

---

— 183 —

thers. They are great animals, and their skins sell well. I would therefore have been a man extremely satisfied with his lot, enjoying my profession and earning enough money, which naturally I told neither my father nor my mother, if, suddenly, I had not fallen in love, which ruined everything. God is master.

I had a young cousin of fourteen whose name was Leilah. I very much liked to be with her, and I was with her quite often. As we had a great deal to tell one another and did not like being interrupted, we had picked out a precious hiding place under the thickest spot in the willows lining the main brook, and we spent hours there unaware of the passing time. At first, I was very happy, but I thought of Leilah so very often that when I did not see her I felt impatient and worried and would run about thither and yon looking for her; and it is thus that I discovered a secret that plunged me into an abyss of grief; I realized that I was not the only one whom she was meeting.

She was so innocent, so gentle, so kind, so tender that I did not for a minute suspect her of unfaithfulness. I would have died at the very thought, yet I was very upset to find that others could take her time, amuse her, at least entertain her, and after wondering a great deal whether I should confide my pain to her, which humiliated me, and deciding that I should not complain, I told her everything.

"You see, daughter of my uncle, I cried one day with bitter tears, my life is waning and in a few days they will be taking me to the cemetery! You chat with Hassan, talk with kerim, laugh with Suleiman, and I am practically certain that you have had to rap Abdullah's knuckles! I know there's no harm in it and that they are all your cousins as I am and that you are incapable of forgetting the oath you made to me to love only me and that you do not want to hurt my feelings! Oh Leilah, my friend, my heart, my treasure, have pity on your slave, he is extremely unhappy!"

— 184 —

And saying these words, I cried twice as hard, I began to howl, flung down my cap, beat my head and rolled on the ground.

Leilah appeared to be quite moved by the spectacle of my despair. She threw herself on me, kissed my eyes and answered:

"Forgive me, light of my life, I was wrong, but I swear by everything that is most sacred, by Ali, by the Imaums, by the Prophet, by God, by your head, that I will not do it again, and the proof that I will keep my word is that you will immediately ask my father for my hand! I do not want any other master than you and I will be yours every day of my life!"

And she started to kiss me again more passionately than before. As for me, I became quite upset and worried. Surely I loved her, but I had never told her that I might have money, because I was afraid she would want it and would succeed in taking it away from me. To ask my uncle for her hand inevitably meant being forced to confess to my father, to my mother, to all my relatives, as well as to her, the existence of my little treasure. What would become of me then? I would be ruined, finished, assassinated! Then again, I intensely desired to marry Leilah, which would fill me with the greatest happiness imaginable in this world and in the next. Moreover, I would have nothing more to fear from the zealous attentions of Hassan, Kerim, Suleiman, and Abdullah, which were roasting me over a slow

fire. Still I did not yet feel like giving my money away and I saw myself in such a perplexity that my sobs redoubled, and I clasped Leilah in my arms, overwhelmed by an inexpressible anguish.

She thought that she was the sole cause of these transports and said to me:

"Dear soul, why are you so grief-stricken at the very moment when you know that you are going to possess me?"

— 185 —

As she said these words, her voice touched the depths of my heart with such sweetness that I began to lose my head and I replied:

"The problem is I am so poor that I don't even own the clothes on my back! I swear on your head that I was unable to pay for them, although surely they are not even worth five sahebkrans![7] So how on earth would I be able to pay my uncle the dowry he will expect of me?[8] If he would content himself with a promise! . . . Do you believe that it might be possible?

— Oh! impossible! quite impossible, Leilah replied, shaking her head. How do you expect my father to give away a daughter as pretty as I for nothing? You must be reasonable."

While saying this, she began to look at the water, and her hand idly picked a few tiny flowers winding through the grass along the bank; at the same time she pouted so winningly that I was beyond myself. However, I wisely answered:

"That is a very great misfortune! Alas! I don't have a penny to my name!

— Really?" she said, and she threw her arms around my neck looking at me in such a way and cocking her head to one side that, without knowing how, I lost my mind completely and whispered:

"I have thirty gold tomauns[9] buried just two paces from here."

And I pointed out a tree trunk at the foot of which I had buried my treasure.

She started to laugh while a cold sweat was running down my forehead. "Liar! she exclaimed, kissing me on the eyes. How little you love me! It's only by begging and praying that I could tear the truth out of you. Now go to my father and ask him for my hand. You will promise him seven tomauns, and you will give him five, swearing that you will bring him the two others later. He will never see them. As

— 186 —

for me, I wager that I will be able to worm two out of him which I will bring back to you and, in this way, I will have cost you only three tomauns. Don't you see how much I love you?"

I was enchanted by this conclusion and hurried to my uncle's. After two days of negotiations mixed with much pleading, many promises and tears on my part, I finally succeeded in marrying my beloved Leilah. She was so delightful, she was so perfectly artful in getting her way (later I understood how she was doing it and from where this irresistible power came), that, when a few days after the wedding Leilah had talked me into settling with her in Zanjan, the capital of the province, she contrived somehow to get a superb donkey out of her father, and to top it all she carried off with her a beautiful carpet without asking his permission. The truth is that she's a jewel among women.

We were barely settled in our new dwelling where, thanks to the twenty-five tomauns left to me, we began to lead a gay life because Leilah wanted some fun and I myself completely agreed with her, when who should arrive but Kerim, one of the cousins of whom I had been so jealous. At the very first I was somewhat tempted to be so again; but my wife made fun of me so thoroughly that even I ended laughing, and, besides, Kerim was such a good fellow! I struck up a close friendship with him and, to tell the truth, he deserved it, for I have never seen anyone so resolutely merry; he always had stories to tell that made us split our sides. We used to spend a good part of the night drinking raki[10] together, and he ended, at my invitation, living in the house.

Things went along very well in this way for three months. Then I became moody. There were things I did not like. What? I couldn't tell; but Leilah bored me and I started wondering why I had got so excited about her. One day while mending my cap, whose lining had come apart, I stumbled upon the reason. I was astonished to find there a tiny bundle

— 187 —

of silk, wool, and cotton threads of many colors entwined with a lock of hair that was exactly the color of my wife's. It was not difficult to understand the charm that kept me bewitched. I hastened to remove these evil things and when I put the cap back on my head, my thoughts had taken a quite

different turn; I couldn't have cared less about Leilah. But I bitterly regretted my thirty tomauns, of which there was hardly anything left, and that made me gloomy and morose. Leilah noticed it. She became even more flirtatious, which left me indifferent, as you would expect, since her charms no longer had power over me; then she turned sour. Kerim became involved, a quarrel followed. I don't really remember what I said or what my cousin answered, but drawing my gamma,[11] tried to give him a good cut across the body. He countered me and with his, which he had raised, he slashed my head, which started bleeding torrents. Leilah's frightful screams brought the neighbors and with them the police so that they were already apprehending the unfortunate Kerim to take him to jail when I cried out: "In God! For God! By God![12] Don't touch him! He's my cousin, he's my aunt's son! He's my friend and the light of my eyes, he's entitled to my blood!"

I loved Kerim very much, infinitely more than Leilah, and I would have been very sorry that misfortune might befall him for a petty incident that it was our right, I believe, to untangle together. I spoke with such eloquence that, although blood was streaming down my face, everyone finally calmed down: they left us alone, Kerim bandaged my wound, so did Leilah, we fell into each other's arms, I went to bed and slept.

The next day I was summoned by the ked khoda[13] or district magistrate who informed me that I had been put on the list of men destined to become soldiers. I really ought to have expected it or something of the sort. No one knew me in Zanjan, where I was a stranger; and I did not have

---

— 188 —

any protector. How could I, especially, have escaped springing that trap into which, of course, everybody had eagerly pushed me in order to exempt themselves or their relatives?[14] I tried screaming and protesting; but remaining unperturbed, the ked khoda had me tied to the felek.[15] I was thrown on my back; two ferashs,[16] grabbing the ends of the pole, kept my feet up in the air, two executioners looking ferocious, each brandishing a handful of rods, administered a shower of blows to the pole to which I was attached, because as I was falling I had slipped a sahebkran into the palm of each.

Nevertheless, from then on I understood quite clearly what I was to expect if I tried to oppose my fate much longer. At that point it occurred to me that I was penniless, that I was at my wit's end, that it was perhaps boring to march right, march left and to make these ridiculous movements that infantry soldiers are forced to execute, but that in the end there were perhaps also in that job compensations and perquisites still unknown to me. Finally, above all, I realized that I could not escape my destiny and that, since my destiny was to be a soldier, I had to resign myself and make the best of it.

When Leilah heard what was happening to me, she cried out frightfully, beat her face and her chest, and she possibly tore her hair. I comforted her the best I could and Kerim spared no pain doing the same. She finally let herself be persuaded, and seeing her in a calmer mood, I spoke to her as follows:

"Light of my life, may all the Prophets, the Imaums, the Saints, the Angels, and God himself be my witness that I can live only by your side and, if I did not have you, I swear on your head that I would be as though dead and even worse! In this sad situation your happiness has been my only concern and since I have to go away what is to become of you? The wisest thing for you to do is to consider yourself free again and to find a husband less unfortunate than I!

— 189 —

— Dear Aga, she replied, kissing me, whatever infinite love you feel for me I also feel in my heart for this dear and adored husband who is mine and, as a consequence, since women are naturally much more devoted than men to what they cherish, I am much more disposed than even you can be to sacrifice myself; I think, therefore, whatever the cost to me, that I will do better by giving you back your freedom. As for me, my fate is set: I shall stay here crying until not one single tear remains in my poor body, and then I shall expire!"

Upon these sad words, Leilah, Kerim and I began moaning in concert. You should have seen the three of us sitting on the rug facing one another with a blue baghali[17] jug of raki between us and our cups, swaying our heads and uttering heartrending cries interrupted by exclamations:

"Ya Ali! Ya Hussan! Ya Hossein![18] Oh, my eyes! Oh, my life! I am dead!" Then we would embrace one another and start sobbing again even louder. The truth is that Leilah and I adored each other, and never has the All Powerful God created nor will he ever be able to create a wife more devoted and more faithful. Ah! Yes! Ah! Yes! That is so, and I can't help crying even now when I think of it.

The next morning, my dear wife and I went early to the mollah,[19] and we had him draw up the divorce contract, then she went home after bidding me the tenderest of good-byes. As for me, I went straight to the bazaar, to the shop of an Armenian, a raki merchant, where I was sure to find Kerim. For the last three days, even in the midst of my troubles, I had had an idea that preoccupied me a good deal.

"Kerim, I said, I intend to report today to my sultan, that is to my captain. I was told that he was a fussy man who prides himself on the refinements. If I pay my respects to him in this torn and stained coat which I'm wearing, he will receive me unkindly, and this deplorable beginning may

have an unfortunate effect on my military future. Therefore, I beg you to lend me your new kulijeh[20] for this important occasion.

— My poor Aga, Kerim answered, I absolutely cannot grant your wish. I have a great occasion today. I'm getting married, and for the sake of my reputation among my friends I absolutely must wear new clothes. Besides, I very much treasure my kulijeh; it is of yellow cloth from the Hamadan mills, edged with a pretty silk braid from Candahar; it is from the hands of Baba Taher, the tailor who works for the greatest lords in the province, and he assured me himself that he has never made anything so perfect. I have therefore decided to pawn my kulijeh, because, having not a penny to my name today, by tomorrow I will have many debts; and, in view of this, you understand that I couldn't, even to please you, deprive myself of my sole resource.

— Then, I replied, giving in to the deepest despair (for, truly, this kulijeh obsessed me and I could think of nothing else), I am a lost creature, ruined, abandoned by the whole universe and without anyone to worry in the least about my troubles."

These cruel words moved my friend. He set out to reason with me; he comforted me in every way he could think of, continued to use his marriage, his well-known poverty, and yet a thousand other things as excuses, and, finally, seeing me in such desolation, he softened and uttered these reassuring words:

"If only I were sure that you would give my kulijeh back within an hour!

— On what would you like me to swear it, I answered fervently?

— You will give it back to me?

— Instantly! Before an hour! Just the time to show myself and come back! Upon your head! Upon my eyes! Upon Leilah's life! Upon my safety! May I roast like a cursed

dog for all eternity if you do not get your coat back before you have time to miss it!

— Come then."

He led me to his room and I saw the magnificent coat. It was yellow. It was superb. I was overjoyed; I quickly put it on. Kerim exclaimed that it was a coat the like of which one did not see, that the tailor was an admirable man, and that some day he surely would pay him out of gratitude.

"But, he added, it is not possible, without incurring dishonor, to wear such a coat with torn blue cotton trousers. Here! Take my new red silk shalwars."

I quickly put them on. I looked like a prince, and I rushed out of the house. I strutted about for two hours in all the bazaars. The women were eyeing me. I was beside myself with happiness. At this point I ran into two fellows also enlisted in the regiment. We went together to refresh ourselves at a Jew's tavern. They were leaving that very evening for Teheran to join their unit. I resolved to go with them, and after borrowing a few clothes from one of them, and the rest from the other, I carefully folded my magnificent attire, and, while the Jew's back was turned, we headed for the door, then the street, then the gate of the city, and laughing heartily at the nonsense we were bantering, we entered the desert and walked half the night.

Our journey was very gay, very happy, and I began to think that the life of a soldier suited me perfectly. One of my two companions, Rustam Beg, was a vekil, sergeant of a company. He asked me to serve under him, and I accepted eagerly.

"You see, brother, he said, imbeciles imagine that it is very wretched being a soldier. Do not fall into that error. The only unfortunate people in this world are the simpletons. You're not one of them, nor am I, nor is Khurshid there. Do you have a trade?

— I am a hunter.

— In Teheran that's no trade. Become a mason. Our friend Khurshid is a blacksmith; I am a wool carder. You will give me a quarter of your pay; the sultan will have half of it as your captain; from time to time you will give a little something to the naib, or lieutenant, who is not too sharp but not mean either; the colonel, naturally, takes what remains, and you will live like a king with what you will earn.

— Masons earn a great deal, then, in Teheran?

— They earn enough. But there are many more ways to make life pleasant for one's self, and I will teach them to you."

He taught me one on the way and it was very diverting. Since he had his vekil's commission with him, we represented ourselves in a village as tax collectors.[21] The peasants were completely fooled by us and after much palaver they gave us a little gift so that we might consent not to collect the tallage and to give them a two-week reprieve, which we agreed to willingly; and we left under a shower of blessings. After a few more pranks of the same kind, which all came off to our advantage, our amusement and our reputation, we finally made our entry into the capital, through the Shimran gate,[22] and one fine day we reported to our serhang,[23] Colonel Mehdi Khan.

We bowed deeply to that great personage just as he was crossing the courtyard of his house. The vekil, who already knew him, introduced us, Khourshid and me, and in very eloquent terms praised our bravery, our obedience, and our devotion to our chief. The colonel seemed enchanted with us and sent us to the barracks with a few friendly words. From then on I was incorporated into the second Khamseh regiment.

I must admit, however, that some aspects of military existence are no fun at all. It's nothing to lose one's pay, and, actually, since the viziers devour the generals, I confess that it seems natural to me that the latter devour the

colonels who, in turn, live off the backs of majors, who live off the captains, and the captains off their lieutenants and their soldiers. It's up to these last to shift for themselves and find their livelihood somewhere else, and thanks to God, no one forbids them to do so. But the problem is that there are European instructors and everyone knows that nothing can be more brutal and more inept than any one of these Frenguis.[24] They're always talking about honesty, integrity, and have the pretension to demand that the soldier's wage be regularly paid. This in itself would not be bad; but, in return, they would like to turn us into beasts of burden, which would be loathsome and, frankly, if they were to succeed in their plan, we would be in such pitiable condition that life wouldn't be worth living. For instance, they would like to force us to remain actually in the barracks, to sleep there every night, to go in and out exactly at the time indicated by their watches. So that we would become exactly like machines, and we wouldn't even be able to breathe except in cadence: which God did not intend. Then they would have all of us, indiscriminately, come onto the drill square under the summer's sun, under the winter's rain, to do what, to move our legs up and down, move our arms, turn our heads right or left. Vallah! Billah! Tallah! Not one of them is able to explain what on earth these absurdities are good for! As for me, I confess that when I see one of these people walk by, I move aside, because one never knows what fit of frenzy will seize them. Fortunately, in making them very brutal, the heavens made them equally stupid, so that generally one can get them to believe anything one wants. Glory to God, who gave Mussulmans this means of defense!

As for me, I immediately saw what the European instructors were like and I stayed as far away from them as possible. Since my friend the vekil had made sure to recommend me to the sultan, I never attended what is called drill, and my existence was quite bearable. Our regiment had come

to replace the one from Suleimanieh which had been sent to Shiraz; so that I belonged to a detachment occupying one of the posts in the bazaar. These European dogs, curse them! claimed that the post had to be relieved every day and the men sent back to the barracks. They couldn't invent enough things to torment the poor soldiers. Fortunately, the colonel was not about to be constantly annoyed and bothered, so that once we were in the guardhouse we would settle down, make ourselves comfortable, and take up residence there, not for twenty-four hours, but for two or three years sometimes, at any rate, for as long as the regiment was garrisoning the town.

Our post was pleasant enough. It was at the corner of two avenues in the bazaar. The building consisted of a room for the naib and of a large hall for the soldiers. There were no windows, only a

door that opened onto a wooden gallery along the street, the whole thing raised about three feet above the ground. All around our building a number of shops displayed their charms for our benefit. First there was a fruit merchant with his grapes, his melons, his watermelons stacked in pyramids or hanging in festoons above the customers' heads. In one corner of the counter was wedged a case of dried figs of which the worthy merchant always allowed us to partake when, in the evening, we went and talked with him about all kinds of interesting subjects. A little farther along lived a butcher, who sold us excellent mutton; but, for each quarter that we paid him, my guess is that there were four whose disappearance remained for him an unfathomable mystery. Each day he told us in despair about the pilfering of which he was victim, and since from time to time we brought him a thief who acknowledged his theft, gave back the stolen object, and ended being forgiven, he never was unfair enough to suspect us. I still remember with warmth a cookshop proprietor whose ovens exhaled odors worthy of paradise. He knew how to prepare kabobs in a way that was absolutely

— 195 —

inimitable. Each piece of meat was so perfectly grilled and so wonderously filled with the essence of laurel and thyme leaves that it seemed as though one held heavenly bliss melting in one's mouth. But one of the great attractions of our corner was the storyteller who had settled in the courtyard of a ruined house; every day in front of an audience filled with admiration and breathless with curiosity he recited stories about fairies, genies, princes, princesses, awesome heroes, the whole larded with bits of verse so sweet to the ear that they drove you half crazy. I spent many hours there to which I owe delights I couldn't possibly express.

In short, it is perfectly true that guardhouse life is an enchanting one. Our naib, a handsome young man, never showed himself. Not only did he abandon his entire pay to his superiors, but moreover he made them handsome gifts so that he was allowed to be a pich-khetmet that is manservant in a great house, which was more desirable than his lieutenancy. My friend the vekil set out every morning, and I can still see him in his baggy trousers which long ago had been white, his red linen coat out at the elbows, his cross belt of dubious color, his battered cap and his long staff in hand. He was going to practice his wool carding trade, and often he did not come back for a week. The rest of us, who didn't know where to sleep, we ordinarily came back to the post between midnight and two in the morning; but generally at eight or nine we were all gone except for one or two who for some reason consented to man the post. It is well known that soldiers on duty have absolutely no purpose except to present arms to important people passing by. That was what we did with great regularity. As soon as a dignitary on a horse surrounded by his servants appeared at the far end of one of the avenues converging on our guardhouse, all the shopkeepers shouted warnings. Our detachment, composed of approximately twenty men, was never represented by more than four or five who, naturally, were busy chatting

— 196 —

or sleeping; often even, there were none. Then out of all the shops auxiliaries rushed who, retrieving our rifles from the corners where we had thrown them, formed ranks in superb order. One of them played the vekil, another the naib, and all presented arms with the martial gravity of the most savage Europeans. The great personage bowed benignly and all was well. I remember with pleasure this excellent guardhouse, those good neighbors, the delightful life that was mine then, and I fervently wish to find a similar situation in my old age. Inshallah! Inshallah!

I don't mean to say that I was more of a stay-at-home than my comrades. Following the vekil's advice, I had become a mason and, in fact, was earning some money; but what I did most successfully was to lend it. Kerim's magnificent coat, which I didn't waste time in selling to a secondhand dealer, gave me some capital, and I began to advance money, either to my comrades or to acquaintances, who very soon were swarming around me. I only agreed to very small loans and demanded to be paid back very promptly. Such prudence was absolutely necessary and worked out well enough for me. However, I also sometimes happened to do business with debtors out of whom I could get nothing; to compensate for these inconveniences, I borrowed myself and did not always pay back. So that, in the long run, my guess is that I have never suffered very large losses. Meanwhile, I made sure to make myself agreeable to my superiors; I sometimes reported to the colonel; I danced attendance on the major; I was, I dare say, the sultan's[25] friend; the naib confided in me; I constantly cultivated the vekil's benevolence and often presented him with small gifts; all of which permitted me never to set foot in the barracks; they didn't see any more of me at drill, and I used the rest of my time either for business or for pleasure without anyone objecting. I confess that I enjoyed frequenting Armenian and Jewish taverns; but one day when I was walking by the Royal College, I entered on

— 197 —

the spur of the moment and attended a lesson given in the garden by the learned Mollah Aga Teherani. I was charmed by it. From that day on, I acquired a taste for metaphysics,[26] and could often be found among those listening to this sublime professor. Moreover, one met there a respectable and numerous company: students, soldiers like me, nomadic cavaliers, lords, townsfolk. We argued about the nature of the soul and the relationship of God to man. Nothing could be more enchanting. I then began to find myself in the society of learned and virtuous people. I sought out the acquaintance of a few taciturn persons who communicated to me certain far-reaching doctrines, and I began to understand, which I hadn't up to that point, that all is awry in the world.[27] Empires are unquestionably governed by horrible knaves, and if one were to put a bullet in all these people's heads, one would give them only what they deserve; but what's the use? Those who would come after would be worse. Glory to God who, for reasons unknown to us, wanted the universe to be run by evil and stupidity.

It also quite often happened that I thought about my dear Leilah and my beloved Kerim. Then I felt tears well up in my eyes, but it didn't last long. I would return to my debtors, my lenders, my masonry, my taverns, my drinking companions, to Mollah Aga Teherani's philosophy, and I totally gave myself up to the supreme will which has ordered everything according to its plan.

For a year everything went in that way, that is to say, very well. I am an old soldier and can say that you will never see things better arranged. One evening, after being absent three days, I returned to the guardhouse toward ten o'clock and was extremely surprised to find most of my comrades there, including the naib himself. They were sitting in a circle on the ground; a blue lamp dimly lit the scene and all were sobbing. But the one who cried the loudest was the naib.

— 198 —

"Blessing be upon you, Excellency! I said. What is the matter?

— Misfortune has befallen the regiment, the officer replied with a sob. The August Government has decided to exterminate the Turcoman nation, and we have our orders to leave tomorrow for Meshhed!"

At that news I felt my heart break, and I did like the others: I sat down and cried.

The Turcomans are, as everyone knows, terrible people. They are constantly making raids, which they call "chap-aouls," into the provinces of Iran the Well Guarded which border their frontiers, and they abduct hundreds of poor peasants. They sell them to the Usbeks from Khiva and from Bokhara. I find it normal that the August Government has decided to destroy these pillagers to the last one, but it was extremely perverse to send our regiment there. So we spent a part of the night grieving; still, since all that despair did not help in any way, we ended laughing, and we were in a very jolly mood when at dawn, men from the Damgan regiment came to relieve us. We took our rifles and, after a good hour spent in taking leave from neighborhood friends, we left the town and went to join the rest of the regiment, which was deployed in battle formation in front of the Dowlet gate.[28] I learned then that we were going to pass in review before the King himself. There were four regiments; each was supposed to have a thousand men, but, actually, counted hardly more than three or four hundred. They were ours, the second Khamseh; a regiment from Ispahan; another from Kom and the first from Ardabil; also two artillery batteries and approximately a thousand cavalry from the Silsûpûrs, the Kakavends and the Alavends.[29] The spectacle was magnificent. Our red and white uniforms looked splendid alongside the white and blue uniforms of the other corps; our officers wore gold-striped narrow trousers and orange or sky blue or pink kulijehs. Then arrived in succession the mirpendi, or di-

— 199 —

visional general, with his escort; the Emir Tuman, who commands twice as many people, with a large troop of cavalry; the Sipeh-Salar,[30] even more heavily escorted, and, finally, the King of Kings himself, the ministers, all the Pillars of the Empire, a crowd of servants; it was magnificent. The drums rolled with a fearsome roar; European music was played in cadence while the men, equipped with their strange instruments, waddled in place so as to keep the beat, the flutes and tabors of the camel artillery whistled and boomed; the crowd of men, women, and children which was all around us was drunk with joy, and we proudly shared in the general satisfaction.

Suddenly, after the King had taken his place on a knoll with the great lords, the order was given to the officers of the tamasha to run back and forth from one side to the other. It is rather curious that

the Europeans, whose languages are as absurd as their minds, had the good fortune to borrow from us a word that perfectly describes the thing. Only in their inability to pronounce correctly, these idiots say "Etat Major." "Tamasha," as everyone knows, is anything meant to create a beautiful spectacle and it is the only useful thing I have ever found in European tactics. But one must admit that it is charming. Very pretty young men, dressed to kill, mounted on beautiful horses, start running at full speed on all sides; they come and go, they turn about; it's delightful to watch; they are not permitted to go at a walk, which would destroy the pleasure. It's a lovely invention, God be praised!

When the King had amused himself for a while by watching this tamasha, they wanted to show him how they were going to treat the Turcomans, and to this end had prepared a mine which they blew up. Only, they did not take the time to wait until the soldiers around it had been warned to withdraw so that they killed three or four of them; apart from this mishap, it all went very well and we enjoyed ourselves immensely. Later, they released three balloons, which

---

— 200 —

brought loud applause; and finally the infantry, cavalry, artillery paraded in front of the King, and in the evening, we received the order to march forth at once, which we did two days later.

The first week of our journey went well. The regiment advanced along the foot of the mountains and in a northeasterly direction. After two months on the march, we were supposed to meet our general, our colonel, the major, and most of the captains in Meshhed or somewhere else. We were all privates, with three or four sultans, the naibs and our vekils. We marched resolutely. Each day we started around two o'clock in the morning, arrived around noon at some place where there was water, and settled down. The column advanced in small groups, each one joining his friends, as it suited him. If we were tired, we fell out on the way and slept our fill, then caught up with the others. As was customary in all regiments, we had with us a long train of donkeys carrying our baggage, the provisions of those who had any, and our rifles, with our packs, for you can imagine that no one was stupid enough to bother with his arms on the way; what's the use? A few officers owned ten or twelve asses among themselves, but two soldiers in our company owned twenty or so which they had bought in Teheran just before leaving, and I had joined in the venture, for that looked like a good bit of business.

These twenty donkeys were loaded with rice and butter. When we arrived at the menzil, that is at our bivouac, we unloaded our rice, our butter, and even some tumbaki.[31] Though we sold at a rather high price, we found buyers; and our gamble was quite successful, for the others had to turn to us, otherwise they would have found themselves in great want. Everyone knows that in the large Iranian valleys, precisely those the roads go through, there are very few villages; the peasants are not foolish enough to settle squarely on the soldiers' path. They would have neither rest nor respite and

---

— 201 —

would end starving, not to mention the unpleasantness of all kinds that would certainly befall them. Therefore, they establish themselves far from the roads and in such a way that it is not always easy to get to them. But neither are the soldiers unresourceful; when we arrived at the bivouac, those of us who knew the country passed on the information. Those least tired from the march would set out on reconnaissance; sometimes it meant walking three or four leagues to get there and as many to get back. But the hope of increasing our provisions sustained us. We had to catch a village by surprise. It was not always easy. These peasants, these cursed dogs, are so wily! If they saw us from a distance, everyone, men, women, children, fled, taking along his belongings, to the last atom. Then we would find the four walls of each house, and nothing to carry off, and had to go back to the encampment with the additional fatigue and face our comrades' jeers. When we had better luck and laid our hands on the villagers, by God! our staves flew. We layed about us unmercifully and we came back with wheat, rice, sheep, chickens. But that was not the rule, we also often happened to come upon cruel and vicious folk, larger in number than we were, who welcomed us with rifle fire, and then we had to take to our heels, only too happy to return with our lives. On such occasions, he who does not have good legs is really a poor devil.

It would be unjust not to say that the August Government had announced to us that we would be quite well fed during the whole campaign. But nobody had believed it. Those are things that all August Governments say, but which they are not able to bring off. The general in chief is jolly well never going to amuse himself spending money to give his soldiers a treat when he can keep it in his pocket. The truth is that at the end of two weeks, having no more rice to sell, my two comrades and I shut up shop; you couldn't have found two wretched loaves in the whole regiment, and we

— 202 —

began to eat the donkeys. I have never seen peasants more ferocious than those of Khorassan. They live in fortified villages; when a poor soldier comes near, they shut the gates, climb on their walls, and if you are not cautious enough to withdraw in great haste, you receive a volley of bullets that do not miss. May the fathers and grandfathers of these horrible assassins burn eternally in the depths of hell and never find relief! Inshallah! Inshallah! Inshallah!

So we began to eat the donkeys. Poor beasts! I forgot to tell you that there weren't very many left. Receiving no food themselves, they had chosen to die in succession and their corpses marked our route. The few we were able to keep alive, at the cost of infinite trouble, were ill-nourished; upon arriving at each bivouac, we had the task of fetching grass for them far back in the mountains. Besides, they were exhausted. It is true that we had begun fairly early on to relieve them of our rifles and equipment, which we jettisoned in the desert; but we had insisted on keeping our baggage as long as possible. In brief, we had to carry on our own backs the things we considered the most precious. What was terrible was that we were short of water. We had to spend more than half the day digging holes in the ground to find a few drops. When our luck was at its best, we succeeded in uncovering a brackish mud that we clarified as well as possible by straining it through cloth. We finally had nothing to eat but grass, a bit of grass. Many of our comrades followed the donkeys' example: they died. That did not prevent us from singing; for if one had to despair over the inevitable evils of life, it would be better not to have been born, and, moreover, with patience, everything falls in place. The proof of it is that the remnants of the regiment succeeded in reaching Meshhed.

Truly, we didn't look like much when we entered the holy city. The major had met us along with a few captains and a number of vendors of all kinds of victuals. We paid through our noses for what they gave us; we were so hungry

— 203 —

that we did not bother to bargain very much. You have no idea if you have not experienced such adversity, you have no idea what it is suddenly to contemplate with your two eyes a boiled sheep's head that is being offered to you. The good meal we had there rekindled our spirits. The adjutant called us sons of dogs because we had lost our rifles; but he had us provided with a number of others that were borrowed from the Khosh-ava regiment for the occasion, and, after we had passed the hat in order to make him a small gift, good feelings were reestablished between him and us. It was agreed that he would make a good report of our conduct to the colonel for whom we also raised a gift that amounted to ten or so tomauns. Having made these arrangements, our entry into Meshhed was set for the next day.

At the appointed hour, the drummers of the other regiments already arrived in the city placed themselves at the head of our column. It was necessary, for we had thrown ours away along with our rifles. A large group of officers mounted on horses they had dredged up as best they could took their place behind the drums, and behind them we marched in as good order as possible. We were approximately two to three hundred men. The people of the city received us rather indifferently, for within the last month they had often been treated to the spectacle of such entries which had nothing particularly attractive for them. Then we were assigned a place to camp; but since the ground was swampy, we all dispersed hoping to find a shelter and some sustenance in town.

As for me, I immediately headed for the mosque of the Holy Imaums. I was drawn there by devotion but also by the idea that I might be lucky enough to get some of the soup they ordinarily distribute to the paupers; and a pauper I could rightfully claim to be. The whole universe doesn't know anything more beautiful than the venerable Meshhed mosque. Its great dome, its sumptuous and magnificent doors, the elegant pinnacles at each corner, the whole thing

— 204 —

covered from top to bottom with tiles enameled in blue, yellow and black, and the majestic courtyard with its vast basin meant for ablutions: the spectacle transports one with awe. From morning to evening a multitude of pilgrims coming from Iran, from Turkestan, from the depths of India, the faraway lands of the Roum,[32] bring to the Imaum Riza[33] (blessed be his name!) an incessant offering of genuflections, prayers, gifts and alms. The holy ground is always filled with a noisy crowd. Flocks of beggars come every day to receive the food prepared for them by the mollahs. They would gladly die rather than forgo the privileges of the mosque. I advanced with respect and emotion amidst the groups, and as I was discreetly asking one of the guardians, whose head was covered with a vast and learned white turban,[34] where I was supposed to go in order to obtain my share of the

distribution, this worthy and respectable turban or, rather, the head underneath it showed me an expression of surprise, then of pleasure, and a large mouth opening in the midst of an expanse of black beard, while jet black eyes lit up with joy, started to utter cries of satisfaction.

"May the Holy Imaums be blessed. Is that you, really you, Baba Aga?

— None other, I answered staring at my interlocutor, and, after a moment's hesitation, recognizing him perfectly:

— Vallah?! Billah! Tallah! I exclaimed. It's you, cousin Suleiman?

— None other, my friend, my kinsman, light of my eyes! What have you done with our Leilah?

— Alas! I said. She died!

— Oh! my God! how terrible!

— She died, I continued with a despairing look, for otherwise would I be here? I am a captain in the second Khamseh regiment and very happy to see you again!"

The idea of telling Suleiman that Leilah was dead had occurred to me because I did not like to talk to him about

---

— 205 —

her and I wanted to go on to another subject of conversation as soon as possible; but he did not go along with it.

"Merciful God! he exclaimed. Dead! Leilah is dead! And you let her die, you scoundrel! Didn't you know that I loved only her in the whole world and that she never loved anyone but me!

— Oh! Only you! I replied angrily. Only you! Aren't you going a bit far in saying this! In that case, why didn't you marry her?

— Because I owned absolutely nothing at all. But the very day of your wedding, she swore to me that she would divorce you to come to me as soon as I would be able to give her a decent home. That's why I left, I came here, I became one of the guardians of the mosque, and I was about to inform her of my present situation when here you come overwhelming me with this unexpected blow!"

At this point he started to cry and sob, swaying his head back and forth. I had an urgent desire to give him a good punch in the middle of his face, for I was not pleased at all with what he had just revealed to me; fortunately, I suddenly remembered that it was henceforth much more Kerim's business than mine and I contented myself exclaiming:

"Poor Leilah! She loved us well, both of us! Ah! what a tragedy that she is dead!"

At these words Suleiman fell into my arms and said:

"My friend, my cousin, we will never find solace, neither of us! Come to my house; I want you to be my guest, and, during the whole time that you remain in Meshhed, I mean everything I have to be yours!"

I was deeply touched by this sign of kindness from that dear Suleiman, whom I had always cherished from the depth of my heart, and, seeing him as afflicted as he was, I shared his grief most sincerely and added my tears to his. We left through the courtyard and on the way, he introduced me to the mollahs whom we encountered.

— 206 —

"This is my cousin Aga Khan, he would say to them, a major in the Khamseh regiment, a hero in the old manner! neither Rustam nor Afrasiâb[35] equaled him in valor! If you would come and have a cup of tea with us, you would do my modest home a singular honor."

I spent a fortnight at Mollah Suleiman's. It was a moment, a very brief moment of delight. During that time they were reassembling the remnants of the regiments, most of which weren't any better off than ours, which is quite understandable after a long journey. They gave us shoes, at least a few of us; they provided us with rifles, or, at least with devices that looked like rifles.[36] More of this later. When we were more or less equipped, we heard one beautiful morning that our marching orders had been issued and that the regiment was going to set out for Merve. I was not too pleased. This time it meant going into the midst of the Turcoman hordes, and God only knows what might happen! I spent a very sad evening with Mollah Suleiman; he tried to comfort me as best he could, the good man, and poured me a a great deal of well-sweetened tea; we also drank a bit of raki. He came back to the subject of Leilah and had me recount the circumstances of the poor child's death for perhaps the tenth time. I had a fleeting idea of telling him the truth, but since I had gone this far with the story, it seemed to me more natural to continue rather than to give him new reasons for perplexity. The dear

friend! He had been so good to me that in the mood I was in, I took a melancholy pleasure in recalling many details to which this time I added memories that had until then escaped me; and the result of this was that before expiring, the dear girl, whom we both mourned, had remembered him with great affection. I cannot entirely claim that my tales were lies; for I had such need to pity myself and others that it was quite easy to speak of sad and touching things, and, truly, I can swear that I did so with an overflowing heart. Suleiman and I mixed our tears once

— 207 —

again, and, when I left him toward dawn, I swore to him from the very bottom of my heart never to forget him, and you see that I kept my word. On his side he embraced me with true affection. I then rejoined my comrades: the regiment marched out and I along with it, in the ranks next to my vekil.

We were a large number. I saw the cavalry pass by; they were tribesmen from the south and the west. They looked fairly good, better than we; but their ill-fed horses were not worth much. The generals had stayed in Meshhed. It seems that it is absolutely necessary to do so, because one leads better from a long distance than from a short one. The colonels had emulated the generals, undoubtedly for the same reason. In sum, we had few officers above the grade of captain, and it is quite proper, in view of the fact that officers are not meant to fight, but rather to draw the soldiers' pay. Almost all the leaders were nomad horsemen: they had come with us; but it is well known that this kind of man is very uncouth, crude and thinks of nothing but battle. The artillery had been sent on ahead.

We had been marching for three days. It was pouring and the weather was very cold. We walked with great difficulty on muddy ground where those who did not slip sometimes sank up to their knees; time and again we had to cross wide ditches full of murky water; it wasn't child's play. I had already lost my shoes and, like my companions, I had fallen into the mire, been in the water up to my waist, and crawled up steep banks on all fours so many times that I was covered with muck and so wet that I was shivering. I hadn't eaten since the night before. Suddenly, we heard the cannon. Our troops stopped short.

We heard the cannon. There were several volleys; then, just as suddenly, we heard nothing more. There was a moment of silence; all at once we saw a train of cannoneers plunging into our midst, whipping their horses desperately

— 208 —

and throwing themselves upon us. A few men were crushed to death, those who could got out of the way. The cannons jolted, bouncing along, stopped, fell, some in the mud, the others in the water; the cannoneers cut the traces and fled like the wind. It was an uproar, a whirlwind, a melee, a lightning bolt; we didn't have the time to understand, and almost at once those who were on the front line saw a cloud of cavalry rapidly heading our way. A general shout arose:

"The Turcomans! The Turcomans! Fire!"

I couldn't make out anything at all, I saw a few men who, instead of lowering their weapons, ran off behind the cannoneers. I was going to do the same when the vekil, grabbing my arm, shouted into my ear in the midst of the din:

"Stand fast, Aga Beg! Those who flee today are done for."

He was right, quite right, the good vekil, and my eyes proved it to me immediately. I saw, as I see you, that mass of cavalry that I just mentioned divide, as though magically, into myriads of platoons, which dashing through the plain and avoiding obstacles with the deftness of people accustomed to the region, turned, enveloped, seized the runaways, and overwhelming them with blows, took their arms and made hundreds of prisoners.

"You see! you see, my boys! the vekil shouted again. Here is the fate awaiting you, awaiting us, if we are not able to hang together! Forward! Stand firm! Fire!"

There were about fifty of us. The frightening spectacle spread out before our eyes gave such force to the sergeant's exhortations that, when a party of these cursed plunderers advanced toward us, our troop quickly closed ranks and, indeed, we fired, and we reloaded, and we fired a second time, and a third time, and a fourth time. By the Holy Imaums! we saw a few of these heretics, of these cursed dogs, of these followers of Abubekr, of Omar and of Osman[37] fall; may these monsters burn eternally in hell! We saw them fall, I

— 209 —

tell you, and that gave us such momentum that, on the vekil's command and without breaking ranks, we began to advance, to go after this enemy who had stopped and wasn't coming to us. After a moment's hesitation, they fell back and fled. During this time the other Turcoman hordes continued to chase the runaways, to catch them, killing a few, beating the others, and leading off those who could march. We uttered shouts of triumph: Allah! Allah! ya Ali! ya Hassan! ya Hossein! We were overjoyed; we had been delivered and we feared nothing.

Actually, we were quite happy. Out of the approximately fifty that we were, we had shown that thirty of our rifles were in working condition. I'm not talking about mine; first, it didn't have a hammer and, second, the barrel was cracked. Still it was a good weapon, which I later put to the test. Since the bayonet did not have a socket, I lashed it on with a strong cord and it held in place wonderfully. I was only waiting for a chance to use it.

I should tell you that our example had been followed. At some distance we saw three or four groups of soldiers firing, and the Turcomans did not dare advance. Moreover, a troop of roughly three or four hundred horsemen had spiritedly charged the enemy and had retaken some prisoners and a cannon. Unfortunately, we did not know what had become of the cannoneers or their caissons, so we heaved the piece into the ditch. For an hour we could see the Turcomans, who at a distance were still taking men; then they disappeared over the horizon with their captives. Our various groups gathered together, and we saw that all told we must have been seven or eight hundred. It was not much out of the six or seven thousand who had started from Meshhed. But still, it was something, and when we regrouped, knowing what fearsome lions we were, we did not for a moment doubt being up to retaking a terrain where the Turcomans would not be able to overrun us. We were so pleased that nothing seemed difficult.

— 210 —

Our leader happened to be the cavaliers' Yuz Bashi.[38] He was a Curd named Rezi Khan, a tall, handsome man with a short beard, blazing eyes, and magnificently equipped. He was so exuberant that his high spirits seemed to excite even his horse, and man and beast shone with ardor in all their movements. There was also a certain Abdulrahim from the Bakhtiari[39] region, a great strapping fellow with Bakhtiari[39] region, a great strapping fellow with the shoulders of an elephant. He was shouting at us:

"My boys! My boys! You are true Rustams and Iskenders![40] We shall exterminate this Turcoman rabble to the very last man!"

We were delighted. We began to sing. The infantry had two leaders: a lieutenant that I didn't know and our vekil. That brave fellow exclaimed:

"Now, what we need are rations and powder!"

We realized that we were dying of hunger. However, there was a way to remedy the situation. We all began to pull up grass in the plain. Part of it was put aside for the horses. With what was left we decided to make soup. But the rain was still pouring and the absence of wood made it even more difficult to light up a fire. We could have made one with dry grass. Of dry grass we had all we wanted; only it was swollen with water. We therefore resigned ourselves to eat the grass just as it was. It didn't taste good, but our stomachs were filled and stopped rumbling. As for the powder, the problem remained difficult. When we left Meshhed, we had been given hardly any. The generals had sold it. And now, we simply had to have some; getting it was laborious. We gathered a few cartridges from the dead. We had about three hundred rifles in working order, and all in all, three rounds for each rifle. Rezi Khan, it is true, enjoined us not to shoot before he gave the order. But we felt so good that a few of us fired their cartridges that very evening to celebrate the victory: furthermore, it mattered little; we had good bayonets.

— 211 —

By an extraordinary piece of luck, we discovered in the neighborhood a sort of fortified encampment built by ancient pagans, with four stone ramparts and a kind of pond in the middle. We entered and shut ourselves up in it to spend the night; that was just as well, for at dawn the Turcomans came back, and since they were more numerous than we, if they had attacked us again on an open field, we would have been in a great deal of trouble.

From behind our walls, we fired on the enemy and killed a few. Enraged, they dismounted and climbed our piles of stones like ants; then we fell on them with our bayonets, Rezi Khan at our head; we handled them so roughly that after a ten-minute struggle, they yielded and fled. Unfortunately, Rezi Khan and the large Bakhtiari, who fought like tigers, were both killed. As for me, I received a

knife wound on the arm, but, God is great! It was only a a scratch.

Nonetheless, look what scoundrels those Turcomans are! They fled, but not very far. They came back almost at once and began cavalcading around our walls. They had noticed, it seems, that we had not fired a great deal. They could easily see that we were no longer firing at all. For very good reason: there was no more powder! Not a grain, not an atom! God knows exactly what he is doing!

Then our enemies wanted to try a new assault, and a part of them was again used as infantry. Lo and behold, they begin climbing up the forts embankment like ants! With the vekil leading us, we sallied forth; once more we disperse them, killing a dozen, they take to their heels, the cavalry charges us, we barely have time to climb back into our hole, and we see, at a distance, the vekil's head on the end of a lance running in the midst of the Turcomans. Ah! I must not forget to tell you that we had been very cold at night. We didn't have a dry thread on our poor bodies. The rain was still falling. A little wet grass in our stomachs hardly sustained us. Myself, I suffered greatly, and we had approximately

---

— 212 —

sixty men die on us, without our being able to explain how or why. God on high and merciful had willed it so!

The night was again very bad; our only resource was to huddle close together in the hope of remembering what it was like to be warm. Yet, toward the morning, the sky cleared. It was cold. We expected to be attacked. The lieutenant was dead.

It was only around noon that the Turcomans reappeared, but they kept a fair distance; in the evening they became bolder and came and rode around the entrenchments within musket reach. Then they withdrew.

The night again took its toll. In the end, we were only four hundred, and no one to lead us. But we knew what to do, and, in case of an attack, we would still have fallen on the ungodly with our bayonets. And yet we were all weakened. It was more or less the time of the asr[41] prayer, and the sun dropped toward the horizon, when in the distance we saw Turcoman troops arrive in larger numbers than the previous days. Everyone got up the best he could and took his rifle. But much to our surprise, that multitude stopped at a long distance from us, and four or five horsemen, only, detached themselves from the main body of their comrades, advanced toward us making friendly signs and indicated as best they could that they wanted to speak to us.

Several of us were of the opinion that we should sally forth suddenly and cut off their heads; but what would be the use? That's what I pointed out along with other comrades, and, after a short discussion, they all rallied to my opinion. We therefore went to meet those sons of dogs, and, after deep bows, brought them within our walls. Everyone sat on the ground so as to form a circle around the newcomers, whom we invited to sit on horse blankets.

Vallah! Billah! Tallah! There was a great deal of difference between them and us! As for us, we looked like

---

— 213 —

ghosts covered with mud and oozing misery; *they* wore good fur-trimmed clothes, shiny weapons and magnificent headgear. When they had settled down, having been appointed spokesman, I said to these cursed ones:

"May salvation be with you!

— And with you too! they answered.

— We hope, I proceeded, that your Excellencies' health leaves nothing to be desired, and may all your hearts have their fill in this world and in the next!

— Your Excellencies' kindness is infinite, the oldest of the Turcomans replied. He was a tall old man with a flat nose, a face as round as a watermelon, tufts of beard here and there and eyes like an upside down crescent moon.

— What orders do your Excellencies wish to convey to us? I continued.

— It is we, the old Turcoman said, who are coming to present a request to Your Highnesses. As you know, we are poor fathers of families, poor farmers, slaves of the King of Kings and servants of Iran the Well Guarded![42] For centuries, we have tried by all means within our power to prove the extraordinary extent of our affection for the August Government. Unfortunately, we are very poor; our wives and children cry with hunger; the fields we cultivate don't bring us enough to feed them, and if, off and on, we didn't have a chance to succeed in a bit of slave trading, which doesn't hurt anyone, we

would be reduced to die in misery, we and ours. Why persecute us?

— Everything that Your Excellency has just explained is most scrupulously true, I replied. As for us, we are very humble soldiers; we have been sent here, but we do not know why, and, now, Your Excellencies having already heaped blessings on us, we take the liberty of begging you to allow us to return to the holy city of Meshhed from whence we came."

The Turcoman bowed in the most amiable fashion and answered me:

— 214 —

"I would to heaven that it were possible! My comrades and I are quite ready to offer you our horses and to beg you to accept a thousand signs of our friendship. But you be the judge of our sad situation. The August Government has attacked us without reason, we who weren't harming anyone, and, moreover, provisions are scarce. You have nothing to eat; but what about us? We have hardly eaten for a week. Come with us. You will be well treated. We will not sell you in Bokhara nor in Khiva. We shall keep you with us, and, if your friends wish to redeem you, we shall be ready to accept the most reasonable of ransoms. Isn't it better to wait patiently for your deliverance under our tent, by a good fire, than to risk dying of misery on the road?"

The old Turcoman looked like a kind man. His comrades started to talk to us about fresh bread, curds and roast mutton. A great emotion overtook us. Suddenly each one threw down his rifle, and the ambassadors, having risen, we followed them willingly.

When we arrived with them near the horsemen, we were quite welcome; they placed us in the middle of the troop, and, while we were marching, we chatted with our masters who seemed to us good people; from time to time, to tell the truth, one of us would receive a good lash of the whip, but only because he wasn't walking fast enough: otherwise, everything went very well except that for people as tired as we were, it was a bit hard to have to travel for eight hours across heavy country before reaching the camp to which we were being taken.

The women and children had come to meet us. It was the most difficult moment to go through. It seems that in that crowd, there were widows of a few days, whose husbands we had killed, and mothers who were angry about what we had done to their sons. In all the countries of the world, women are nasty; these were ferocious. The least they would have liked to do to us was to tear us with their nails, if

— 215 —

they had been given the chance. The children were quite willing to treat us every bit as badly, and, to start things off, they welcomed us with screams and a shower of stones. Fortunately, the men were not disposed to see us damaged and, half growling, half laughing, and also dealing a few blows here and there to those furies, they succeeded in leading us into the camp; and if they did not keep our enemies and their young auxiliaries from jeering at us, which caused no harm, at least they kept them far enough away that they could not tear us to pieces. Once we were all gathered in the middle of the village, we were counted and warned that those who tried to escape would be killed instantly. After this declaration, we were distributed amongst the horsemen who had taken us, and we became their slaves. One thus acquired ten prisoners, another five and still another two. As for me, I was allotted to a still very young man, who took me home at once.

My master was not poor; I could see that upon entering his tent. This tent was of the kind named alatchik, made with partitions and walls of braided reed covered with thick felt; the floor was made of wood covered with rugs; there were three or four chests painted in all sorts of colors, a big bed with cushions, and, in the middle of the tent, a stove from which emanated an agreeable warmth. In this charming dwelling I noticed a young woman; she was nursing an infant. I saluted her respectfully—she was undoubtedly my mistress, but she did not life her eyes to me, and hardly looked at her husband. I shall tell you right off what Turcoman women are like. Not worth talking about.

They are ugly enough to make the devil flee, witness the young lady in the tent to which I was brought, whom I later learned to be one of the beauties of the country. I wouldn't have suspected that offhand. She looked like a Tabrîz street porter. Her shoulders were broad and flat, her head large, her eyes small, cheekbones sharp, a mouth like a baker's oven, her forehead flat, and on her chest two moun-

— 216 —

tains. I have seen even worse. These women are stupid, mean, violent, and the only thing they know

how to do is to work. They are therefore forced to work like mules, and rightly so.

The master told the lady:

"Put the child down and serve me my supper."

The lady obeyed at once. She began to fuss with the dishes and plates and signaled me to follow her outside the tent; I immediately obeyed, entertaining the notion that I would soften her by my zeal. She led me to a sort of a hut used as a kitchen, where something, I'm not sure what, was simmering in a pot. She made a sign that I did not clearly understand; without a word of explanation, she took a staff and gave me a blow on the head.

"Here, I thought, is a kind of a monster who will not make my life easy."

I was wrong. She was a good woman. She beat me often, she was exacting, wanted everything to be done her way; but she fed me well, and, once she was somewhat used to me, she talked to me more, and more than once I succeeded in cheating her, without her ever noticing it. When she was in a good mood, she would say laughingly:

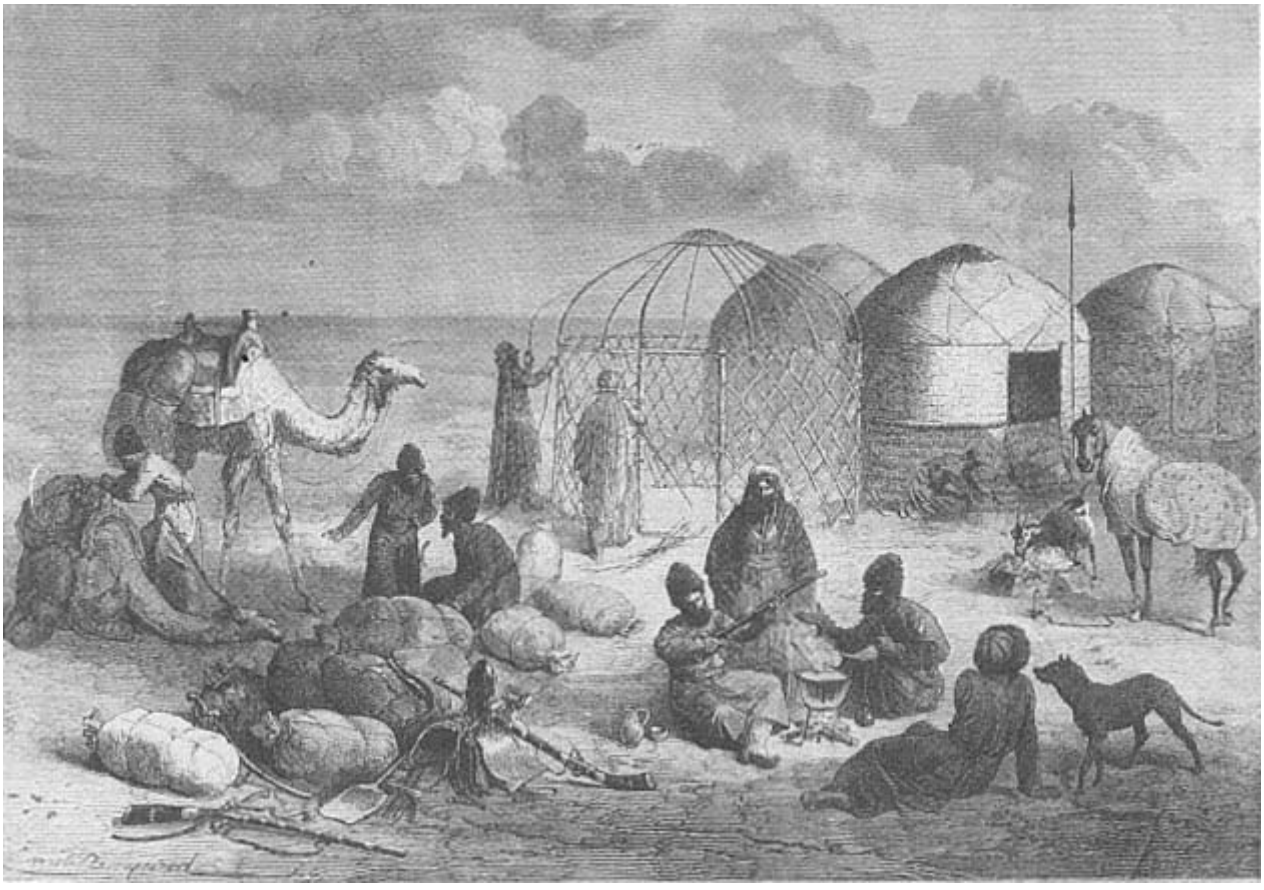
"Isn't it true that you people from Iran are more stupid than our horses?

— Yes, mistress, I would answer humbly, it's quite true. God willed it so!

— The Turcomans, she would continue, plunder you, rob you, abduct you, and sell you to whom they want, and you cannot find a way to stop them.

— It is true, mistress, I would reply again; but that's because the Turcomans are great wits, and we are asses."

Then she would start to laugh her head off again and would never notice that her milk and her butter shrank to my profit. I have always thought that the strongest people are always the least intelligent. For instance, look at the



Campement turcoman. — Dessin de Émile Bayard d'après un croquis de M. de Bloqueville

Intèrieur d'une tente turcomane. — Dessia de E. Thérond d'après un croquis de M. de Bloqueville

— 217 —

Europeans! People cheat them as much as they want, and, wherever they go, they assume that they are superior to us, because they are the masters; they cannot and they never will be able to appreciate this truth, that mind towers over matter. The Turcomans behave in exactly the same way. They too are brutes.

I was employed by my owner to split wood, carry water, lead the sheep to pasture. When I didn't have a task, I would take a walk in the country. I made a few friends, and I sang songs. I also knew how to make mousetraps, and I taught a few women to cook Persian dishes which their men found superb. They rewarded me with buttered tea and biscuits. Fairly often there were weddings where I danced, which made all the guests laugh a great deal. Besides, they were in a very good mood, and it's easy to understand why. Our camp, the neighboring camps, and the whole nation were in an exalted state because of their victory. There were prisoners galore and they expected to make a killing from them. Second, once their first feeling of anger had passed, all the widows were delighted with their situation, and no wonder, for a young Turcoman girl is not worth five gold tomauns, and it would require very special circumstances for a man to go looking for one when he wanted to marry. To the contrary, a widow is worth a lot and often fetches a very high price. That depends on the experience she has acquired in running a household, on her reputation for thriftiness and on how accustomed she is to manage everything around her. And, furthermore, one knows precisely whether or not she can bear her husband's children. As for love, you had better keep in mind that, with the way these ladies look, it's out of the question. No one thinks of it, or understands what it can be. I once tried to tell my mistress about the very touching and beautiful passion that Mejnoun felt for Leilah[43] and that reminded me of my own Leilah, and threw me into a painful

— 218 —

transport. My mistress beat me outrageously for having dared bore her with such absurdities. She was still quite young, but had already had two husbands before the present one, and three children to boot. As a consequence, she enjoyed an immense consideration, and it was an honor for me, one to which I was not insensitive, to belong to such a lady.

I had been living there fairly peacefully for about three months, and I was beginning to get used to my lot (in truth, as I said, it was not very hard), when one morning, while strolling idly in the camp,

I was accosted by two other slaves, Persians like myself, soldiers from the Kom regiment, who claimed they knew for sure and swore on their heads that we were going to be liberated that day and sent back to Meshhed.

This rumor had already circulated so often, and had been so often found false, that I started to laugh and advised my comrades not to put too much faith in what they'd been told and to continue to arm themselves with patience. Still, upon leaving them, I found myself, as each time I heard similar news, rather troubled and disturbed. I am well aware that a number of disgraceful things are taking place in Iran and that a good deal of evil can be found there; yet it is Iran, and it is the best, the most sacred land on earth. Nowhere else in the world can one experience so much pleasure or joy. When one has lived there, one wishes to return to it; and when one is there, that's where one wants to die. I didn't believe for a minute what my two comrades told me, yet my heart was pounding, and I felt sad, so sad that instead of continuing my walk, I returned to my master's.

He had just then dismounted from his horse and I saw him talking with his wife. When he saw me, he called me.

"Aga, he said to me, you are no longer my slave, you've been ransomed; you are my guest, and you are about to leave for Meshhed."

— 219 —

I was so startled by these words that I thought I was going to choke, and it felt as if the tent was spinning around me.

"Is it true? I cried.

— Aren't these Iranians stupid! the woman laughed; what's so extraordinary about that? Your Government has ransomed its soldiers at the rate of ten tomauns a head. We could have got a better price, but since the harm has been done and we have got our money, go home and don't act like a fool."

I barely heard what this creature was saying. Something like a vision passed in front of my eyes. I saw, yes, I saw the lovely Khamseh valley where I was born; I could distinctly see the brook, the willows, the lush grass, the flowers, the tree at the foot of which I had buried my money, my beautiful, my adored Leilah in my arms, my hunting trips, my gazelles, my tigers, my dear Kerim, my excellent Suleiman, my so kind Abdullah, all my cousins, the Teheran bazaar, the grocer's shop and the caterer's, the faces of people I knew; yes, yes, yes, my entire life passed before me at that moment, and a voice was crying in me: You are about to live it again! I felt drunk with happiness! I could have sung, danced, sobbed, kissed all those my mind pictured in that moment of supreme bliss, and I began to cry out in anguish.

"You idiot! the woman said. You drank raki yesterday evening and perhaps again this morning. If I should ever catch you again! . . ."

Her husband laughed.

"You will never catch him again, for he is leaving this very day, and, from this moment on, I repeat it, Aga, you are free!"

I was free! I rushed outside the tent, and ran toward the large area in the middle of the camp. From all the dwellings my poor comrades were pouring out, as excited as I. We

---

— 220 —

embraced one another, we did not forget to thank God and the Imaums; we shouted from the fullness of our hearts: Iran! dear Iran! Light of my eyes! And then I learned little by little how it was that we had suddenly left the depth of darkness to enter such glorious brightness.

It seems that after the loss of our army and beginning of our captivity, much had happened. The King of Kings, learning what had taken place, had become very angry with his generals and accused them of letting his poor soldiers meet the enemy alone, without going with them; he had also accused them of selling the provisions, the powder, the weapons and the clothes destined for the soldiers, and, finally, had announced his firm resolve to have all guilty parties beheaded.

He might have done the right thing in implementing this threat. But, after all, what use would it have been? After those generals, there would be others exactly alike: that's the way the world turns. One should not try to change it. So His Majesty behaved much more wisely by subduing his anger. The only result was that the Ministers and the Pillars of the Empire received many gifts on behalf of the accused, one or two of whom were suspended for a few months; the King received magnificent presents, and it was decided that the leaders would redeem all the captive soldiers from the

Turcomans, and would redeem them at their own expense since they were the cause of the misfortune that had befallen those poor devils.

The problem thus solved, the generals had naturally taken the colonels and the majors to task, who had done exactly as they. They threatened them with the stick, with demotion, and even with beheading, and did it so well that in the end another deal was struck on their side. The colonels and the majors gave presents to their superiors, and the latter recouped a little of the expense that ensuring their safety had just cost them in Teheran.

— 221 —

Meanwhile they had sent emissaries among the Turcoman tribes to negotiate the captives' ransom. There had been some difficulty in coming to an understanding. However, an agreement was struck and this is how and why, after experiencing an incredible turmoil and then a sort of blissful ecstasy, and after taking leave of our former masters and Turcoman friends, we started for Meshhed walking, take my word for it, as fast as birds about to take flight.

The weather was splendid; at night, the stars shone in the sky like diamonds; during the day, a beautiful, sparkling sun covered the sky and the earth with gold specks streaming from its blazing circle. The whole world smiled on us, on us, poor unfortunate soldiers, yes, the most unfortunate, the most forsaken, the most ill-treated of beings, who were emerging from the depths of misery into at least a glimmer of hope, and we were walking merrily, and we were singing lustily, and in that way we arrived at a point two hours from Meshhed. We could clearly see coming ever closer to us the domes and the minarets and the tiled walls of the holy mosque and the city's innumerable rows of houses set against the blue sky; and as we were thinking of the good things we were going to find very soon awaiting us in the heart of this heavenly vision, we suddenly found ourselves stopped by two regiments deployed across the road, in front of which a group of officers was standing. We stopped and bowed deeply.

A mollah left the group of officers and approached our troop. When he was within hearing, he lifted his two hands in the air and addressed the following speech to us:

"My children! Glory to God, the Lord of all worlds, omnipotent and merciful, who rescued the prophet Yunès from the belly of the whale[44] and you from the hands of the ferocious Turcomans.

— *Amen!*[45] our entire troop responded.

— You must thank Him for it by entering Meshhed humbly, humbly, I repeat, and as befits miserable prisoners.

— 222 —

— We are ready! We are ready!

— Therefore, my children, like pious men and faithful Mussulmans you are going to put your hands in chains, and the entire population, moved by this sign of your misfortune, will shower blessings and alms upon you."

We found that an excellent idea and were very taken by it. Then soldiers from the ranks of the two regiments drew near. They put iron collars around our necks and manacles on our wrists, and then divided us into groups of eight to ten chained together. That made us laugh a great deal and we were quite contented in that way, although the weight of the metal was a bit overwhelming; but all we had to do was to wear it for several hours and that was a trifle.

When our toilet was finished, the drums, the music, the officers and one regiment formed the head of the column; we followed after them in our pitiful outfits, but quite content, and on our heels walked the other regiment. Soon we saw the crowd of Meshhedis coming to meet us. We saluted them, and had the pleasure of hearing them pour benedictions upon us. Meanwhile the drums rolled, the music played and a few artillery pieces fired salvos in our honor.

Once in the city, we were split up; some took one street, others another, with soldiers to escort us. Seven comrades and I were chained in the same file, manacles on our wrists, collars on our necks, and were led to a guardhouse and allowed to sit down on the platform. There the sergeant in charge of our escort prompted us to solicit the charity of the passersby. It was an excellent idea that we executed promptly and with marvelous success. Men, women, children brought us rice and meat in abundance and even pastries; they gave us little money. I think the kind of people who succored us did not have much of it themselves.

In the evening an officer arrived. We begged him to have us unchained and to let each of us take care of his business. As for me, all I could think of was spending a comfortable

— 223 —

and much-needed night at the house of my friend and relative, Mollah Suleiman. The officer said:

"My boys, you must be reasonable. In your case, you have been liberated thanks to the incomparable and superhuman generosity of my uncle, General Ali Khan. He paid ten tomauns to your masters for each one of you. Would it be fair for him to lose so much money? No! it wouldn't be fair, you would be the first to agree. Moreover, if he let you go, although you are all very honest and incapable of repudiating your debts, unfortunately you have no resources. Where would poor soldiers find money? With this in mind, my uncle, who is kindness itself, will help you find some. By leaving the chains around your necks until you have each gathered fifteen tomauns which you will faithfully turn over to him, he provides you with the means of touching Mussulman hearts and of eliciting public charity. Do not despair. Tell people about your misfortunes, continue to solicit those who come near. Call them all, these kind folk who are passing by! They will come! You will see that they feed you very well. Little by little, they will feel more pity, and their purses will open. Believe me. In a few days, when you can hope to collect no more here, you will be moved. In this way you will return to Teheran, from there you will go to Ispahan, to Shiraz, to Kermanshah, to all the cities of Iran the Well Guarded, and in the end you will repay this debt."

The officer stopped speaking, but we became angry; despair overwhelmed us, we began to call him son of a dog, and we were well on our way to dealing in the same fashion with his uncle, his wives, his mother, his uncle's daughters (if they existed) when, at a sign from our torturer, our guardians fell upon us, beat us, threw us to the ground, trampled us. I very nearly had a rib caved in, and my head was swollen with two huge bumps. Then we had to calm down. Each of us submitted, and as for me, after crying in a corner for a

— 224 —

good half hour, I resigned myself and in a pitiful voice again started begging alms from the passersby.

Charitable people were not lacking, and everyone knows, thanks be given to God all powerful! that there exists in Islam a great good will to come to the help of paupers. Women especially crowded around us in large numbers; they looked at us, they cried; they asked us to tell of our misfortunes, which were great. You can be sure that we were not trying to understate them; to the contrary, we never missed adding to our tale that our wives, our five, six, seven, eight toddlers were waiting for us at home and starving. In this way we collected a lot of small cash and sometimes silver coins. But some of us were luckier than others.

It is well known that our regiments are recruited from among the poor, who, being without friends or protectors, cannot get out from under military life. When soldiers are needed, they pick up off the streets and out of city taverns and village houses the rabble that no one else will claim as their own. So, there were here chained together, mature men, fifteen-year-old boys, and seventy-year-old men, because, when you are a soldier, it is forever, unless you find a way to be exempted or to desert.

Those among us who received the largest share of alms were the youngest. There was one, a pretty boy of sixteen, born in Zanjan who was delivered at the end of two weeks, so much was he given from all sides. It is true that he had the face of an angel. As for me, I succeeded in letting Mollah Suleiman know of my sad fate. The good man ran to me, threw himself at my neck, and, in the name of our dear Leilah, he gave me a tomaun. It was a great deal. I thanked him very much. I might have had more from him; but on the next day they had us leave Meshhed en route for Teheran.

My comrades and I composed a song that told of our misfortune, and we sang it for the peasants along the road. That always brought something. Besides, Moslem charity

— 225 —

fed the poor captives better than it had previously the King's soldiers, and our guardians benefited from it as we did. Only, each one of us had to keep a sharp eye on his small takings, for naturally either we ourselves or our soldiers thought only of stealing what was not ours. I for one kept my money wrapped in a piece of blue cotton; I did not show it to anyone and tied it by a cord under my clothes. I may as well confess now that by the time we reached the capital, I owned a few silver sahebkrans and my copper shahis, that is, including the gold tomaun given by my cousin, approximately three and a half tomauns. Some of my comrades, I am sure, were richer than I; but others were poorer; for an old cannoneer named Ibrahim, who was my neighbor in chains, was so ugly he never obtained anything.

Upon arriving in Teheran, we were brought, as it happened, to our former guardhouse and were

displayed on the platform. Recognizing me, the people of the district rushed up; I narrated our misfortunes, and we were in the process of collecting a good deal when a true miracle took place. Praise to God! May the Holy Imaums be blessed and their sacred names extolled! Amen! Amen! Glory to God, the Lord of Creation. Glory to God!

A miracle, I repeat, took place and this is what it was. As usual, many women had gathered around us. They crowded against one another and elbowed to the front as best they could to get a good look at us, so that I, who was telling our audience of our misadventures, found myself facing a wall of blue and white veils lined up in front of me. I had arrived at this sentence, which I repeated often with unction and despair:

"Oh! Mussulmans! Oh! Mussulmans! There is no more Islam! Religion is lost! I am from Khamseh! Alas! Alas! I am from the vicinity of Zanjan! My poor mother is blind, my father's two sisters crippled, my wife paralyzed and my eight children are dying in misery! Alas! Mussul-

---

mans! If your charity does not promptly succor me, they are all going to starve to death and I will die of desperation."

At that very moment I heard a piercing cry next to me, and a voice that I immediately recognized, and which shot through my heart like an arrow of fire, cried:

"In God! By God! For God! It's Aga!"

I didn't hesitate a second.

"Leilah!" I cried.

As thick as the veil was that covered her, my eyes saw her face shining through! I was instantly transported by joy to the height of the seventh sphere.

"Silence, she said. You will be freed this very day or tomorrow at the very latest."

On these words she turned and disappeared together with two other women who accompanied her; and that evening, as I was dying of impatience, an officer arrived with a vekil; they cut my chains and the officer said to me:

"Go where you wish, you are free."

As he pronounced these words, I found myself clasped in someone's arms, yes! But in whose? My cousin Abdullah's!

God! how overjoyed I was to see him!

"Ah! my friend, my brother, my beloved, he said, how fortunate! What a reunion! When I heard from our cousin Kerim that you had been abducted by the military, who knows to what excess of grief I was about to abandon myself!

— The excellent Kerim! I cried. We always loved one another tenderly, he and I! Although I confess that now and then I preferred Suleiman, and, speaking of him, do you know that Suleiman. . . ."

Thereupon, I told him what had become of our worthy cousin and how he was in the midst of becoming a very learned mollah and a great personage in Meshhed. Abdullah was delighted by this tale.

"I regret, he said to me, that our kinsman Kerim was not to have so glorious a fate. It's a bit his fault. You know that he had an excessive weakness for cold tea."

This expression, "cold tea," refers, as everyone knows, among self-respecting people, to that horrible liquor that is called raki. I shook my head in a gesture of sorrow mixed with indignation:

"Kerim, I replied, used to drink cold tea, I am only too aware of it; for a long time I made an extraordinary effort to tear him away from this shameful habit; I never succeeded.

— Still, Abdullah continued, his situation could be worse. I employ him as a mule driver, and he transports merchandise for me on the road from Tabrîz to Trebizond. He earns a good living.

— What are you saying? I exclaimed. Is it possible that you have become a merchant?

— Yes! my brother, Abdullah replied, looking modest. I acquired some wealth, and that's what made it possible for me today to come to your help, when my wife revealed to me the unfortunate situation in which you found yourself.

— Your wife!"

I couldn't have been more surprised.

"Indeed, not having the means to keep this adorable creature in the way she deserved, Kerim consented to a divorce and I married her."

I wasn't too happy. But what could I do? Accept my destiny. One cannot escape it. More than once, I had had the opportunity to acknowledge this truth. It had just confronted me once more, and, I must say, in a way that affected me. I didn't say a word. Meanwhile I followed Abdullah. When we arrived near the New Gate, he led me into a most handsome house and guided me to the anderûn.[46]

There I found Leilah sitting on a rug. She received me affectionately. To my regret, I found her prettier than ever, more fetching, and my heart was swollen with tears. She

---

— 228 —

noticed it, and after taking tea, when Abdullah, who had some business, left us alone, she said to me:

"My poor Aga, I can see that you are a little sad.

— Very much so, I replied, lowering my head.

— You have to be reasonable, she went on, and I will hide nothing from you. I confess that I loved you very much and still do; but also that I was not insensitive to Suleiman's good qualities; Kerim's gaiety and liveliness delighted me; and I am filled with esteem and tenderness by Abdullah's merits. If I were asked to say which of my four cousins I prefer, I would ask that one man might be made out of the four; and that man, I am sure, I would love passionately and forever. But is this possible? I ask you. Don't cry. Rest assured that you are constantly alive in my heart. I couldn't marry Suleiman, who had nothing. I turned to you. You were a bit offhanded; but I forgive you. I know that you have tender ties to me. Kerim was setting me on the well-traveled road to misery. Abdullah made me rich. I must be reasonable in my turn, and I will be faithful to him to my death, while thinking of the three of you as men who. . . .But I have said enough. Abdullah is your cousin; love him; serve him; and he will do his best for you. You may well imagine that I will not stand in the way." She said many more affectionate things which, at first, made me twice as sad. However, as there was no other way, and as I was only too aware of it, I resigned myself in the future to be nothing more for Leilah than her uncle's son.

As a merchant Abdullah often dealt with important people. He did them favors and had some credit with them. Thanks to him, I was made a sultan in the Khassa or Private Regiment, which always stays in Teheran, in the palace, mounts the guard, carries the water, splits the wood and does construction work. Here I was, then, a captain, and I began devouring soldiers as I had been devoured myself, which gave me a very honorable position, about which I don't complain.

— 229 —

We are the King's Guard; they have often thought about giving us a magnificent uniform, and they still talk about it. I think that they'll go on talking about it to the end of time. Sometimes they plan to dress us like the troops watching over the Russian Emperor's life, who, it seems, wear green with gold stripes and embroideries. At other times, they want to dress us in red, still with gold stripes, embroideries, and fringes. But, dressed this way, how could soldiers be of any use? And who would pay for these beautiful costumes? Meanwhile, until they find a solution, our men have only torn breeches and often go hatless.

When I became an officer, I wanted to live with my peers and made many acquaintances. But among them, I became especially close to a sultan, a young man of excellent disposition. He had lived for a long time among the Frenguis, where he had been sent for his education.[47] He told me some very curious things. One evening when we had drunk a little more cold tea than usual, he expressed to me opinions that I found perfectly reasonable.

"You see, brother, he said, all Iranians are brutes, and Europeans are fools. In my case, I was raised among them. First they put me in school, and, then, as I had learned as well as those dogs what is required to take examinations, I entered their military school, which they call Saint Cyr. I stayed there two years, as they do themselves, then, having become an officer, I returned here. The people here wanted to hire me; they asked me what ought to be done. I told them; they mocked me, came to hate me; I was called an infidel and an impertinent, and put to the bastinado. At first, I wanted to die because Europeans look upon such a disgrace as a dishonor.

—The simpletons! I exclaimed, emptying my glass.

— Yes, they are simpletons, they don't understand that in our country everything, habits, mores, interests, climate, air, terrain, our past, our present make a total impossibil-

— 230 —

ity of what for them is utterly simple. When I saw that my death would be of no use at all, I reeducated myself. I stopped having opinions, wanting to change things, criticizing, contradicting, and I became like all of you: I kissed the hands of the Pillars of Power, and I said yes! yes! quite so! to the greatest absurdities! Then little by little they stopped persecuting me; but since they still mistrust me, I will never be anything more than a captain. We both know fifteen-year-old generals and eighteen-year-old marshals. We also know good warriors who are incapable of loading a rifle; as for me, I'm over fifty and I shall die poor, and under the cloud of an incurable suspicion, because I know how to lead troops and what would be required to stamp out the Turcomans on the border within three months. A curse on these European villains who are the cause of my miseries! Pass me the raki!"

That night, we drank so much that it was only on the evening of the next day that I was able to get up from the carpet, where I had fallen, and I left my comrade there.

Thanks to Abdullah's protection, I hope that I will be promoted major this year, unless they make me a colonel. Inshallah! Inshallah!

— 231 —

A Traveling Life

I would rather leave you at your parents'," Valerio said. Tears welled up in Lucie's eyes. She looked at the speaker with such anguish that it would be hard to imagine anything more painful.

"What! she whispered. We've been married hardly eight days!

— And for three of those, I've known of our ruin,[1] Valerio replied with a somber face. I am responsible for your life, and I cannot find anything to do here. I feel walled in by my sudden misery, and, if I cannot find a way out of my predicament, I shall be confronted by a desperate situation. So, my Lucie, I accepted a proposition. I shall leave, I shall work for you; but frankly, I do not find it in me to impose my new existence on you.

— If I loved you, Lucie answered, taking his hands, it was not my fault. If I will not and cannot leave you, it is not my fault either. I cannot imagine what would happen to me. I must follow you, I must live by your side; nothing else matters."

With these words Lucie pressed herself against her husband's chest; she took her beloved's head in her hands; she covered his forehead and his hair with passionate kisses, and a vanquished Valerio, returning kiss for kiss, said:

"That's the end of it. You're coming with me."

It is of little importance at this point to know how and why Valerio Conti had learned five days after his wedding that a disloyal agent had just made off with his fortune.

— 232 —

He was an active man, a witty, knowing and deserving one. He had traveled several years in the Orient, and one of his friends, learning of his disaster, had immediately interceded and had arranged for him to return to Constantinople with the certainty of finding work there, either in that capital or in the Ottoman provinces.

He sold everything he owned. His father-in-law, exasperated at having a destitute son-in-law and, moreover, a son-in-law who was taking his daughter away, gave him very little and that with the sternest warnings that he would never give him any more; and the pair of poor young lovers, one twenty-six years old and the other eighteen, left from Naples on a steamer that would take them through Hellenic seas to ancient Byzantium.

Knowing how to travel is not everybody's calling any more than knowing how to love, how to understand and how to feel. Not everyone is able to penetrate the real meaning of those new sights that the changing scene brings any more than everyone is fit to grasp the sense of a Beethoven sonata, a da Vinci or Veronese painting, of the Arles Venus,[2] or of Bianca Capello's passion.[3]

On board the ship that was carrying Valerio and Lucie along the blue sheet of the sea between the gemstone islands[4] and the Archipelago, there was a sizable group of those excellent animals which fashion flushes out of their barns every spring and pushes to take, as they say, a trip to the Orient.

They go to the Orient and they come back, and they are not any wiser once back home. They have learned nothing of the past or the present of those places; they know neither the how nor the why of things. Landscapes that do not resemble Normandy or Somersetshire only seem ridiculous to them. The city streets have no sidewalks; it is unbearably hot in the desert; there are too many ruins and they are frequented by those little animals that are called scorpions; armies of fleas have the nerve to conduct intolerable expeditions on

— 233 —

the persons of the travelers; the natives want too many baksheesh, and their jargon is unintelligible. All this childishness does not amount to much, and one generally assumes that the voyager will stop with these tactful remarks which, moreover, if the will were there, might even expand the circle of his experience and take him a little farther under the crust of things. What bars him from it is that he does not know how to see. Were he to travel as long as Isaac Laquedem,[5] he would never see the beauty, the singularity, the unique features of what was spread out under his eyes. Infinite glory to that omnipotent and good wisdom which has, indeed, given the empire of the world to the evil and the stupid but which did not enable these evil and stupid ones to perceive its perfections, measure its bounties and comprehend its merits!

On the ship there were two or three Englishmen, three or four Frenchmen, five or six Germans entirely preoccupied with the ship's dinner and lunch, playing whist a part of the day, and the rest of the time chatting with two actresses from Marseilles engaged by the Pera theater, plus a furniture dealer who was on his way to establishing his business in Smyrna. Those people went to the Orient and came back from it with the same profit they would have found pacing around an empty room.[6] Once more, glory to the kindly and benevolent Lord who reserved something exclusively for the chosen!

Valerio knew a great deal; Lucie was ignorant: but Lucie sensed instinctively the value of what has value; she guessed its underlying worth at least as well as Valerio, perhaps with even more finesse, and she avidly sought explanations. Nothing escaped her; novelty struck her and propelled her into fantasies in which her imagination burrowed unceasingly. A palikar[7] coming on board, swaying his hips with that arrogant and triumphant look peculiar to the Albanians, was enough to transport her mind to the Acroceraunian[8] mountains about whose picturesque horrors her husband was just

— 234 —

then telling her. The cerulean swells, gently pushing one another, led her thoughts away to the still invisible shores of that Africa full of sand, of lions, of human violence combined with nature's violence; and these strewn gems, amethysts, topazes, tourmalines, rubies, which one calls the Archipelago, thrown there in the middle of a sapphire sea, made her understand how the ancient people, at the time of so much splendor, of so many forever alive, changing and seductive wonders, had received in their souls a profound conviction: the gods were there, present; the sunbeams were the very hair of Apollo, the divine coachman; Dawn herself kneaded the joyous firmament with her rosy fingers; and unwilling to extinguish or do more than barely hide them, sacred Night smilingly enveloped in her veils sparks of fire lighted on the forehead of Andromeda, Callisto and the Homeric twins, sublime cavaliers and protectors of ships.[9]

On a magnificent day, when Lucie, leaning on Valerio's arm, gazed from the ship upon that point of bluish rock from which the white columns of the Sounion temple arise, she experienced a kind of dizziness. Grace, majesty, eternal youth appeared before her together in the mutilated and still standing remains of this temple in whose shadow Plato had been seen to sit and teach.

One of Dante's opinions, accepted by the Order of Saint Dominic, teaches that the damnation of men shall consist in this, that they will obtain in excess what they loved, what they sought, what they desired in their earthly existence. Thus put in possession of their wishes for the duration of eternity, they shall by the same token have the misfortune of knowing what is beyond with the certainty that they will never be able to reach it.[10]

It matters little. There are gifts in this world whose darker side one can accept, and among these is a powerful experience of nature. Whoever sees well and loves what he sees, whoever grasps the full content of the mind's inventive

— 235 —

intuition masters nature itself: he soars over its summits, descends into its depths.

You must admit that it is no little matter to sail along the Trojan plains, which are dominated by the Asiatic Olympus, and there to contemplate Tenedos. Step by step the shrinking shores of the Dardanelles moved away from the travelers. The Marmara basin opened up; and at the back of this large, rounded cup appeared the majestic height which, connected by innumerable towers, the Byzantine walls embrace, girdling Constantinople. From this enclosure a forest of minarets and domes rises above a thousand dark-leaved cypresses, themselves like pyramids.

The view of Constantinople has been compared to that of Naples. But what conection is there between even the most charming genre painting and the grandest known historical scene, between a masterpiece by Lorrain and a miracle by Veronese? It has also been compared to the bay of Rio de Janeiro. But what is this superb entanglement of innumerable basins succeeding one another under lacerated mountains, whose vertical ridges bristling with forests resemble pipe organs, where only physical nature shows, where no trace of humanity speaks, where the eyes alone are astonished, dazzled? What does this entirely material opulence have in common with the view of Constantinople, an animated, magnificent, intelligent, eloquent scene, locus of the greatest past, forever inhabited by memories and by the sublime creations of genius? What is the most perfected of anonymous and silent landscapes next to so expressive a spectacle? When physical nature is not impregnated with moral nature[11] it provides but little emotion for the soul, and that is why the most dazzling scenes from the New World could never equal the slightest aspect of the ancient.

Valerio had taken along from Naples a letter of introduction to one of the ambassadors representing a great power. Count P.[12] received him very well and understood from the

---

start what sort of a fine, perceptive, impressionable and rare temperament he was dealing with. He was himself one of these. He had seen, experienced, learned a great deal — and remembered it all. To retain as he did the persistent vibrations of past emotions in his memory and heart is not given to everyone. In brief, in spite of the deadening effect of important business, he had remained capable of enthusiasm about people or things.

The young couple charmed him. These two migrant swallows, who having lost their shelter now flew startled through the world, aroused his sympathy. He took their interests to heart, and, one morning, arriving at his protégés', he took both their hands and spoke to them as follows:

"Your lot seems to me settled for the moment. Keep in mind that the last remnants of generosity and chivalry, so completely extinguished in Europe, are still alive here in the souls of a few Turks of ancient stock. Naturally I am talking about those Ottomans who have known the Janissaries.[13] Thanks to the friends I have among them, you, Valerio, have been given a very undefined mission on the eastern borders of the Empire. Those who are sending you do not know what you will have to do, and hardly care to learn it. What matters to them is that you enter the service of the Sublime Porte. You will survey forests, mines, places where roads could be established but which in any case will never be established, and you will give your opinion if it suits you. Go! You have been recommended to all the Empire's governors. When you come back, you will be given a position that will perhaps give you an entry into what modern speech magnificently calls 'practical life,' that is to say into all the platitudes, stupidities, cowardices of today's life. Once more, go, my children. For a few months you will have nothing else to do except to go forward, where you wish, as you wish, fast or slow; nothing, no one rushes you. I have known this life; and I will forever mourn its loss. It is the sole and unique one worthy of

---

a thinking being. Go, be contented, fill the world with your love and your love with the infinite charm of the world."

We now find Valerio and Lucie debarked on the distant shores of Trebizond. They have crossed this Black Sea, this Euxine, which has seen so many things; and yet, of all these things, the most memorable and the most talked about is the ancient Argonaut.[14]

On the quay there was a throng of Europeans, who in that part of the world are called Franks: sailors, merchants, adventurers of all sorts, Ionians, Greeks, Maltese, Dalmatians, French, English, Wallachians, a sad multitude which crawls low in the descending scale of creatures. However, their minds are sometimes marked with a trait that partly alleviates their vulgarity; they have a sense of the unexpected, a love of action and audacity: sometimes too a cowardice worthy of the "capitano" in Italian comedy and not lacking in originality.[15]

Mixed with this motley, restless crowd, a few Osmanlis passed by, beads in hand. Almost all of

them were degraded by modern attire, which they wore and understood in their own way, which is to say, very badly: a brown or blue overcoat with split or torn sleeves, so as to make ablutions easier, disgustingly stained trousers, an ill-laundered shirt whose collar was puckered by a tie that was pulled too tight, a fez pushed to the back of the head; sometimes along with their beads, a thick cigarette held between dirty fingers. When, on the heinous advice of the Colchide sorceress, poor Aeson's daughters undertook to rejuvenate their father, they stripped him bare, cut him into pieces, settled him into the boiling cauldron, then removed him piecemeal, shaped, trimmed, and served him;[16] poor Aeson, I would think, must have had the pitiful appearance, form, and build of a reclaimed Turk.

Across from this poor chap, Circassian immigrants stood in a somber and aggressive posture. Because they too were

— 238 —

Moslems, these fierce men had counted on the Turk's hospitality to replace the homeland they had abandoned to the hands of the Russians. They had found only starvation and indifference.[17] Despair clouded their eyes; misery weighed heavily on their backs; death confronted them and they beheld it clearly. Helpless and half resigned, they watched the ships in the roads and the debarking passengers. Meanwhile, an Abazian,[18] a determined brigand, clad in brown, with short, tight breeches, his turban the same color as his coat, a rifle on his shoulder, a dagger at his belt, and his wife respectfully ten steps behind him, was watching the newly arrived with the look of a wild beast stalking a herd of buffalo and seeking a way to corner one of them away from his fellows and shepherds.

Trebizond in itself has nothing very special about it. In this case, the name is more grand than the thing. The houses are neither Turkish nor European; they partake of both styles. There are few remains of the past, and what there is is insignificant. The streets are wide and too large for the very modest shops lining them. Buildings painted in red or sky blue cannot be associated with any obvious style of architecture. After all, Trebizond is interesting only insofar as it is both the last and the first word of the enigma: it is the gate to Asia. Beyond it the unknown begins; at its gates is seated Adventure, which mounts behind the voyager and rides off with him.[19]

Accompanied by the zaptiehs[20] whom the governor had provided, Valerio and Lucie had gone a few leagues along the narrow road paved with large stone blocks, which, although recently built, looked left over from an ancient past, when they found themselves in the midst of a totally idyllic nature: fields, trees lining the banks of brooks, and mountains unfolding to the right. Soon the setting opened, the idyll became an epic, and the song that the two lovers felt warbling in their hearts exploded like a symphony whose chords

— 239 —

and melodies filled their whole being. With the same intensity, the delicious vertigo they felt transported them out of themselves. Mounted on horses which gaily tossed their fine heads, they rode ahead of their escort and felt alone, completely alone, truly belonging to each other. How fully they lived! How fully they loved! And nothing prevented them from loving! No worry brushed its dark wing against the bloom of their tenderness, and, in the bosom of this vast nature, they were as free to yield to feelings no less simple and vast than it, just as formerly, at the dawn of time, the blissful couple of the first Eden had been able to do before the fall and the beginning of enslaving labor. It was indeed a sort of Eden they had entered, for they were traveling among the valleys of the Taurus.

For several days, the banks of a large, calm, limpid river, which flowed majestically toward the sea, stretched inland before their gaze. Thick forest covered the flanks of mountains rising in harmonious tiers. Wooden huts clung to the slopes and could be seen even on the crests; herds were grazing in green pastures and filled the winds with the tinkling of bells. Innumerable flowers, periwinkles especially, uninhibitedly spread their petals at the foot of enormous, rough barked trees, whose lush green branches twisted boldly, whose roots abruptly sprung out of the ground and displayed on their network every kind of moss and grass. Everywhere vigor and pride, everywhere grace and charm. Eagles and hawks described their hunting circles way up in the dome of the sky. Singing birds were gaily frolicking under the greenery. Above the clouds steep rocks suddenly leaping from the thick of the woods formed a sort of vast esplanade from which rose some huge fortification, the decayed work of the Byzantine emperors. As for size, height and architecture, the latter unbelievably whimsical, Europe has never known anything like it. It is there that one can contemplate in a reality resembling a dream the exact counterparts of those magic

— 240 —

castles that Atlant the Enchanter and his peers conjured up with a magical formula for the greater glory of chivalry.[21] Before the crusaders had conceived such astonishing architecture, it would have been impossible for a poet, even one the most disdainful of verisimilitude, to imagine and describe it for the entertainment of listeners, who would not have believed that it existed. Vast curtains, on their flanks sculptured mousharabys[22] piled one on the other, towers bearing clusters of pinnacles and garlanded with turrets, dungeons carved like lace, doors opening onto endless space, windows from where it seemed that it was possible to gaze into the depths of the heavens, and all that on an enormous scale, incredibly delicate and elegant, such is the spectacle; and, I repeat, beneath, clouds float while the sun lovingly sparkles on platforms festooned with innumerable crenels.

Once in Arz-roum,[23] the lovers were warmly welcomed by the governor. He was a Curd. He had been raised in a Parisian school, and had spent some time in Constantinople, in the offices of the Porte; appointed a secretary to the Berlin legation, he had made a three-year halt there before being transferred to a minor court as a plenipotentiary. He had been called back; after having been kaimakam in Baiburt,[24] he had been in Arz-roum as pasha[25] for a year. He was a gentlemanly character, a mediocre Mussulman, but, on the other hand, in no way a Christian; his confidence in the future of his government and his country did not go very far; he had little faith in the merit and even less in the concreteness of the reforms; but he strongly believed in the necessity of making his personal position as comfortable as possible. His European habits had not at all smothered his Asiatic instincts; and those, in turn, did not attempt to react unduly against training and education. He enjoyed the delicate refinements of grooming, although he was no longer young; he had a weakness for armchairs and furniture from Paris; he liked to have albums around him and insisted above all on

— 241 —

his table being served as though he were living in the heart of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. To this end, he kept a French cook and majordomo. He also subscribed to the *Siècle* and to the *Journal illustré* .[26] In brief, Osman Pasha was a man of taste in spite of a few flaws; the gilt had not penetrated to the core of the Curdish metal.

Several years earlier this eminent personage had married, and since he had wisely understood that an Osmanli girl of good family would only bring to his household old-fashioned habits to which he himself was in no way accustomed, he had preferred to let his choice fall upon a Circassian slave whom a Caucasian merchant, a Russian subject, had sold to him at a rather high price. That young person was pretty, spoke French, knew geography, and skillfully played waltzes and quadrilles on the piano. That was more than was necessary to assure Osman Pasha's domestic happiness. That happiness was complete. The Khanum,[27] the lady, dressed in the European way and only in the Parisian fashion, in which she also dressed her two children, a girl and a boy. She was bored in Arz-roum. She would have liked to go to the theater, the ball, the Bois de Boulogne, the Chantilly races, suppers at the Café Anglais. *Le Journal des modes*[28] had revealed to her the existence of this enchanted world of which she dreamed. For sophisticated Asiatics, the ideal of the intelligent life is, for men, the club and, for women, the demimonde. Osman Pasha and Fatmeh Khanum were delighted to see Valerio and Lucie arrive. It was a diversion.

It lasted only a few days. Arz-roum is not an attractive town. Situated on a high and barren plateau, its streets are windswept, inhospitable, surrounded by a bleak and sterile plain. It rains there constantly; the sky is gray. Valerio stayed only long enough to make arrangements with the leader of the caravan that was starting out for Persia and to whom he meant to entrust his destiny. He dismissed

— 242 —

his zaptiehs, who were not supposed to accompany him any further, and, having come to an agreement with the head muleteer, he announced his departure to Osman Pasha and took leave of him. Lucie did the same in the harem with Fatmeh Khanum. There were fervent expressions of regret, many tears, and endless embracing; then, toward two o'clock in the morning, Valerio and Lucie, with two Mussulman servants, took leave of their kind hosts and started out to join their future traveling companions.

As is customary, the caravan[29] had left the city two days earlier and was camping at a half hour's distance from the suburb. It was of considerable size. In the moonlight one could see strings of pack mules and of horses tethered by the fetlock to stakes and eating their morning barley; departure was imminent. Fires were burning here and there; bundles of merchandise rose like walls and in many places formed cubicles whose occupants were busy removing the temporary furnishings composed of carpets and blankets on and under which they had slept. These movable constructions formed sorts of

streets in which already a very bustling crowd was circulating. Here and there stood a few light tents through whose fabric one could see the glow of the morning lamps and the shadows passing back and forth inside them. Near a charcoal stove a great many small traders had spread out on the ground pastries, thin flaky bread, what was needed to make tea and coffee, cups, milk dishes, a bit of mutton and chicken. One breakfasted. One came and one went; the muleteers gathered their bundles, put ropes around them and began to load the animals. Holy men chanted prayers aloud. Valerio had himself taken to the head muleteer, leaving Lucie for a little while with a Turkish family going to Bayazid, to which the pasha had recommended the young Italian lady.

A head muleteer,[30] a caravan leader, does not hold a hierarchic rank amid the public servants in any Mussulman

— 243 —

country. He is nevertheless an important character in a certain way; he enjoys two privileges most rare in this world: first, he commands everything around him, and his authority is never questioned; second, his honesty is always unchallenged, and only rarely is it challengeable.

In regard to Kerbelai Hossein, the head muleteer with whom Valerio happened to deal, this last point was a certainty: one had only to look at him attentively to recognize immediately the signs of innate integrity on his face. Kerbelai Hossein was a man of average size, stocky, remarkably strong; half of his face was covered to the cheekbones by a short, black, curly beard; his frank and brave eyes looked at you openly and firmly; he had a tan complexion and the grave and prudent look befitting a man used to responsibility. Kerbelai Hossein was from the province of Shooster, formerly Susiana,[31] from which most of his comrades came. He personally owned three hundred pack mules, that is to say, a fairly respectable holding. He was therefore rich and respected; but as was proper for a man of his profession, he did not give himself any pompous title, did not even insist on being called *beg* ,[32] walked around in quite decent but very ordinary wool clothes, and contented himself by being the most despotic and inflexible of legislators. Futhermore, he never got angry, his obstinacy could match that of his most obstinate mules.

"Master, Valerio said to this personage, are you going to Tabrîz?

— Inshallah, if it pleases God! Kerbelai Hossein answered with pious reserve.

— How many days do you think the journey will take?

— God alone knows! the leader replied still in the same tone. That will depend on the weather, on the condition of the grazing for my mules, on the price of barley at the different stations, and finally, on the time we shall spend in Bayazid[33] and elsewhere.

— 244 —

— So you cannot tell me at all ahead of time when we shall arrive?"

The muleteer smiled.

"Every time I have met Europeans, he said, I have always noticed that they were in a hurry. Believe me, the hour of death always comes. You have time enough; we shall arrive in Tabrîz not one minute sooner nor one minute later than fate has decided. Take my word, live contented, without further worry.

— You look to me like a good man, Valerio replied, and I believe that you are one. I am therefore going to talk with you heart to heart. I have a young wife, and I fear that the prolonged hardship of the road might be a bit too much for her; that is why I came to consult with you about what could be done so that my wife will suffer as little as possible. Then I have another thing to ask of you. I am taking along some money for the trip, and with all the people there are here in the caravan, I don't feel comfortable having it always on my person; I'm afraid that I will be robbed.

— It is most certainly what will happen before two days have passed, the muleteer answered, if you keep your purse on you. Give it to me. I will pay for your expenses on the road, and I will give you an account of the balance when we arrive at our destination."

This offer was exactly what Valerio was hoping for, and he hastened to place what he possessed in the hands of Kerbelai Hossein. The latter counted and recounted the money and, as is customary, put it in a chest without giving a receipt. He himself remarked about it, and said to Valerio with a smile:

— I once went as far as Trebizond and two other times as far as Smyrna. It appears that you Europeans are great thieves, for your merchants constantly require guarantees from one another. But you should understand that if muleteers were not men of honor who have absolutely no need

— 245 —

to be constantly proving their honesty, business would simply not be possible. Look, right now, a great Teheran merchant depends on me! A year ago he gave me eighty thousand tomauns[34] so that I could bring back to him wool and cotton cloth, porcelains, crystals, silk and velvet, all of which I had to order from Constantinople. I spent sixty thousand tomauns and I am bringing him back the balance. Take my brother, who leads a caravan from Baghdad to Shiraz, from Shiraz to Yezd, and from Yezd to Kerman. He lately had an order for one hundred thousand tomauns worth of shawls destined to a merchant in Cairo. He spent one hundred and fifty thousand tomauns, which were completely paid to him on his word. If we muleteers opened ourselves to the least doubt, I tell you again, what would become of business! Indeed, Effendi,[35] God most high and merciful must be greatly thanked, for, having created all men thieves, he did not permit the muleteers to be so!"

Thereupon Kerbelai Hossein started to laugh, and, as tea was being brought, he offered a cup to Valerio, who accepted.

"Now, the good man continued, you asked me another question and since I found it to be by far the most important, I will answer it last. Excuse the freedom with which I am going to talk to you of your house;[36] I know that Europeans are not so reticent on these matters as we are, and I approve of them, for there is much pretense in our supposed reserve and, moreover, I am the father of a family; I have four daughters married and with children, and I will talk about your wife as I would about a daughter of mine, since you trusted me enough to consult me on her account.

— Kerbelai Hossein, you are a worthy man, Valerio replied; I shall listen to you with my full attention and trust.

— To start with, you were wrong to bring your house with you on this voyage which you undertake. I imagine

---

— 246 —

well enough what your wives are like; not at all like ours; I saw that at a glance in cities inhabited by the Frenguis.[37] Ours? You put two of them on a mule, one on the right side, the other on the left, with a blue canvas above them and three or four children in their laps. They chat and sleep, and one does not worry about them. If they are very great ladies, instead of these cajavehs[38] they are given a takhte-ravan, a large box carried by two animals, one in front, the other behind; it pitches and rolls like a boat; they are quite comfortable in there. But your wives are too refined; you teach them so many things, you spoil them so much, that it is impossible to treat them in this fashion. Therefore my opinion is that they should not come to our countries where there are no carriages, no fine furniture, and where, to the contrary, there is too much sun, too much heat or too much cold, much hardship, which they cannot take.

— What is the meaning of this fear that you are trying to give me, Kerbelai Hossein, Valerio answered. Thank Heaven, my wife is strong, in good health, and so far has adapted herself to everything and has not suffered at all.

— Undoubtedly, undoubtedly! Glory to God that it has been so; but it is now that the difficulties start. Well, everything will work out, Inshallah! Inshallah! It is not my intention to frighten you without a reason, Effendi, but just to urge you to caution; for you know that usually you people do not know much about common sense. I hope that it is not so in your case. I have a pretty little horse which has an easy gait. I will send it to you at once to transport your house; it is better than her present mount." Valerio was in the midst of thanking the worthy muleteer when shrill cries were heard, furious imprecations, a dreadful uproar. A muleteer was running and waving his arms through the crowd, which seemed indignant.

"What is the matter? Kerbelai Hossein calmly inquired.

— 247 —

— It is a scoundrel of a Shemsiyèh,[39] the muleteer answered, who dares try to join the caravan! Did you ever see such impertinence? We want to chase him! He won't budge!

— I will talk to him, Kerbelai Hossein answered gravely," and he started in the direction indicated by the agitation and cries of the crowd. Valerio followed him and they arrived outside of the camp on the banks of a small brook dominated by a boulder; at the foot of the boulder stood a man whom the people of the caravan were insulting and threatening. The Turks were particularly relentless; the Persians sneered and shouted insults; Catholic Armenians raised their arms to the sky with exclamations of sorrow and shame; several Jews shook their heads gravely bemoaning this desolation and abomination, but they did not make too much noise. A few stones aimed at the target of the

general hostility bounced off the boulder. They were thrown by Curdish children.

The Shemsiyèh, who was standing, his whole body recoiling in response to the projectiles that were being thrown and that Kerbelai Hossein stopped with a gesture, appeared to be about forty years old. His face seemed sweet or rather meek and fearful; his mouth was smiling, he kept his eyes lowered and rapidly glanced about him. He was dressed in the Curdish fashion, but wore a white felt cap of a very small size; he held in his hand a small round shield covered with braids and tassles which he clutched convulsively to protect himself from the stoning; he carried a saber and a dagger, but showed no intention at all of using them.

"What do you want, dog? Kerbelai Hossein said severely.

— My lord, the Shemsiyèh replied with an inimitable smile and extreme humility, I am asking Your Excellency's permission to join the caravan and go as far as Agajik.[40] I do not intend to cost anyone anything; I am not asking for charity. Be only so kind as to authorize me to join you, that is all I want."

A general cry of outrage rose from all around.

— 248 —

"What's the meaning of all this? Valerio asked. Is this man a criminal or afflicted with the plague?"

Kerbelai Hossein slightly shrugged his shoulders:

"He's only a Shemsiyèh, he whispered to his interlocutor; he worships the idols of former times and, they say, the sun; the Turks would like to eat him because he venerates neither Osman, nor Omar, nor Aboubekr;[41] the Persians would like to see him eaten because they enjoy a good show and a row; the Christians and the Jews take this occasion to prove themselves zealous partisans of divine unity; only God knows the truth of these matters! As for me, I would disrupt my whole caravan if I were to go against the feelings of these people. The Shemsiyèh cannot come with us. Off with you! he shouted in a stern voice. Off with you! Infidel, cursed scoundrel, go on! How dare you even think of joining such an honorable company?

— I am the Sultan's subject, like the rest of you, the Shemsiyèh replied in a rather firm voice. If I travel alone to Agajik, I will be robbed and murdered on the way. You don't have the right to exclude me; I am not harming anyone, and the new laws[42] apply to me as well as to Mussulmans and the other people of the Book."[43]

Thereupon a furious outcry arose among the citizens of the caravan, stones began again to fly from all sides and even sabers were about to be unsheathed when Kerbelai Hossein, striking three or four good blows around him with his stick, which drew painful screams from the victims but which checked the advance of the crowd, shouted louder than everyone else:

"I don't care about the new laws! Get out! Stop disturbing honest people who are going about their business. If God in his impenetrable wisdom permits you to stain the world with your presence, at least let it not be among us!"

Unanimous applause drowned the end of this edifying speech, but Valerio, watching the Shemsiyèh's face, saw tears

---

— 249 —

running down his cheeks; he too was moved, and he said brusquely to Kerbelai Hossein, in a way to be clearly heard by the crowd:

"I'll take this man as my servant. I don't know whether he's a Shemsiyèh or whether he isn't, and I don't care. If anyone attacks me or mine, he will answer to the vizir[44] of Arz-roum. Is that clear, Kerbelai Hossein?

— Perfectly, the other answered with a wink of complicity. But I do not, however, want to vex anyone. Mussulmans, Christians, and Jews, do you hear what the European gentleman has just said? I am a poor muleteer, and I must respect the orders of the Sublime Government! If any one of you is not satisfied, I urge him to stay in Arz-roum. But now the animals are loaded, so Forward!"

On this magic word, the crowd dispersed, suddenly driven by a keen sense of their business and their immediate interests, and while the loaded camels and the rest of the caravan walked by, the Shemsiyèh seized Valerio's hand and kissed it.

"I have a dying wife in Agajik, he whispered; I had come to Arz-roum to find a bit of work. I am bringing back money. God bless and save you!

— How is that you do not recommend me to all the gods? Valerio answered, smiling.

— I do not wish to shock your opinions, the man of the Ancient Faith answered, but only to express my gratitude to you."

Valerio hastened to rejoin Lucie with his new servant and explained to her what had just happened. The little ambler sent by Kerbelai Hossein arrived, and after trying it, Lucie found it quite to her liking. As usual, Valerio rode to her left. The Shemsiyèh was walking on the other side, a few servants followed; once the sun was high in the sky, it lit the caravan which was now well under way. It was a very beautiful and grand sight.

— 250 —

The immense train composed of two thousand travelers stretched out over a long distance. Strings of camels and mules succeeded one another uninterruptedly, watched over by the guards who, their heads covered with round or cylindrical caps, identical to those one sees on antique vases and sculptures, were sewing or knitting wool while walking. Kerbelai Hossein, riding a very modest horse and gravely rolling his beads in his fingers, was surrounded by a few horsemen as serious as he, either mollahs[45] or important merchants. This worthy group was, obviously, the object of general respect. Here traders ran about driving their animals on; elsewhere there were people rather richly garbed, belonging to professions other than commerce, perhaps employees of the governor, or soldiers, or landowners. Then there was the crowd, mostly on foot, chattering, gesticulating, laughing, moving here and there; sometimes one of these men would say to a muleteer:

"Brother, here is a beast which isn't carrying anything. May I ride it?

— Yes, the muleteer would answer; what will you pay me?"

The deal would be struck underway; the man would pay and enjoy the ride. Then the women, who kept apart, moved along making much more noise than the men. There were endless chirpings, laughter, shrieks, rages, fears, adjurations; and from time to time children added their shrill cries. You see, then, this mass: camels, horses, mules, donkeys, and dogs, and the crabbed and the elegant, and priests, and Mussulmans, and Christians, and Jews, and everything; and you hear its din. The crowd advanced, advanced slowly, but at the same time, it seemed to be constantly eddying on itself; for those on foot especially, in their constant agitation, went from the head to the tail of the convoy, and from the tail to the head to talk to someone, to meet someone, bring someone together with someone else; it was a perpetual motion

---

— 251 —

and an effervescence that never stopped. Lucie was at once dizzied, astonished, amused to the extreme. She asked her husband a thousand simultaneous explanations of the various aspects of this new spectacle; nothing had prepared her so far to conceive of such a sight. And yet it is precisely in this organized roving that the Asiatic temperament and mind thrives the best.

Around eight o'clock the caravan stopped to rest the whole day and only started again in the night around two o'clock. Kerbelai Hossein, faithful to his duties toward the young European couple, came in person to show them to a choice site, where he had their tent erected. It was placed in the middle of the most elegant, aristocratic quarter, as it would be called in Europe, in which only serious folk and those worthy of consideration lived. It was more respectable but less entertaining than other areas of the camp. So Valerio took a very carefully veiled Lucie for a stroll around.

What could be considered as the middle-class quarter had fewer tents, mostly small and low ones. The largest part of these habitations consisted merely of bundles stacked one upon the other and covered with lengths of cloth put between the sun and the head of the landlord of what could hardly be called a building. Some of these arrangements were very pretty and comfortable, well furnished with rugs and cushions.

In the popular quarter one saw only open-air encampments, lighted fires, a few huts contrived out of mule and camel saddle packs; there the people, very little sybaritic indeed, slept lying under the sharp light with their abas[46] over their heads; and, everywhere in the three quarters, cook shops, grocers, tea and coffee sellers were set up, and from many a corner, invariably occupied by an Armenian, the sound of guitars and tambourines was heard. It was wise not to venture too far in those directions.

— 252 —

"Madame, said a hoarse voice in Italian, Madame, I greet you and stand in front of you as a most unfortunate woman."[47]

Lucie stopped, Valerio did the same, and they saw beside them a woman dressed like a man, in the Persian manner, wearing a straw hat on her head.

"What country do you come from? asked Valerio.

— From Trieste, sir. My name is Signora Euphemia Cabarra. Such as you see me now, I am making the trip from my native city to Teheran for the twenty-seventh time.

— It must be a very compelling reason that has reduced you to such a harsh existence? Valerio asked."

The woman was not very tall; she seemed to be extremely thin; hooked nose, thin mouth, small, bright eyes gave her whole physiognomy an expression of hardness and rapacity little agreeable to see. She replied:

"First I followed my husband, a military musician hired by the Persian government. I did well enough with a small business of mine. Signor Cabarra died. I went back to Trieste to buy more merchandise, and I came back. I have continued to sell, make a little, lose a little. I got used to coming and going like this. I enjoy this existence more than any other. Sometimes I find work as a cook, either in harems where they are curious about European dishes or in some legation. Right now I'm carrying along with me a small stock of cheap odds and ends. I save my money, camp with the muleteers, eat bread and cheese, and I serve God to the best of my ability.

— It's a very hard existence! Lucie exclaimed.

— My dear lady, the woman replied with morose gravity, each human creature has his lot. It is not the life I lead which is the cause of my misfortune. I have seen many a queer thing in my time.

— I do not doubt it, Valerio replied. You should tell them to someone who could write them down. It would assuredly make an interesting book.

— 253 —

— The book has been done," said Signora Euphemia Cabarra, and she pulled out of her pocket a small duodecimo volume printed on coarse, ordinary paper and in a rather crude type. She handed it to Valerio, who looked at the first page, on which was written:

"The Unique and Truthful Adventures of a Lady from Trieste in the Numerous Voyages She Made by Herself in Turkey, Persia, in the Land of the Turcomans and in India, for the Greater Glory of God and the Triumph of Religion."

Valerio looked here and there without reading anything at all about the countries visited by the author; it consisted of a series of anecdotes relating the innumerable instances when Mme Cabarra's virtue had been most endangered, from which she emerged as pure as crystal and absolutely triumphant. From that moment on, this paragon of respectability followed Lucie and Valerio, and, in exchange for a small salary, undertook to do the cooking.

After a few days Valerio discovered still one more European in the caravan. This one was a very young man from Neufchâtel, Switzerland. He had fallen in love with the Orient through reading voyagers' memoirs and wrote verses. He wanted, he said, to draw his inspiration from the very source of sublime exaltation, and his ideal was Thomas Moore's Lalla-Rookh.[48] Valerio's impression of him was that he was half crazy. The poetry the enthusiastic young man showed him at their first encounter seemed to him dreadful. The poor boy did not know much. He wore his hair long, a red silk sash, a cross-hilted sword like the knights of old, heavy boots with gilded spurs and a plume on his hat. However, his travel money was scanty, and, in order to economize it, he followed the example of Signora Cabarra; he ate with the muleteers and slept on their blankets. He was thin, pale, debilitated; his chest was bad. Before reaching the Persian frontier he died and a public health officer, a Saxon ex-student, had him buried and had a stone placed on his grave on which

---

— 254 —

he personally inscribed the victim's name beneath a lyre. It must surely have been a solace for the wandering soul of one who could never have played that instrument. Apparently a head full of sublimity and blind recklessness is not sufficient for making the best of things. Lucie's heart was filled with sadness at the sight of this unfortunate character who, if it had not been for his bad judgment, could perhaps have made in La Chaux-de-Fonds, say, or Moûtiers,[49] a quite decent solicitor's clerk. But there was nothing one could do except let destiny toy with its prey to its heart's content. Each day revealed some new individual to the two lovers, some tragic like the poet, others grotesque and strong like the Triestina, others touching like the one I am going to tell you about, or noteworthy like the one after that.

Lucie noticed near her tent each morning a young family composed of a husband, wife and child. The husband may have been about twenty and the wife about fourteen or fifteen. She never failed to greet Lucie, and, although she could not speak with her, she made herself understood with signs, and these gestures were most amiable and graceful. The husband was eager to make himself as useful as he could to his two camp neighbors. He would help take the tent down, fold it, load the mules, and all this, without seeming obsequious, and with that natural easiness and gaiety which are the prerogatives of Orientals who have a gift for living. He told his story himself to Valerio:

"My name, he said, is Redjèb Ali and I come from a village near Yezd.[50] This woman, who is mine, is also my cousin; we were raised together, and from the time of our birth, our parents had decided that we were to marry. Two years ago, as this plan was about to be carried out, the young woman fell ill, and it was clear to everyone that she was going to die. The Jewish physician made no secret of it; she had only a few hours left, and when I saw her on her bed, pale and about to expire, her father and mine, her mother and

---

— 255 —

mine, crying, sobbing, and uttering heartrending screams, it was more than I could bear; I kissed her lips, saying good-bye to her as well as to all my hopes, and I ran out into the street. As I crossed the doorstep of the house, my eyes so blinded by tears that I couldn't see what I was doing, I bumped against someone who suddenly took me in his arms.

— What is the matter? he said in a rasping voice.

— Leave me alone, I answered angrily, I'm in no mood to talk to anyone.

— But I am in the world, he replied, to speak to the afflicted and to console them. Tell me about your misery and perhaps I will have the remedy.

I took a look then at the person who detained me and saw that it was an old dervish with a white beard and a look both kind and rough.

— Oh! Father, I answered, death is inside this house. Let me go now, you know everything!

And struggling energetically, I pushed him away and fled. As for him, from what I heard later, he made no effort to hold onto me and without hesitation entered my parents' house; he came into the room where my fiancée was expiring, with a gesture pushed away the people there, grasped the patient's arm, and without saying a word, pulled a lancet out of his pocket. He bled her copiously; then, while an abundance of blood was flowing, he took from his belt a vial containing a red liquor and poured several drops into a glass of water and forced my cousin to swallow some of it. After which, he opened the door wide, ordered everyone to go out and to stay in the courtyard, for, he said, the child needed air.

He himself sat at the foot of the bed and kept his eyes fixed on the dying girl. Why do I say dying? When I came back an hour later, expecting to find no more than a corpse, I saw her on the bed, her eyes wide open, having regained consciousness, and attempting a smile. She looked at me. . . .

— 256 —

May God on high and holy give the dervish the bliss of the Chosen for this look which I owe him.

For three days, the old man did not leave her whom he had just saved. We offered him everything we owned as evidence of our gratitude.

— I would not know what to do with it, he answered with a smile. By not owning anything, I own everything; however, it is in your power to do me a great favor.

— Only speak, we replied, you have every right and power over your slaves.

— Well then! he continued. As I have just said, I am old and my strength is declining; in my youth, I made a vow to complete the pilgrimage to Kerbelah[51] ten times. I have done it nine and no longer feel up to the tenth obligation. I am infinitely remorseful because of it, my life is troubled and I will be sure not to be punished after my death, as a perjurer should be, only if one among you accepts to take my place[52] and go to the Holy Imaums' tomb, lie in adoration in front of the stone, and tell them this:

— Oh, Holy Imaums, sacred martyrs of Kerbelah, the dervish Daoûd comes, through me, to kiss the dust of your sepulcher!

— I will be the one to do it! I exclaimed. I swear it on your head and on the head of the one you saved; and not one particle of the merit attached to so holy an act will be stolen from you by me; it will all go to you, all belong to you, and, later, after I come back here, I will go a second time and on my own behalf, to thank the Imaums for having through your intervention saved the life of the one

destined to be my wife.

The dervish embraced me and I left. I fulfilled his vow and obtained a certificate from the guardian of the Holy Mosque; then I came back, I gave him the document, which seemed to give him a great deal of satisfaction, and I got married."

— 257 —

The young man stopped there and seemed to hesitate for a moment; but Valerio realized that it was the effect of his struggling against emotion. And he continued, indeed, after a little while, in a low and shaky voice:

"I have to tell you that my wife is so kind, so sweet and that I love her so much that I find it the more necessary to go thank the Imaums for having given her to me. I already owed them a pilgrimage of my own. I made it; then I came back. When I wanted to leave again for the third one, which was the one made out of gratitude, she told me that she too was grateful, and this is why we are going together, this time with our child.[53] But I see that I tire Your Excellency. You were infinitely kind to listen to me to the end. I am only a poor man and I have greatly abused your generosity."

There are such souls in Asia, people who live only through the imgination and the heart, whose entire existence is spent in a sort of active revery and who can forgo any contact with what elsewhere is called real and practical life, all the better for the fact that the burden of obligations it heaps on men's shoulders only exists for the rich and powerful. The poor are dispensed from doing anything, if they wish; they will never lack sustenance or shelter either in caravans or in cities, and the parable of the birds in the heavens whose needs are known and fulfilled by the Heavenly Father, is true only in the lands of the Sun.

From the moment that Redjèb Ali had made himself known to Valerio, he had become, along with the Swiss poet, one of the fellowship of the Italian tent; but they soon had a new member. He was called Saiyid Abdurraman and was a scholar. One morning he told his story in these words:

"I was born in Ardabil, a well known city, little distant from the sea of Khozèr,[54] that you, Europeans, call the Caspian Sea. Since my family was made up entirely of mollahs, the mollah my father, the three mollahs my uncles, the eight mollahs my cousins, I couldn't fail to become a very

— 258 —

scholarly person, and that is what happened. I was beaten so often and so hard that I learned my theology, metaphysics, history, poetry thoroughly, and when I was barely fifteen years old, I was being cited in all the colleges of the province as one of the most subtle logicians who had ever been heard to shout from the pulpit.

This in no way prevented me from acquiring a certain taste for wine, which led me to brandy, and that liquor, which incidentally I curse, working in me an intellectual reform of prodigious magnitude, I understood one beautiful day the nothingness of everything; the prophet no longer seemed to me as sublime as you might imagine; the lessons I had given a great number of students at the college suddenly seemed to me as absurd as those I had been forced to absorb, and, confronted by this general wreck of all my opinions, I decided to start on a voyage to refresh my notions of things, to provide myself, if possible, with a knowledge more solid than my former one, and also to entertain myself through the contemplation of interesting and strange spectacles.

I have been leading this sort of life for ten years now and I have never had any reason to regret it. You perhaps noticed from time to time a tall, good-looking boy with whom I generally team in our walks. He's a baker from Caboul who has the same passion as I for traveling. It's the eighth time he has followed this route and he is going back to Afghanistan with the firm resolve to leave immediately for the north of India and from there to visit Cashmere, Samarcand and Kashgar.[55] As for me, I have already been twice in those lands, and when I return there, I will go as far as the China Sea; right now, I am coming from Egypt and intend to travel to Belúchistan.

— So, in brief, tell us, Saiyid, Valerio said, tell us what fruits you have reaped from so much toil.

— Very beautiful ones, the traveler answered; first I avoided the much greater fatigues of sedentary life, I avoided working, permanent contacts with imbeciles, the hostility of

— 259 —

the great, the worries of property ownership, of a household to manage, servants to scold, a wife to put up with, children to raise. Those are the things I have escaped. Is that nothing?

— But by the same token, you have lost the corresponding advantages.

— Which mean nothing to me, Saiyid Abdurraman exclaimed with a gesture of contempt. But on the other hand, there is no land inhabited by Mussulmans which is unknown to me. I have seen the most illustrious cities and places mentioned in history; I have conversed with scholars of all countries; I have collated the totality of opinions held in one place, challenged in another, and, in balance, I can no longer doubt that the largest part of mankind is worth a little less than grains of sand, that truths are false, that governments are arsenals of wickedness, that the lives of only a few wise men scattered over the universe are significant and that God on high and most great, who created this pile of mud and turpitude where so few specks of gold shine, to have acted thus must have had motives that we do not know and of which the apparent absurdity must certainly conceal reasons of a divine profundity.[56]

— *Amen!* " whispered Redjèb Ali, who had not understood the first word of this tirade, except that full respect had been rendered to the Creator of the world. As for the poet, he was looking for a rhyme for the verb *to lose* , and the Shemsiyèh was smiling with some irony, which was noticed by Saiyid Abdurraman, who turned quickly toward him and challenged him as follows:

"You are making fun, he exclaimed triumphantly, you are making fun of the words I have just said, because you believe, you scoundrel, whose name is an object of horror and whose person an object of disgust for the people among whom you live, you believe that you are the only one to possess the truth, and this poor truth would thus find itself in

the world, like a crushed, dulled, yellowed pearl deprived of its setting and lying almost unnoticed in the dirt! Well! as low as you are, Shemsiyèh, I will propose you as an example to the others and they will see that you are a model for them. Your fathers have been powerful; their errors spread over so many countries, which have long since abandoned your dogmas, that there was no longer any room under the sky for different religions. Foolishness was considered as sane as the most rigorous demonstrations of good sense; and your ancestors accounted for it with conviction in temples of marble and porphyry. However, everything has changed. Men have turned to other opinions; but take comfort, these opinions will some day receive the same treatment as yours; and multitudes will cast the same glance on a Mussulman, a Jew, a Christian as on you today."

The Shemsiyèh bowed silently and Valerio said to the Saiyid:

"You who have traveled so many lands, have you never set foot on European territory?

— Never, the Saiyid replied, with an embarrassed look.

— How is that? Valerio continued.

— What would I have looked for there? What would I have found there? You will not take my words badly and will not think that they are motivated by some religious prejudice unworthy of a philosopher?

— Absolutely not, Valerio answered; I know the breadth and the freedom of your ideas, Saiyid, and could never suspect you of such weakness; speak freely therefore and educate me through your experience.

— There is no advantage for a wise man to travel in European countries, the Saiyid answered with conviction. First, one is not safe there. Everywhere one comes upon grim-looking soldiers who are marching about; policemen fill the streets and constantly ask where one is going, what one is doing, and who one is. If one fails to answer them, he is taken

to a jail from which it is very hard to get out. One needs pocketfuls of boyourdis,[57] firmans,[58] teskeris[59] and endless other papers and documents, without which one might even lose one's life. I swear to you that that's the way things are: I have heard it said by trustworthy people who had followed Mussulman embassies in those devilish countries."

Redjèb Ali did not miss a word of these revelations, his face reflecting terror; Valerio started to laugh:

"Continue, I beg of you, Saiyid, there is some truth in what you are saying and I insist on hearing the rest.

— Well then! Since I am not angering you, I will add that, if one has been fortunate enough to escape those perils and not be imprisoned for one thing or another that one shouldn't have done, one still is in great danger of starving. If one is poor, one shouldn't say anything; no one thinks of asking if

you have dined, and what doesn't cost a poul[60] in Mussulman countries, requires extravagant amounts in your miserly land. So, what can one do? Here and everywhere else, if I should lie on the path to sleep, I will be left alone: in your country, prison is not out of the question; and it's the same for everything; hardheartedness among men, cruelty and severity among people in power, and freedom nowhere: there is nothing but constraint; and to boot, a climate that is as inhospitable as everything else. I have never been surprised, Effendi, to see what you must also have observed, namely that those of your Europeans who come to live amongst us, no longer can pry themselves away, quickly pick up our habits and mores, while one has never known one of us to be in the least inclined to stay in your lands and settle there.

— Again, all this is fairly exact, Valerio replied, and yet, I would like to point out that the number of Asiatics traveling to Europe becomes larger every year.

— Granted! the Saiyid exclaimed. They are soldiers sent there to learn military drill and the ways of the nyzam![61]

They are workmen whose job is to plant telegraph poles![62] They are physicians who will learn how to dissect human cadavers! All these are jobs for slaves, stupid or demeaning jobs! or ignoble! But it is not conceivable to anyone that Europeans, who are familiar with crude and ordinary matters, are in the least acquainted with higher ones. They know neither theology nor philosophy. Their poets are not renowned because they are ignorant of all the artifices of beautiful language, knowing neither the alliterated style nor the flourished and learned ways of expression; moreover I heard that their languages are nothing but rough and uncouth dialects. The result of all this is that Europe could not possibly attract refined natures in any way, and that is why, I repeat, that no gentleman ever sets his foot there unless forced to do so by the orders of his government."

Since Saiyid Abdurraman had concluded this outburst in a voice filled with solid conviction, Valerio saw no point in arguing against him and the conversation turned to other things on which it was easier to agree.

Meanwhile, the caravan was advancing. The landscape was changing. They were going through the mountainous regions of Upper Armenia; they arrived at the noisy, rockbound banks that confine the furious torrent that farther down becomes the Euphrates. The caravan was covering ground; but slowly. First, it only traveled six or seven hours each day, and the motion of such a large body was slow. It was a body that moved with a sort of solemn caution and imperturbability that nothing could upset. Then, it often stopped halfway from the station planned for that day's journey and this for a number of reasons. One must keep in mind that Kerbelai Hossein always made a point of listening to the reports of the emissaries he had sent out to the various villages a few days ahead in order for them to negotiate with the peasants for the quantity of barley and chopped straw he would need for his animals and for the number of sheep,

---

of chickens, of loads of rice and vegetables required by the population in his train. Often the peasants made unacceptable demands regarding the price they wanted to get. Then the bargaining began: the muleteer's emissaries would confront them with the competition coming from other villages; but often the latter would strike an agreement with their neighbors so as to impose and maintain very high terms; the caravan's diplomats therefore became involved in proposals, rejections, counterproposals, intrigues, attempts to corrupt one or another of their adversaries, solicitations, reinforced by bribes, made to the local authorities in order to get them to issue orders that would moderate the rapacity of the village folk. The negotiators were continually coming back to Kerbelai Hossein to report what they had achieved, to receive new instructions and to carry new offers. The muleteer was as busy as the prime minister of a large state. When everything seemed to work out well enough, when barley, chopped straw, and food were found at a good price and in abundance, the caravan advanced more rapidly and at a regular and predictable pace. Otherwise, things slowed down. When an agreement had not been reached and when the inhabitants of the villages situated along the route insisted upon unreasonable demands, then Kerbelai Hossein resorted to strong measures; he would announce that they were going to leave the direct route, and if this threat had no effect, he would carry it out. It amounted to a coup d'état. Then, unbeknownst to most of the travelers, the whole caravan would take a long detour across country seeking less avaricious regions; and it quite often happened then that the peasants would submit out of fear of losing assured profits and would beg Kerbelai Hossein to come back. In this case, he haughtily refused until sufficient indemnities for the delays and the additional trouble were given him. Also the suppliers, sure as they were to find other buyers for their

merchandise, often let the caravan go. He therefore always had himself preceded

— 264 —

by his emissaries all along the way, and made the best of fortune. He did not have a minute's rest. His mind was always at work, he looked after his people in the same way Moses did when crossing the desert; and the habit he had of this responsibility, his profound knowledge of the character of the people with whom he dealt and of the agents he employed gave him a self-assurance and a firmness worthy of the highest respect.

But what caused the longest delay was the discovery of abundant pasturage. In such instances, enthusiastically announced by the scouts a few days ahead, the caravan would sometimes spend two or three weeks at the same spot. Camp would be set up in a less transient way, with every convenience the travelers could procure for themselves. It was as if they were going to spend an eternity there. Each one seemed to say, as the Apostle in the Gospels:

"It is good for us to be here; let us therefore make here three tents: one for thee and one for Moses and one for Elijah."[63]

The camels, the mules, the horses, the donkeys would wander about up to their bellies in the lush grass. The muleteers were delighted to see their animals so visibly recover from their fatigue, thanks to this tasty foraging; the sight of the greenery and the flowers pleased all eyes; and the hive hummed more than ever, everyone coming and going, chatting, fidgeting, pursuing his bargaining, his schemes, his buying and selling which, as one saw, even the journey did not interrupt; for the caravan is a movable city, and the interests and pleasures of a city are just as active there as in sedentary ones.

During these prolonged halts, Lucie and Valerio used part of their time for excursions into the surrounding country. They were already in those rich Curdistan mountains whose beauty is, perhaps, rougher than that of the Taurus, whose gorges are narrower and escarpments steeper, but where fertile nature is not less generous with its gifts. The two lovers

— 265 —

were young; they were bold; they did not always follow to the letter the wise warning of Kerbelai Hossein, who tried to exhort them to caution and to discourage them from overlong excursions.

"You never know, he told them, whom you might encounter. The Curds, may Heaven confound them! are not all thieves and murderers, but there are rare exceptions, and you must not tempt anyone. I therefore urge you not to stray far from the camp and thus run the risk of becoming the victims of marauders."

A small adventure gave a kind of consecration to these wise words. Valerio and Lucie, accompanied by the poet, the Shemsiyèh and Redjèb Ali had set out one morning to visit a somewhat distant village whose picturesque situation they had heard about. They were all quite cheerful; the poet a little less ill than usual, was showing off on his rented horse, comparing himself to one of the knights of ancient times, with whom he shared especially at that moment the plume, the sword and the spurs, but certainly no other attribute. Redjèb Ali lustily sang a Persian song, and the Shemsiyèh, always withdrawn in himself, was walking silently alongside Lucie's horse. The path, confined by the mountains, was charming, full of rustic, flat-roofed earthen dwellings, with an abundance of fruit trees bearing apples, pears, plums and grapes. Suddenly, they found themselves in a narrow gorge that followed a brook and was dominated by high crests; they heard the roar of a violent fusillade.

In a flash Valerio clutched the reins of his wife's horse and stopped it dead. The Shemsiyèh, with a gesture much to his credit, pulled out his saber and threw himself in front of Lucie to protect her with his body; the poet drew his sword invoking Saint George; and Redjèb lay on the ground shouting that he was dead. Their alarm was great, with good reason. But immediately they heard from all around, from both flanks of the mountains:

— 266 —

"Do not be afraid! No one is after you! Go away! You are not the ones being shot at!"

And the fusillade stopped for a moment; taking advantage of this truce, Valerio forced Lucie's horse to turn around, and the little troop galloped away and did not stop until it was back in camp, where Kerbelai Hossein heard the details of the adventure with a smile.

"If you had told me this morning, he said to Valerio, that you meant to go in that direction, I would have dissuaded you. I knew that two neighboring tribes were going to fight; that is what keeps

them busy, and since it doesn't hurt anyone, they can jolly well be left to shoot to their hearts' content. God is great and always acts for the best."

Thus spoke the wisest of muleteers, and from that day on Valerio never failed to take his advice on the distance as well as on the direction of excursions he and Lucie intended to take.

One of the main pleasures of the march was to meet in camping areas with a caravan coming from the opposite direction. Naturally, in such cases, the respective heads of the two large ambulatory bodies have made sure ahead of time that they can settle next to one another without endangering their means of subsistence. Then you have two cities halting face to face; two veritable cities: one comes from the Occident, the other started from the Orient; imagine Samarcand and Smyrna meeting at the foot of the mountains that separate Medea from the region of the Tigris and Euphrates. On this side, under those tents, those huts, are Persians from the East, people from Khorassan, Afghans, Turcomans, Usbeks, men coming from the faraway frontiers of China and even from those little-known countries through which the dogmas and the ideas of Arabic Islam penetrate into the midst of the provinces of the Celestial Empire.[64] On that side, in contrast, you have Persians from the West, Osmanlis, Armenians, Yezeedies, Syrians and men from dis-

— 267 —

tant Europe whom we have already met and whom we have been following since the beginning of this story. In both cities there exist common elements, especially Jews. Those might come just as well from Damascus and Aleppo as from Bokhara and Manghishlak.[65] One travels to sell and buy, but another is an emissary of the Jerusalem community. His mission is to collect and bring back to the inhabitants of the holy city the alms of the faithful. He goes everywhere to gather his crop. This year he may be going to Teheran, last year he was in Calcutta; Khiva will receive his visit later; everywhere he is received with respect by his coreligionists. He is a grave, strict and rigid man. He knows the world and knows better than anyone the present state of the Universe. He is not humble like his coreligionists and will accept neither snub nor insult. If need be, he claims French citizenship, produces a passport of that nationality, which identifies him as born in Algiers, and he haughtily demands the protection of consuls, threatening them to go to the newspapers if they do not see that he is dealt with fairly. He is an awesome character who is feared by everybody.

Without losing a minute he gathers in his tent the Jews of both caravans, and that is where they learn from one another what there is to sell and to trade on both sides: the names of important merchants, the nature and the weight of the goods they carry with them, finally the news, both great and small.

Such encounters usually result in a fairly long sojourn of the caravans, provided, of course, that the circumstances of the season, of safety, of location, and of supply permit it. Then there occurs also a movement in the two populations. Some go back toward the west with the Orientals, some who had come with the latter, join the people coming from the west. After much activity, intrigue, bustle, good-byes are said, and they move on.

— 268 —

But there are also caravans of quite another kind which one is never in a hurry to join. On the contrary, one willingly walks twice as far so as not to camp near them. Those are the holy caravans whose mules, camels, horses carry coffins and their dead instead of merchandise, on their way to bury them in some holy city: Meshhed, Kom, Kerbelah.[66] These caravans are, mind you, not any sadder than the others. There people sing, laugh, and entertain themselves just as much. In truth, their conductors are those virtuous shawush[67] with their vast turbans and venerable mollahs adorned with no less impressive headgear; the verses of the Koran are frequently recited; but one cannot spend one's life in prayer, and, in the intervals, which are numerous and long, the most austere leader is not above hearing or telling a good story. When one reaches a station, the turban is put aside, and in drawers and nightcap one takes one's ease; one praises God for having created brandy. Meanwhile the respectful sons, the devoted brothers, have unloaded the bodies of their beloved from the mule's pack saddle; the funeral boxes have been stacked one upon another in a pile or else have been left where they fell; they will be picked up the next day and if there is an error as to coffin, each of the departed will ultimately have the same funerary bed under the protection and in the neighborhood of the Imaum. All would be for the best were it not that the smell exuding from these ill-wrapped cadavers was unpleasant in itself and was generally held to be unhealthy; this is the only reason for which one avoids, whenever possible, the caravans of the dead.

However, one does not mind running into a great lord who is going hunting or going to pay his

duties to the King accompanied by two or three hundred cavaliers. It is a pretext for festivities. It also sometimes means additional safety. Two or three hundred brave gentlemen from the tribes armed to the teeth are no insignificant help in regions haunted and disturbed by the Djellalys[68] or other Curds in the northern

— 269 —

regions, or else by the Bakhtiaris[69] or the Lurs in the southern ones. So, while traveling side by side, they exchange great civilities and little gifts, which does no harm to those who receive them.

Once in a great while, the ever-advancing caravan arrives at last in the neighborhood of a real and permanent town. Such cities are rare. Once settled under the walls of one, the nomadic population becomes twice as busy and active. This one succeeds in selling what he acquired in Trebizond. He reaps an honest profit and finds for himself a new stock of wares. That other leaves the circle of friends he has made since the beginning of the trip and stays in the city or else joins another caravan; his place is taken by newcomers. Acquaintances leave and are embraced and are sent away with tender good-byes; a few cry, others deplore with endless lamentations the inconstancy of fortune; but here come other people into the picture; one does not know them, one talks about them, tries to approach them; one would like to befriend these unknowns and on their side they are quite willing. Days go by, business progresses. The word goes out: We are leaving tomorrow! I know for certain that Kerbelai Hossein intends to. — He said so to Murad Bey. — I have it precisely from Nourreddin Effendi, who learned it from a close confidant of Kerbelai Hossein. — Are you sure? — I am sure of it, upon my head! upon yours! upon my eyes! by all the Imaums, and the ninety thousand prophets.

The next day, one does not leave; but one leaves a week or so later. One goes on as in the past. One meets with new adventures, some good, some bad; never the same ones, always different like each of the leaves, millions in number, which form the roof of a thick forest; and were one to travel in this way with a head muleteer and so many diverse companions for hundreds of centuries, still one would never meet with the same encounters nor find the same conjunction of things twice. One can then understand that when men have tasted

— 270 —

once of this sort of existence, they can no longer bear another. Lovers of the unexpected, they are its masters or, rather, its servants from night to morning and morning to night; if they are thirsty for sensations, their thirst is quenched; if they are curious, their eyes are constantly pleased; if they are inconstant, they do not even have the time to tire of what leaves them; if, finally, they are enraptured with the sensation of the moment, they are freed both from the shadows of the past, which they leave behind as they incessantly move on, and even more from preoccupations with the future, which fade under the imperious presence of what is there.

Such is the physiognomy of a traveling life, such is its language, and thus it speaks to the imagination of one who espouses it and knows how to live it. Unfortunately, every fruit is prey to the worm, and the most brillant flowers in all creation are not without a secret venom, the more dangerous as the colors of the plant are brighter and more beautiful.

We have seen how at first Lucie had been strikingly and joyfully impressed by all the wonderfully varied scenes that followed one upon another or crowded together under her eyes. Whenever the ways of these strange lands had excited her enthusiasm, she had entered into the innumerable tales she had heard with the greatest curiosity; she had been intoxicated by the perfume of so many strange revelations, and those human beings so different from herself, who daily swarmed under her gaze, aroused at the same time her sympathy in some cases, her disgust in others; but nothing was devoid of interest to her.

That is where things stood when, one night, an idea, an impression was enough to change everything for her. She had awakened feeling an indefinable uneasiness; and, for the first time since her marriage, she felt sad, mortally sad. She understood nothing, knew nothing, felt nothing in particular; yet she started to cry without meaning to, almost without knowing it, and little by little, she choked on her tears and

— 271 —

began to sob aloud; and Valerio awakened, found her with her arms crossed over her face and no longer even trying to control her despair.

The young husband was extremely surprised, not to say terrified. He took his wife in his arms:

"What's the matter, Lucie," he said.

She could not answer; she was crying too abundantly. She was clinging to that heart which was hers, but the comfort she sought there, the reassurance she found there, could not, however, succeed in calming her.

"I don't know what's the matter with me, she was saying haltingly; I am most unhappy! . . . I wonder myself what overcomes me, for, I can feel it, I am overcome. . . .It's as if I were in a prison[70] . . . as if all the doors were shut against me. . . .No! that's not it! . . . Rather, I feel lost in a desert in the midst of endless sand and unable ever to escape from it! . . . No! that is still not it! It seems to me that I am shut up in a narrow tomb and that the gravestone has been sealed over me! . . . But no! but no! All these pictures are too atrocious, and yet, yes, Valerio! They are all true! I am beginning to understand what has overcome me!

— Tell me, tell the truth! the young man exclaimed while clasping her hands and pressing her head against his chest. Tell me everything so that I can comfort you.

— Well! Yes, the prison, the desert, the tomb, all that is true; I feel like a captive. . . .Valerio, I have to get away from here! I have looked at everything, I have seen everything. I have been entertained, charmed, enchanted, I don't deny it! but suddenly, I have just realized that we are alone, absolutely alone, in the middle of a world which is alien to us.

— What! You are afraid? What are you afraid of? You imagine some danger?

— I only imagine what I see: this moral solitude, absolute, relentless, which thickens around us. . . .Afraid? I

— 272 —

am not afraid; or at least, it's not exactly fear . . . but, at the start, I only saw, only understood the

surface of things and perceiving it as it is, colorful and changing, I was entertained by it and did not imagine its underside. But now, is it dawning on you too that we are surrounded by the unknown, by an immeasurable, limitless strangeness? That everything we come in contact with is watching us as we ourselves are watching it, and this without understanding us, as we ourselves don't understand? We are tossed on a stormy sea whose force we don't even know; and a puff of wind can turn into a tempest; we can sink into a whirlpool; we do not have a compass to guide us, and in the same way as we have no knowledge of the landscape lying behind those high mountains there, likewise we do not know which springs set in motion the minds and the wills, what fires suddenly inflame the imaginations of people whom we right now take to be the most harmless and the best. Here! for instance, who says that the Shemsiyèh is not going to enter saber in hand, and cut our throats to make a sacrifice to his gods? Yes! yes! yes! Don't laugh . . . and, as a sacrifice, he might judge it the better for loving us, perhaps, thus offering up both his benefactors and his gratitude? How do I know what might hatch and stir in those heads which are so different from ours and which reveal facial expressions so new to us? And this very Kerbelai Hossein, whose honesty and integrity we have praised since we first met him, how do we know what he means by integrity and honesty? What is there in common between these people and ourselves? Indeed! yes, I am afraid. I would like to be transported to another country, ours, one we have seen all our lives, which has nothing mysterious and unknown for us; for which we are made, and which is made for the natures heaven gave us! I would like to see people we can recognize, whose faces we are used to reading, and who understand good and evil the same way we do! In a word, Valerio, yes, it is true, I feel lost here; we are all alone, and,

— 273 —

I confess, I am afraid! afraid! afraid! I don't want to stay here! Let us leave!

With these words she held onto her husband even tighter and resumed her sobbing. She was the victim of a reaction that happens not uncommonly in Asia in souls which have been little or insufficiently tempered. You see some of these, with no more reason than an inner ferment of the mind, suddenly overcome by panics which, piling up on one another, become exaggerated and exasperated; and they become truly mad. Such a one, and there are known cases, simply chooses to flee and regain Europe amidst very real dangers so as to escape only the most imaginary of perils. Such another constantly believes himself about to be murdered. If he is sitting in his bedroom with a locked door, and he hears steps in the corridor, it can only be a fanatic Mussulman who is there hugging the wall . . . tiptoeing . . . entering . . . his dagger is already in his hand . . . he is about to strike! The victim feels a cold sweat cover his limbs. . . .However, he calms down. . . .It was nothing more than his own servant bringing tea and putting the cup on the table. But the patient found that he had a strange expression. This man is hatching an evil plot. He did not dare, because he saw that his victim was on his guard. Now he is going to come back. He is going to fire his two pistols through the window.

Sometimes the person suffering such hallucinations regains his self-control and adjusts to the milieu in which he finds himself, and his cure is certain; but it can also happen that the illness continues and reinforces its hold. Then one falls into the most fearful kind of suffering. It is called nostalgia.

When he saw that Lucie was suffering from such a condition, Valerio was afraid in his turn. Daylight came and the night's anxieties abated slightly to be replaced by a languor, a despondency that did not look auspicious. That day and the following ones, the young woman strove to hold her own

— 274 —

so as not to afflict her husband; but she was unable to regain her lost enthusiasm; she was no longer truly interested in anything; she was ill at ease, unresponsive; a profound and irremediable distaste increasingly took hold of her and showed in everything she said.

Kerbelai Hossein noticed from her pallor that things were no longer going as they had; he more or less guessed what was happening as he had seen other examples of it.

"I warned you, he said to Valerio, one morning during the march; I warned you! The women of your country are not made for the life we lead. Yours is particularly vulnerable; she cannot indefinitely bear the sight of our long beards and robes, she who is used to shaven faces and short coats. If you persist in prolonging your voyage, you will lose her, I tell you frankly.

— That is true, Valerio answered, lowering his head, my wife is ill; but do you think that her

condition cannot improve and that its consequences are so dangerous?

— Believe me, I will say it again, do not test her any further. A bit later, at the station, we will meet with a caravan going to Baghdad; leave us, join it, and return to Europe via Aleppo and Beirut."

Valerio gave in and was immediately rewarded for it. As soon as Lucie learned what was going to happen, she felt immediate relief. She smiled openly for the first time in many days. Taking leave of all the friends she had made was, however, painful; although a few hours earlier, she had detested and feared them. When the Shemsiyèh said goodbye to her, the young woman gave him a few presents which were received with touching gratitude. The poor fellow swore an eternal remembrance in the best European fashion, and he kept his word. The poet composed a sonnet, a copy of which was preciously conserved.[71] Redjèb Ali's wife held her protectress against her heart for a long time, and the latter returned her embraces with true emotion. At that moment,

---

— 275 —

she almost wished that she were not leaving. But the decision had been taken. Kerbelai Hossein gave her his solemn blessings, calling her his daughter, and she went with Valerio to the other caravan's encampment.

One year later, Valerio Conti and his charming wife were taking tea in a Berlin drawing room. Diplomats, officers, professors and very witty and amiable ladies were present. The young lady traveler was being asked to tell her adventures in Asia, and she was doing so with a verve, a fire, an exaltation that made her look particularly charming.

"Yes, I assure you, she was saying. I regret those days as the best of my life. I, of course, am very grateful to Count P. for having had M. Conti appointed secretary to the Turkish legation in this court; but if he hadn't succeeded, well, I would still be in that Orient, through which I went too rapidly, and which stirs amidst my memories the happiest, the most dazzling and most unforgettable sensations I have ever experienced.

— Alas! Valerio said. You are forgetting, my dear, that these sensations were killing you and that their end didn't come one minute too soon.

— Madame, added Professor Kaufmann, who is a bit of a pedant, when all is said and done, the human organism retains the imprint of a pleasure that hurt just as it does that of a grave illness that could destroy it."

— 277 —

Afterword

This is what men are made of, even the best.[1]

"Mademoiselle Irnois"

"Mademoiselle Irnois,"[2] published in 1847 in seven installments of *Le National* , was Gobineau's fourth serious attempt at fiction. This time, perhaps energized by his recent marriage to Clémence, he succeeded. He responded to his familiar financial straits with buoyant productivity and a potboiler that will remain one of his masterpieces. He made the feuilleton technique work to his advantage. Each installment of "Mademoiselle Irnois" skillfully ends in a way that is not only suspenseful but creates the wrong expectations.

If one did not know the date of composition of "Mademoiselle Irnois," its relatively conventional technique would betray it as an earlier work. The largely straightforward third person narrative, the classical unfolding of the plot (exposition, building of tension, climax, denouement), the concern for antecedents and causal relationships point to Balzac. Yet, Balzacian as the story might seem, it is already Gobinian. A relationship has been suggested between Emmelina Irnois and various characters in Balzac: Eugenie Grandet, Modeste Mignon, and Mademoiselle Cormond (*La Vieille Fille*), for their unhappy love affairs; Madame Claes (in *La Recherche de l'absolu*), for her sublime passion. She may also have had counterparts in real life, such as Gobineau's mother, who claimed in her memoirs that

she had married Louis de Gobineau to escape a political marriage forced on her by the

— 278 —

emperor,[3] or his sister Caroline, the frail "Patouille," who was the first to make fun of her own "prevertebrate" constitution. Tales of forced unions under Napoleon's dictates and of fortunes scandalously and dubiously made after the Revolution were current in the conservative circle around Gobineau. Although the story lends itself to the "key game," its strength lies in those elements that come from the inner Gobineau and are unmistakably his: the ambivalence of Emmelina's mute and stubborn passion, which, as Flaubert would have said, "has depths of expression like an imbecile's face."[4]

The author cultivated this ambivalence. Emmelina's character is described along two divergent lines. On the one hand, she is compared to a saint, an angel, a mystic. She is described as "tranfigured," illuminated by the flame of a "sublime" passion, as floating in the spiritual "sphere." On the other, her contorted, involuted body is still a body, a "nature," an "organism," a "constitution," whose secret vitality shows in a superb mass of hair and into which instinct—an aberrant form, perhaps, and closer to a biological "imprint" than to a true sexual drive but instinct nonetheless—finds its way. Emmelina's *nature* is to be *soulful* and, vice versa, her *soul* manifests itself through an *instinct* , a single-minded, unworded desire that, as P.-L. Rey has shown,[5] constructs its poetic space within the stuffy measurable space of a First Empire bourgeois apartment. Desire? Or is it perhaps a tropism that causes Emmelina to turn automatically toward that other being from whom her existence is suspended? Her death has been compared to *La Mort du loup* by Vigny (a favorite poet of Gobineau), seen as the triumph of individualism in a world crushed by the weight of autocracy and materialism. It has also been read as a first expression of the sort of love that Gobineau later called "a sacred illness" and that his critics call "crazed love" (*amour fou*).[6] One would expect no less from an author Zola had accused of tumbling "into the

— 279 —

blue of the sky" and who crowed about it because, after all, it was better than "tumbling into the gutter," like the author of *L'Assommoir* .[7] But Emmelina would be no more than a female Quasimodo if, against all rules of romantic dualism, Gobineau had not made it so clear that soul and instinct, drive and spirit, desires and reflexes are synonymous.

Souvenirs de Voyage

"Akrivie Phrangopoulo"[8] and "Adélaïde,"[9] written twenty-two years later (1869), show a total independence from literary models. The stifling boredom of Rio made Gobineau turn to happy travel memories. *Souvenirs de voyage* , which originally was to consist of four stories, refers to various parts of the world he had visited: "The Crimson Handkerchief" to Cephalonia, "Akrivie Phrangopoulo" to Naxos, "Adélaïde" to the Germany of small kingdoms he had sampled in his early diplomatic career, and "The Caribou Hunt" to his mission to Newfoundland.

The collection was ready at the time of Gobineau's return from Brazil. In his elation at being free from a much-resented appointment, he anticipated that 1870 and 1871 would be especially momentous for his career. Little did he foresee the national disaster or the familial penury that were to fill these two years. Thus the publication of *Souvenirs de voyage* had to wait until 1872.[10] Gobineau was the more anxious to see the volume in print as he counted on it to help his candidacy at the Académie française by adding literary counterweight to the too technical and scientific *Essai* , although in his view, his pièces de résistance should have been *Amadis* and *Le Paradis de Beowulf* , which he considered to be more dignified literary productions. One hopes that neither of these pompous epic poems would have swayed its members. In any case, by 1872 these works could

— 280 —

not be blamed for the fiasco of Gobineau's candidacy since they were still in manuscript form.

The date and place written under the last line of "Akrivie Phrangopoulo" are retrospective—deceptive, it appears—and were perhaps a secret code between its author and the woman who inspired it, Gobineau's Athenian friend, Zoé Dragoumis. In their correspondence, she urged him to write a story about Brazil. But Gobineau spurned the idea: the Brazilians, he said, were all of mixed blood and, therefore, "the scum of mankind."[11] Instead, he would write a Greek story, forgetting that at the time he was in Athens, he had depicted Greece as "an ocean of lies and

knaveries."[12] But he was referring then to complicated chains of diplomatic intrigue and to Greece's inner instability. And that was *history* . The Greece for which he now feels a "violent passion" (though "from a distance, perhaps," he concedes) and which seems to him a flawless land, is mythical, ahistorical.

In a more immediate context, "Akrivie Phrangopoulo" refers to a second excursion to Naxos and Santorin made by Gobineau in September 1867 while, probably not to his regret, the rest of the family waited for him in Salamis. The personal sources of the story are numerous and specific. Norton was modeled partly after Captain Lindsay Brine, the skipper of the English corvette that transported the Gobineaus to the islands, partly after Lord Edward Robert Lytton, at that time secretary of the British Embassy in Athens, who, as the son of the renowned author of *The Last Days of Pompeii* , as an aristocrat, a poet himself (under the alias of Owen Meredith), a great traveler, and an admirer of Gobineau, had made the conquest of the French plenipotentiary. Akrivie is, of course, Zoé, although the model seems to have been more prudish and conventional than the "Daughter of Priam." Moncade, Phrangopoulo, and probably Mella are all based on real persons. In a wider context, the story evokes the Greece of the Crusaders and of the sixteenth century,

— 281 —

not surprisingly more to Gobineau's taste than the democratic Greece of the classical period which he had already castigated in the *Essai* . Gobineau appreciated the looseness of the medieval order, whether in Western Europe or in the Levant, a looseness that had preserved the relative autonomy of small islands like Naxos and made it possible for them to bypass history.

But the most compelling context is the Greece of mythology. It serves as a stage for a fairy tale, the love between the Sleeping Beauty (as Gobineau calls Akrivie) and a Prince Charming. It could just as well be Ariadne and Theseus, Cybele and Attis, Persephone and Hades, or a hundred other Western or non-Western myths in which the hero conducts a quest, he or the princess disappears into a cave or forest, returns, and is reborn. The wind from the Aegean Sea or from the volcano's mouth whistles very ancient tunes over the graceful somnolence of Akrivie. Zoé meant "life." Akrivie's name means "accuracy" (

ἀκρίβεια

), that is, just instincts, perfect authenticity, a truth unquestionable because of its very simplicity—nature itself. As such, she disconcerts Norton, this refined product of millennia of culture, but instantly charms his dog, who knows better. Norton's real trial will be a sterner one than the tongue-in-cheek speleology in Antiparos. If the concept of "crazed love" means for Gobineau the gift of oneself, then Norton will have to renounce all his prejudices about taste, manners, fashions, knowledge, intelligence, in short, his "culture." It appears that the prize is worth the gamble to this slightly jaded gentleman whose natural nobility had predisposed to such initiation and rebirth. Without trying at all, Akrivie, the earth goddess, establishes her unchallengeable reign over Norton. Life in sophisticated England makes no dent in her primitive serenity. So the prince, far from awakening the princess, joins her in this suspended dream, as his resignation from the navy and retirement in Naxos make clear.

— 282 —

Gobineau admired Stendhal and was one of the first critics to hail him as a giant. According to Rey, "Akrivie Phrangopoulo" would be the most Stendhalian of Gobineau's stories, provided that one considers the systematic *De l'Amour* as the real Stendhal (which, fortunately for the author of *La Chartreuse de Parme* , is not the case). Rey draws a parallel between the various phases of *De l'Amour* and Norton's progressive awareness of his love for Akrivie but rightly points out that (contrary to Stendhal's thesis) this love brings him closer to his true nature and to nature as a whole.[13] What is most remarkable about "Akrivie," however, is neither its psychology nor its artfulness, for it is very loosely constructed, moving in fits and starts along the predictable but uneven path of Norton's responses to the Greek girl. Note, for instance, the ridiculously short space devoted to their lives in England. What is remarkable about it is that it revolves around an *absence* and a *silence* : hers. As powerful a catalyst as she is, she hardly speaks directly. We perceive her largely through Norton's baffled reports. So, in the long run, the impression that lingers from the story is that of the *ineffable* quality of her charm and, more important, of reality. In this context, is it possible to say that the Antiparos cave alludes to man's ridiculous need to rape his environment and to defile it *with words* ? Could the graffiti represent the superimposition of cultural clichés over Nature's primeval silence?

This tale, it is true, is not one of Gobineau's most concise. It is occasionally guilty of the loquacious bonhomie of good-natured people, kind to themselves and to one another. But it is indeed silence and

reverence that the erupting Santorin elicits in the two young people who *let* the volcano stage for them a titanic and unforgettable spectacle. Here we have the same Gobineau who wrote that the gift of speech seemed to him the least of all possible gifts and urged writers and artists to make themselves as transparent as possible. As in the case of Proust, whose *Recherche* started as a *Contre*

— 283 —

Sainte-Beuve (an attack on the literary dicta in favor among his predecessors), Gobineau's small masterpiece might be a symbolic indictment of literature—or, at least, of belles lettres.

One month after the largo of "Akrivie," the scherzo of "Adëlaide" was written in a single day (December 16, 1869). Gobineau used his recollections of the four months he spent as attaché in the Court of Hanover and Brunswick in 1851. His correspondence from the time sounds straight out of "Adélaïde." "Hanover is charming," he wrote his sister. "A court, a favorite, a Palace Marshal, Courtiers, intrigues, a regiment of guards, a squadron of House guards, curial officials, a diplomatic corps. Reread Hoffmann."[14] Judging by the anecdotes, galas and costumes Gobineau describes in other letters, Offenbach would have been equally suitable. Delighted with this first mission and hopeful that it would refill his coffers, Gobineau indulged in the life and mores of these small principalities. He was entirely wrong about the money. Obligated by his rank to six servants and a coupé drawn by two handsome horses, he would be in financial difficulties in no time at all. But he assuredly got a decor and an atmosphere out of it for his future "Adélaïde."

As to its cast, he did not lack models in real life in a period when at least two such triangles existed among his acquaintances: that of Prime Minister Adolphe Thiers with his wife and his mother-in-law (and ex-mistress); that of George Sand, her daughter and Frédéric (note the first name) Chopin. In fiction, they were even more numerous, starting with (noblesse oblige) Sand's *Dernière des Aldini* . The most striking resemblance seems to be with *Les Mémoires du Diable* , a popular feuilleton by *Frédéric* (here we are again) Soulié which "Adélaïde" echoes almost word for word in the first spirited exchange between Elisabeth and her daughter. The possibility that one might identify the powerful Thiers as the antihero of this tarty tale was plausibly a sufficient

— 284 —

deterrent for Gobineau (always vulnerable, as he was always seeking better appointments) that he decided to exclude "Adélaïde" from *Souvenirs de voyage* at some point between 1869 and 1872.

Another reason might be that he saw "Adélaïde" as less exotic, therefore less poetic, than the three other stories in the collection. One may disagree with him. To the contrary, its crystalline economy seems to us an excellent example of his own definition of the short story:

> All the finesse of observation, all the philosophy, all the logic in the world could not possibly suffice in producing a good short story. . . .Rather . . . let the form catch the reader's attention at every step, amuse and seduce him; let no expression, no word leave the writer's pen without being immediately disciplined, and set, so to speak, like a precious stone, in the place that is best for it; in a short story, handle prose as you would verse; for nothing is too good nor too carefully chosen for this small frame where everything must pass so close an examination.[15]

This craftsmanship makes it stand out among works built around the same motive: the sort of love in which only the rich and idle of a selected group can indulge. Stendhal called it love of the game for itself, also *amour à querelles* .[16] It involves the head (the ego, we would say today) more than the heart and is not meant for cowards. Laclos gave us a prototype, the *Liaisons dangereuses* which, like "Adélaïde," often speaks of love in the imagery of war and hunting. But the short story's concentration works in Gobineau's favor: instead of lengthy and wordy schemes, "Adélaïde"'s brisk ballet seems less cerebral, more instinctive and dynamic than the *Liaisons* . It is also less poignant. Although Gobineau refers to his heroines as two "Olympians," they look to us more like two elegant panthers working out their sexual hierarchy and territorial imperatives without lethal consequences for either, the sort of ritualized activity one observes in nature among well matched conspecifics. Thus, "Adélaïde" is the more

— 285 —

enjoyable for not involving our ethical values. That leaves Frederic out of the accounting; but from the start Gobineau makes him so naive, so vain, and, worse, so self-serving that one does not waste much pity on his deficient masculinity. So, in the end, if the species will not procreate, at least it will survive in the sort of balance that here takes the form of a seesaw. Let us not say that this perpetual motion

is hell: it might be, given a Christian context; but, in this case, each character has more or less what he or she wants.

As in "Akrivie," the story's form espouses its content, here as a series of *coups de théâtre* , which, again, cannot be pointed out without spoiling the reader's pleasure. Just one example is the totally unexpected introduction at the end of the fifth paragraph (and third page) of Elisabeth's husband, a trick that sixteen years later made Henri Becque's *La Parisienne*[17] (1885) famous overnight. Although more durable than Becque's play, Gobineau's story was less fortunate and was published only posthumously in the *Nouvelle Française* in December 1913. If Gobineau tried to live up to his manifesto on the short story, his labor is hidden: his narrator, the baron, tells the tale in the relaxed manner of an aristocrat talking to good friends—an excellent excuse for occasionally loose syntax and negligent usage. Nonetheless, the story's brilliance lies in its minute details and in its understated humor, which keeps the translator on his toes. For instance, the *transis évincés* of the first paragraph are a splendid and oxymoronic rephrasing of *amoureux transis* . Or the use of the definite article, *du* , in *les chevaux du mari* , "the gentleman's horses" (p. 167 in our translation), which gives the husband the aspect of a traditional vaudeville character, one destined to be cuckolded, though here afflicted with too many wives.

Finally, the story within the story is handled with maximum economy (three lines at the beginning and three short paragraphs at the end to enclose the baron's narration) but

— 286 —

with maximum effect. What are we to think of Mme de Hautcastel's scandalized expressions in view of her "deep sigh" and her silence at the end, while we are told her husband slept through most of the evening? A whole conjugal drama in very few words, the kind of thing that absolutely precludes us from letting down our guard during this lovely piece.

Nouvelles Asiatiques

In 1870, "exiled," he felt, in the hyperborean darkness of Stockholm, Gobineau returned to the remedy that had worked in Rio—writing a book, this time to conjure up Asia. Thus, the book will be an Asiatic pendant to *Souvenirs de voyage* . Garbed in his brown and white aba, surrounded with Persian mementos and keeping the narghile burning, he wrote three stories over the summer months: one on the Caucasus ("The Dancing Girl of Shamakha"), one on Persia ("The Story of Gambèr-Ali"), one on Afghanistan ("The Lovers of Kandahar"). Taking his time over them, Gobineau wrote the last three Asiatic tales in 1873–74: "L'Illustre magicien," inspired by his love for Mathilde de La Tour, "The War with the Turcomans," and "A Traveling Life." The collection was only published in October 1876.[18] Gobineau boasted that it was a commercial success. There is no evidence of this, but it pleased a few friends, among whom were Wagner and Robert Lytton. Today it is the best known of Gobineau's literary works and the most appreciated. Romain Rolland's quip that he would give up all of Stendhal and Mérimée for the *Nouvelles asiatiques*[19] is but one example, among many, of their belated success.

The terror inspired by the Turcomans' raids into the bordering Persian provinces was a recurring theme in travel books, such as the *Aventures d'Arminius Vambéry* (1865), and magazines of the time.[20] Gobineau had been able to

— 287 —

verify its truth since in 1862 he had to see to the release of a rather questionable character, Henri de Blocqueville, who had been a captive of the Turcomans for fourteen years. Moreover, he found a model in a similar episode of Morier's *Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* .[21] "The War with the Turcomans" has been compared to *Gil Blas* and to *Candide* , but it is less didactic than either. In contrast to the obvious grip Voltaire holds on *Candide* 's plot, Gobineau disappears behind a kind of moral unobtrusiveness. We live this minor historical episode solely through the eyes of an Oriental good soldier Schweick, who copes with an absurd war by means of an admirable survival instinct.

Gobineau said in the introduction to *Nouvelles asiatiques* that "the habit of lying masters the Persian mind."[22] He would more aptly have described "Turcomans" had he said that the Persians are masterful liars who mingle lie and truth to the point where everything is to some extent both true and false, suggesting in this manner a whole philosophy of life. The several examples of this in the text are rendered totally acceptable by the absence of outside criteria such as a judgmental Western observer would have implied. The same goes for various traits in the characters which might otherwise seem

negative: their fascination with clothes, the deceptiveness of women, their overly ornate speech. The story has sometimes been read as reflecting Gobineau's poor opinion of Persians. Nothing is further from the truth. In the introduction he again extols what in his view are their qualities: "in all of them [Persians] an incomparable abandon and the absolute tyranny of the first impulse, whether it be good or of the worst." So Aga Beg may not be as pure an Aryan as Akrivie or Adélaïde, but his instincts, his adaptation to his environment, are as correct, and his vitality is equal to theirs. It is even clear that Europeans have lost something in comparison with the Persians. Thus, the charming rogue Aga Beg verifies Gobineau's

— 288 —

proposition (in *Les Pléiades*) that beggars too can be "sons of kings."[23]

"A Traveling Life" follows *Trois ans en Asie* closely enough that its status as fiction may seem questionable. The footnotes of the Pléiade edition refer a great number of characters or details to *Trois ans en Asie* : for instance, Signora Cabarra, the Shemsiyèh, the muleteers, and caravaneers, and the ambush by Kurd bandits were based on real people or events; Lucie Conti's homesickness precipitated the end of the voyage as had that of Mme de Gobineau herself. As for Count P., the initial and his description both point to Gobineau's old friend, Count Prokesch-Osten. A variation, though, and surely a clue to Gobineau's feelings in 1874, is that the Contis have been made Italians as an homage to Mathilde de La Tour. Their itinerary is the reverse of the one followed by Gobineau on his return to France in 1858.

But if "A Traveling Life" is only barely a fiction, it is, at any rate, a fable or a parable, recapitulating Gobineau's Persian experience, and, since Persia answered many of his favorite obsessions, it can be seen as his summa. At the center of the parable is a caravan. It has all the features important to Gobineau: it is transient and unpossessive (woe to the bourgeois and materialist way of life); it constitutes a collective body whose nonchalant pace reveals, rather than arbitrariness, a superb adaptation to the terrain; its spontaneous hierarchy is as precise as it is implicit. An organism itself, it will coexist with other organisms (other caravans, other racial groups) while preserving its own integrity against truly foreign elements such as the Shemsiyèh. It has an organic rather than a mathematic sense of time. It accepts death with animal simplicity and practicality. In brief, it is the perfect symbol of an ecology, one for which the Oriental mind is better prepared than the Western because it is less structured by rationalism, more empirical, less prejudiced.

— 289 —

The Contis' initiation to this nomadic life in a foreign milieu coincides with their honeymoon and is presented as an edenic episode in which, as in Genesis, Eve is imaginatively more acute than Adam. After a few weeks, Lucie, until then more responsive to the enchantment than even her husband, experiences a great anguish, as if edging an abyss. The vast horizons, which used to talk to her so *eloquently* , she now perceives as an *unintelligible prison* . Is Gobineau suggesting, then, that East and West will never meet, that the fusion of cultures is impossible regardless of goodwill? Is that why at the beginning of the story he chose the Christian Eden as an incongruous symbol of bliss and innocence in the midst of an Islamic context? Is the Gobineau who not only in the Middle East but in Berne and Stockholm griped about fleas or bedbugs[24] more genuine than the one who at the beginning of "A Traveling Life" pokes fun at tourists for doing exactly the same? Probably not. Contradictions are more in his character than cynicism. Reading this story as a disenchanted fable about the impermeability of cultures seems farfetched. Rather than remarking that in the early days of their voyage Valerio and Lucie perceive the landscape through the grid of the Occidental tradition, we find significant that, as they proceed East, they desist; also, that descriptions of the landscape are minimized as their intimacy with nature increases. Even if, in the end, Lucie is not capable of relinquishing her Western identity (thus stopping short of penetrating the true "sense of things"), even if, as Professor Kaufmann states on the last page, our puritan constitution does not tolerate prolonged felicity, and even if Gobineau himself was not always up to it, he offers it as an ideal for anyone well "tempered." After all, he had warned us that the art of traveling, like that of loving, was not given to everyone. The anticlimactic ending reaffirms the parallel: once back in Europe, Lucie forgets her panic and, for the benefit of her friends, spins the

— 290 —

usual clichés about their trip; but her husband stops her rather sharply and—it seems—with irony, if not resentment. So much for love.

Gobineau's last story is both his simplest and his most daring. It has no other plot than the Contis' spiritual adventure (a relative fiasco at that), the adventures of the caravan itself being nothing out of the ordinary. What sustains our attention, therefore, is the narrative voice, coinciding most of the time with the young couple's impressions but provided off and on by other travelers (Kerbelai Hossein, Cabarra, Redjèb Ali, and the sage Saiyid Abderraman). In so doing, Gobineau achieves two things. In terms of plot, he completes a journey away from the melodrama of "Mademoiselle Irnois", which has taken him through "Akrivie Phrangopoulo"'s simple story, "Adélaïde"'s antistory, and "Turcoman"'s rambling tale to this absolute, minimal argument. In terms of narrative technique, he has gone from the neutral third-person narrator of "Irnois" to an empathic one in "Akrivie" to the quasi-complicity of "Adélaïde"'s narrator and the coincidence of narrator and author in "Turcomans." This trajectory would look like a modernist move toward the arbitrary and the subjective if the multiplicity of voices in "A Traveling Life" did not make it, in flagrant contradiction to some recent literary dicta, more, rather than less, objective. The balanced points of view convey adequately the ecological message of the story. In itself, it says more than any words could have about the genuineness of Gobineau's tolerance—his rallying to the Oriental belief in the complexity of life and the ambiguity of truth—and about his ultimate realism.

Notes

Introduction

[1] Gobineau to his wife, 16 Dec 1869, *Lettres brésiliennes* .

[2] Gobineau to Mme de La Tour, 26 Aug 1873, BNUS, MS. 3517.

[3] Gobineau to Dom Pedro, *Corr. Pedro* , p. 461.

[4] Gobineau to J. Monnerot, April/May 1848, quoted in Boissel, *Gobineau* , p. 114.

[5] Gobineau to Mme de La Tour, dated 1 May 1882, BNUS, MS. 3568. Gobineau's vehemence when he refuses to make concessions to popularity or when he defends the thesis of the *Essai* reminds one of Marquis de Sade's Bastille letters (e.g., letter V, to his wife, in *The Complete Novels* , ed. and trans. R. Seaver and A. Wainhouse [New York: Grove Press, 1965], pp. 137-140).

[6] Boissel, *l'Orient et l'Iran* , p. 280.

[7] Jean Mistler, "Gobineau le plus grand méconnu du XIXe siècle" in *Annales-Conferencia* , n. 204, vol. 74 (1967).

[8] A. B. Duff, "Un fragment inédit des souvenirs de Diane de Guldencrone" in *Etudes gobiniennes* (1966): 67-68. break

[9] Gobineau to his sister, July 1867, quoted in Boissel, *Gobineau* , p. 24.

[10] *Essai* , in *Pl.* I, p. 285, n. 1. The same idea will be advanced about the Abyssinians' mixed blood (ibid., p. 450).

[11] Letter dated March 1857, in *Corr. Prokesch-Osten* , p. 139.

[12] Gobineau, a letter to his sister, 25 Nov 1856 (quoted in Boissel, *Gobineau* , p. 170). See also, letters to Prokesch-Osten, 16 July 1857, p. 154, *Corr. Prokesch-Osten* , and to his sister (20 Jan 1862), in *Ecrits de Perse* , p. 390; also *Pl.* II, pp. xv, 1067-1068.

[13] The figures are from Michel Lémonon's thesis, *Gobineau et L'Allemagne* (Université de Strasbourg 1972), discussed by Boissel, *Pl.* I, pp. 1231-1232.

[14] "Dedicace" to the *Essai* , in *Pl.* I, 136.

[15] *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1878), p. 4. In this passage Renan refuses to grant all races *la même plénitude et la même richesse* and the Semites more than a "clear but limited" conscience, although he extols their moral and spiritual superiority on the previous page. Just as startling an example of schizophrenic attitudes toward other races is found in the "liberal" Michelet's opinion: "Etre nègre, c'est bien moins une race qu'une véritable maladie" (*Histoire du XIXe siècle* , Vol. 3 [Paris: M. Lévy, 1875], p. 298).

[16] "In view of these facts, one understands not only why there are no pure Aryans left, but why their very existence is no longer of any use. Since their general role was to achieve the proximity and intermingling of [human] types by connecting them in spite of their distance, they henceforth have no raison d'être." The white race "develops, radiates, expands to accelerate their fusion and dies when its prevalent ethnic component has been completely dissolved in the heterogeneous elements it has rallied, that is to say, when its specific task is accomplished" (*Essai* , in *Pl.* I, p. 1162). continue

On the mythical status of a pure white race, see ibid., pp. 283, 1163.

[16] "In view of these facts, one understands not only why there are no pure Aryans left, but why their very existence is no longer of any use. Since their general role was to achieve the proximity and intermingling of [human] types by connecting them in spite of their distance, they henceforth have no raison d'être." The white race "develops, radiates, expands to accelerate their fusion and dies when its prevalent ethnic component has been completely dissolved in the heterogeneous elements it has rallied, that is to say, when its specific task is accomplished" (*Essai* , in *Pl.* I, p. 1162). continue

On the mythical status of a pure white race, see ibid., pp. 283, 1163.

[17] Ibid., p. 195. In contrast, glancing at the contents of the *Essai* , one may be puzzled to see "semitization" associated with decline (e.g., in the last chapters of Books IV and V, apropos Greece and Rome). This paradox, largely responsible for Gobineau's reputation as an anti-Semite, finds its explanation in Chap. 2 of Book II, where he describes how the strong, rough, white Semites conquered Assyria and found there a thriving black Hamitic civilization as *refined* as it was *sensual* . In accordance with the premises of the *Essai* , the austere Semites, seduced and corrupted by this civilization, intermixed on a large scale and thus lost their original characteristics. In Gobineau's view, the prevalence of the Semites in the Mediterranean-Aegean region made them an instrument of decay inasmuch as they further precipitated general miscegenation. One should keep in mind, however, that *any* people touched by this process (i.e., all Latins, including Spaniards, Italians, French), became, for Gobineau, as degenerate and corrupting as the Semites themselves.

[18] *Essai* , in *Pl.* I, p. 343.

[19] "The source from which sprang the arts . . . is hidden in the blood of black people. . . .Assuredly the black component is indispensable to develop artistic genius in a race" (ibid., pp. 472-473).

[20] See *Essai* , "conclusion générale," ibid., p. 1150.

[21] After clearly stating the superiority of the black's aesthetic instinct, Gobineau saves face by demonstrating that their deficient intellect precludes the creation of more than crude artistic products (ibid., pp. 473-477).

[22] Examples of this appear in *Trois ans en Asie*, *Pl.* II, pp. 80-81, and in a letter of 8 May 1855, in *Corr. Prokesch-Osten* , p. 24. See n. 15, "A Traveling Life." break

[23] *Essai* , in *Pl.* I, pp. 1038-1039, 1150.

[24] *Oeuvres philosophiques* , ed. J. Piveteau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954), p. 35.

[25] "Une Littérature nouvelle est-elle possible?" *La Revue Nouvelle* , 5 May 1845 (*Etudes critiques* , p. 245).

[26] For instance, R. Lytton (alias Owen Meredith), "A Novelty in French Fiction," *The Fortnightly Review* (1 Sept 1874): 292-307.

[27] They have been collected and presented by R. Béziau in *Etudes critiques (1842-1847).*

[28] Dated 16 Jan 1852. See F. Steegmuller's *Flaubert and Mme Bovary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), p. 247.

[29] As an example of the first, see (in *Etudes critiques* , p. 82) Gobineau's remarks on Musset's *Confessions* , which he finds exaggeratedly dramatic ("It is . . . a very grave literary error to force the expression; one would risk less perhaps in keeping it this side of the truth"); as an example of the second, see Gobineau's letter to Mme de La Tour, 7 July 1874 (BNUS, MS. 3517), and Gaulmier, "Notes sur Gobineau et la sculpture" (*Etudes gobiniennes* , 1973, pp. 66 ff.), in which Gobineau attacks as "sterile" the notion that "art is the imitation of nature." His own definition, however, inspired by Victor Cousin and reflecting current ideas ("an aspiration toward the manifestations of the material or ideal world"), is ambiguous and leaves room for realism.

[30] Gobineau to Prokesch-Osten, 27 Sept 1872, *Corr. Prokesch-Osten* , p. 358.

[31] *Dioclétien* , in *Contes en prose et en vers* (Paris: Renduel, 1837), p. 395.

[32] Gobineau, a letter to Tocqueville, 7 July 1855, *Corr. Tocqueville* , p. 232. Gobineau adds, "This is what we shall be like by Sunday." break

[33] "I believe that I have really invented a new kind of form and feeling," in a letter to Prokesch-Osten, 7 Oct 1872, *Corr. Prokesch-Osten* , p. 361.

[34] *Le Constitutionnel* , 18 May 1874.

[35] 1 March 1874, *Corr. Prokesch-Osten* , p. 377. But in the first paragraph of the second section of *Trois ans en Asie* (*Pl.* II, pp. 224-226), Gobineau makes it clear that European observers of Persia are blind to their own corruption as well as prisoners of their linguistic ineptitude and cultural prejudices.

[36] Introduction to *Nouvelles asiatiques*, *Pl.* III, pp. 307-308.

[37] Vol. VIII (Paris: Edition Bossange, 1826), p. 187.

[38] In addition to J. J. Morier's *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (London, 1824, trans. into French by Defauconpret, 1824), which was a direct and explicit source of *Nouvelles Asiatiques* , and *A Journey through Persia* . . . (London, 1812) by the same writer, which Gobineau may have read, other likely sources of the stories are E. Flandin's *Souvenirs de voyage en Arménie et en Perse* (published in *Revue des deux mondes* , July 1 and August 1, 1850) and J. P. Ferrier's *Caravan Journeys and Wanderings in Persia* . . . (London, 1856; Paris, 1859).

[39] From Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 12. Said claims (ibid., pp. 206 ff.) that while *manifest* Orientalism changed as the knowledge of the Orient expanded, *latent* Orientalism never changed and kept reorganizing new knowledge along the lines of old prejudices. By including Gobineau as evidence, Said disregards the fact that Gobineau's sojourn in the Middle East resulted in attitudes contrary to the thesis of the *Essai* (and to the European lust for power)--attitudes clearly stated throughout *Trois ans en Asie* , for instance (*Pl.* II, p. 225).

[40] *Pl.* II, 226. break

[41] Letter to Mme de Circourt, 20 May 1862. "Deux correspondances inédites d'A. de Gobineau," ed. J. Gaulmier, in *Etudes gobiniennes* , 1972, p. 25.

[42] Letter to Tocqueville, 20 Sept 1857 (*Corr. Tocqueville* , pp. 285-286) resurrected in a timely fashion by Boissel, in *Gobineau* , pp. 176-177.

[43] *Trois ans en Asie* (*Pl.* II, p. 363).

[44] See Afterword, n. 14.

[45] Let us just mention the bibliographical section of "Pour en savoir un peu sur la nouvelle française," a succinct panorama by R. Godenne (himself the author of a standard study on the subject), and the works we have found the most useful: P. G. Castex, *Le*

Conte fantastique en France de Nodier à Maupassant (Paris: J. Corti, 1962); R. Thieberger, *Le Genre de la Nouvelle dans la littérature allemande* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968); M. Swales, *The German Novelle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); E. Gans, *Un Pari contre l'histoire: Les premières nouvelles de Mérimée* (Paris: Minard, 1962). In America, the influence of the English Gothic tale and of what one might call scientism converged in Poe and Hawthorne, with a native awareness of an uncontrollable natural world, to produce the first bleak modern stories, simultaneously but independently from the European development of the genre. Whether one believes that the short story emerged from the tale (as does R. Marler, "From Tale to Short Story," *American Literature* , n. 46, March 1974, pp. 153-169) or that the melodramatic and lyrical traditions have always coexisted (as does W. Evans, "Nineteenth-Century American Theory of the Short Story," *Orbis Litterarum* , n. 34, 1979, pp. 314-330), there seems to have been no room in American literature for stories that would be the equivalent of Gobineau's.

[46] In an afterthought to *Les Deux amis de Bourbonne* , in *Oeuvres* , ed. A. Billy (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), pp. 726-727. break

[47] See G. Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans . . . Deutsche Realisten des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Newied: Luchterhand, 1971) pp. 374 ff.

[48] Goethe, *Conversations with Eckerman and Soret* , trans. J. Oxenford (London: G. Bell, 1875), 29 Jan 1827, p. 209, apropos his own *Die Novelle* .

[49] *Essai* (*Pl.* I, p. 270).

[50] Gaulmier's witticism (from a personal letter to the authors) is not extravagant in view of the handling of French history in the popular *Asterix* series. The *Essai* could also provide film scripts in the vein of *Excalibur* or *Raiders of the Lost Ark* .

[50] Gaulmier's witticism (from a personal letter to the authors) is not extravagant in view of the handling of French history in the popular *Asterix* series. The *Essai* could also provide film scripts in the vein of *Excalibur* or *Raiders of the Lost Ark* .

[51] *Die romantische Schule* , III, quoted by Castex, in *Le Conte fantastique en France* , p. 398.

[52] Ibid., p. 347.

[53] Letter to Gobineau, 1 Oct 1872, *Corr. Prokesch-Osten* , p. 359.

Mademoiselle Irnois

[1] The First Republic started in September 1792 and ended with the establishment of the Directory in 1795.

[2] Gabriel Ouvrard (1770-1848), a legendarily wealthy and opportunistic speculator during the Revolution, the Consulate, and the First Empire. Balzac's Père Goriot and Irnois are literary examples of smaller businessmen who survived the turmoil thanks more to their low profile than to their brilliance. break

[3] As a partisan of the old monarchic order and as a man who boasted an impeccable ancestry, Gobineau visibly enjoys describing the groveling progress of a parvenu under the loathsome Republic.

[4] By the eighteenth century the meaning of this word had been extended from the Antilles to the American continent, specifically Louisiana, where France deported the surplus from Paris's prisons. On the bizarre attempts to populate Louisiana with both sexes by matching prisoners, see James B. Perkins, *France under the Regency* (Boston: Houghton, 1892).

[5] A reminiscence of famous eighteenth-century literary salons such as those of Mme d'Epinay, Mlle de Lespinasse, and Mme Geoffrin, frequented by the Encyclopedists.

[6] Protagonist in one of Lesage's most famous plays (1709). His name has come to designate a crude, illiterate man who through financial speculation has built a scandalous fortune on public poverty.

[7] In French, *Ferme générale* , a number of men contracted by the monarchy to collect taxes for a healthy percentage. Many of the *Fermiers généraux* became prodigiously rich and powerful.

[8] Ouvrard was not the only man in his time to make huge profits by selling mediocre leather goods to the army.

[9] An ancient street connecting the present first and fourth arrondissements. Its name is associated with the wild speculation originated by the banker John Law's schemes under the French Regency between 1717 and 1720. Gobineau had a sentimental connection with that part of Paris: three years before the publication of "Mademoiselle Irnois," he had written an article on Chassériau's paintings in the St. Merri Church, one of which employed the features of his future wife, Clémence Monnerot, in a representation of *St. Mary of Egypt* (*La Quotidienne* , 321, 16 Nov 1844). break

[10] This point, signaling the end of the first installment of "Mademoiselle Irnois" (29 Jan 1847), illustrates Gobineau's skill in using the genre to his advantage. See the same strategy of suspense at pp. 52, 59-60, 68, and others.

[11] F. G. Ducray-Duminil (1761-1819) and Charlotte de Bournon Malarme (1753-1820) were prolific authors of romances. Gobineau had written desultory remarks on both in *Le Commerce* (Nov. 26, 1844). See *Etudes critiques* , pp. 151-152.

[12] Both tales from *Contes de fée* by Charles Perrault (1628-1703).

[13] An allusion to marriages forced on families by Napoleon and, perhaps, on Gobineau's own mother. See Afterword, p. 277-278, and note. The topic itself was, moreover, a current one as evidenced by Vigny's entrance speech at the Académie Française (Jan. 20, 1846) in which he denounced this particular form of despotism. A. Whitride, *Alfred de Vigny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933, reprinted 1971), gives a summary of the speech (pp. 158-163).

[14] In French: Mais elle était du monde où les plus belles choses / Ont le pire destin. It is a famous line from F. de Malherbe's *Consolation à M. du Périer . . . sur la mort de sa fille* (1598).

[15] The *Conseil d'Etat* , heir to the monarchy's King's Council, was founded by Bonaparte in 1799 and given the double function of preparing bills of law and judging administrative litigation. It counted from thirty to fifty members chosen by the First Consul, mostly jurists. Under Napoleon, it played a major role in drafting the *Code Civil or Code Napoléon* .

[16] The name, synonymous here with "jack-of-all-trades," originally designated the hero of a collection of stories much reedited in the second half of the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century, the *Bibliothèque bleue ou Recueil d'histoires singulières et naïves* . break

[17] Six years later, in 1853, Gobineau himself appropriated the title of count. In 1847, he was apparently still content with middle-class status.

[18] J. J. de Cambacérès (1753-1824), who was successively a representative of the nobility in 1789, later a member of various revolutionary governments, finally made Prince of Parma and archchancellor by Napoleon in 1804, played a major part in the preparation of the *Code Civil* . He was, in the eyes of Gobineau, the prototype of the depraved and unprincipled politician.

[19] This expression, more ironic than it seems at first sight, refers to Oriental sovereigns in popular speech, but more specifically here to the descendants of Genghis Khan in Rachid od Din's *Histoire des Mongols de la Perse* , which E. M. Quatremère had translated in 1836 and which Gobineau had most certainly read, having himself partially translated J. J. Schmidt's *Geschicte der Ost-Mongolen* , ca. 1835-36.

[20] J. L. Tallien (1767-1820), leader of the Jacobins and a deputy to the Convention, precipitated the fall of Robespierre and the Reign of Terror until he was himself eclipsed from power.

[21] Cambacérès. See n. 18.

[22] Fulcrand, Marquis d'Aigrefeuille, one of Cambacérès's friends and frequent commensals.

[23] In the popular tradition, a malevolent fairy in the shape of a gnarled old woman.

[24] Ironic allusion to King Louis-Philippe's turning the National or Civic Guard, which was of revolutionary origin, into supporters of his constitutional monarchy. Gobineau, whose father had been an officer under Louis XVIII and aide-de-camp to the future Charles X, obviously mocks the bourgeois and democratic military of the Orléans monarchy.

[25] In Turkish, a written dictate from the sultan. break

[26] The repetitiousness of the dialogue in this passage and others owes to the feuilleton technique (still observed today in television soap operas) rather than to the author's awkwardness. It also aptly describes the Irnois' monotonous life.

[27] The daughter of Tantalus and wife of Amphion, who lost all her children to the wrath of Apollo and Artemis and was turned into a stone image of perpetual weeping.

[28] The editors of the Pléiade edition annotate Gobineau's lack of logic here, since the Styx is not an Olympian divinity, and allege a possible typographical error (*Pl.* I, p. 1213).

[29] The word refers to members of the Upper House in the Polish and Hungarian diets, therefore, to despotic regimes.

[30] Gobineau puns on the modern meaning of *plaisant* (that which brings laughter, is funny) and the obsolete one (that which gives pleasure, is pleasant), an untranslatable play of words preventing an exact rendering of the passage.

[31] In *Contes et nouvelles en vers* , IV, 1 (1674).

[32] A phrase used several times in the Old Testament as well as in Mark, VIII, 18, where Jesus reproaches his disciples' lack of faith following the multiplication of the loaves: "Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?"

[33] Allusion to the Judgment of Paris among Juno, Minerva, and Venus.

[34] In French, *ondine* . Besides appearing frequently in German authors such as Herder, Goethe, Grimm, Hoffmann, all quite familiar to Gobineau, it is the title of a novel by Friedrich H. K. La Motte-Fouqué (1810) much praised by him in an essay on Hoffmann. See *Revue de Litérature Comparée* , 1966, no. 3, p. 429. The ondine is given a soul when she falls in love with a mortal. See the translation of *Ondine* by E. Gosse (Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1978). break

[35] Approximately $400 today. A napoléon was a twenty franc piece bearing Napoleon's effigy.

[36] A gold coin originally minted under Louis XIII and worth twenty-four pounds; later synonymous with napoléon.

[37] The paradoxical answer to Jesus's question (see n. 32).

Akrivie Phrangopoulo

[1] The archipelago of the Cyclades, whose islands form a circle in the Aegean Sea southeast of Attica, takes its name from the Greek *kuklos* , circle. Naxos, the largest and most important of them, enjoys a thriving agricultural economy (citrus, figs, olive oil, wheat, and a renowned white wine). It figures in Greek mythology as the place where Theseus abandoned Ariadne, a story antipodally related to that of Akrivie. In 1204, when the Fourth Crusade broke the Byzantine hegemony over Greece and created feudal states under the rule of Western European nobles, Naxos fell to the Venetians. In 1566, it became part of the Ottoman Empire and was reunited to independent Greece in 1832. It thus constitutes in itself a recapitulation of medieval European history. Its beauty inspired many a nineteenth-century traveler, Chateaubriand (*Itinéraire de Paris à Jerusalem*) and Nerval (*Voyage en Orient*) among them. In Canto II of Byron's *Don Juan* , the hero is shipwrecked on the Cyclades (st. 107 ff.) and welcomed by a Greek girl: "Haïdee was Nature's bride and knew not this; / Haïdee was Passion's child, born where the Sun / Showers triple light . . ." (st. 202). In his youth, Gobineau was an ardent reader of Byron. At the time of Gobineau's visit, the island counted roughly 15,000 inhabitants.

[2] The name's symbolic significance is obvious. P.-L. Rey (*Mademoiselle Irnois et autres nouvelles* , p. 361), remarks that in *Essai* the apparition of the white race is described as "a dawn continue

soaring above the human chaos." The name is to be connected to that of Aurora Pamina (*Les Pléiades*), who catalyzes a second beginning for Prince Jean-Théodore as Akrivie does for Norton.

[3] This paragraph and the one that follows reflect a comparative experience of boats acquired by Gobineau during his many travels, not only in the Middle East but to Newfoundland and Brazil. The typically Gobinian point made here is that the overcentralized French administration squelches individual initiative, while the English system allows it.

[4] Dickens and Tennyson are at the peak of their reputation in England. It is R. Lytton who drew Gobineau's attention to the latter (letter, BNUS, MS. 3527).

[5] P. Lésétieux (*Pl.* II, p. 1229) points out that the qualities attributed by Gobineau to the landscape are the very ones Norton will love in Akrivie. This beautiful metaphor, crowning one of Gobineau's most exquisite descriptions, again links the landscape to the character of Akrivie and the connubial theme of the story.

[6] "Cossack" or "Russian" trousers were wide enough at the bottom to form folds over the shoe and were sometimes gathered into short boots.

[7] George Brummell's youth would correspond to the period of the French Directory, ca. 1800, when men's attire did not shun excess. The hats described further along refer, however, to a type called *bolivars* , in favor around 1820.

[8] While in Santorin in 1866, Gobineau had actually run into a symbiotic twosome similar to Phrangopoulo and Moncade. They were M. de Corogna and M. de Lenda, the first a barely literate French consular agent, his friend, to the contrary, an amateur geologist and historian. Phrangopoulo (etymologically, "descending from the Franks") is effectively the name of a Santorin family. Moncade is named after a fifteenth-century Spanish adventurer who conquered Naples and who appears in Byron's *Don* continue

Juan (II, 24): "For here [in Trinidada] the Spanish family Moncada / Were settled long ere Juan's sire was born." For these characters' claim to French ancestry, see n. 14. The volume of business between Naxos and the Hanseatic Cities or even Great Britain around 1860 must have left the two Naxiotes a great deal of leisure.

[9] Sir Edward Codrington (1770-1851), hero of Trafalgar, led the Franco-Anglo-Russian fleet that defeated Mohammed Ali, viceroy of Egypt and the Turkish sultan's main ally, at the battle of Navarino (1827).

[10] With typical consistency from the former contributor to the *Revue provinciale* and the journalist who feared for Capodistrias's Greece the dangers of homogeneity (*Deux Etudes sur la Grèce moderne*), Gobineau likes to remind his readers that the Ottoman Empire wisely respected the local autonomy of the Greek islands. Partly because of his fundamental antiuniversalism and anarchism (See Smith, *Gobineau H. N.* , pp. 78-86), partly because Prokesch-Osten had influenced him into believing that a strong Ottoman Empire was essential for the stability of the Middle East, Gobineau was not in favor of Panhellenism. Neither were the Naxiotes, irked in those days by the overcentralization of which the eparch was a symbol.

[11] A great favorite of Gobineau, who read them as a youngster and later owned the 1842 reedition of the original Galland translation (1704). He considered these tales as a "revelation" that was refused to mediocre minds. For their influence on Gobineau's imagination see Boissel, *L'Orient et l'Iran* (pp. 46-48) and Smith, *Gobineau et l'histoire naturelle* (pp. 57-58).

[12] With the independence of Greece, the city of Hermoupolis on Syros became the chief town of the Cyclades.

[13] Horace, *Odes* II, 10, *Ad Licinium: "Auream quisquis mediocritatem Diligit* ." Horace advocates the golden mean in one's choice of dwelling. Gobineau puns on "golden." break

[14] As Gobineau points out, these Naxiotes' claim to French ancestry may be exaggerated. In brief, Mario Sanudo, a Venetian judge, encouraged to engage in private enterprise by the Republic's liberalism in matters of colonization, took over the Cyclades in 1207 and made his capital on Naxos. However, anxious to keep his autonomy from Venice, he played his hand with the Franks who occupied the Latin Empire of Constantinople (Romania, Thessaly, Achaia) and did homage to its emperor, Henry of Flanders, who turned Naxos into the Duchy of Aegea (Dodekanesos). Moreover, in 1267 (Treaty of Viterbo), Emperor Balwin II ceded suzerainty over Naxos to the French prince of Achaia, Charles d'Anjou. The thirteenth century saw such a flow of French into Greece that it was referred to as the "New France." The Sanudo fortress on Naxos contains, indeed, the mansion of the Della Rokka family, a branch of the French de la Roche family, which reigned over Athens. Nevertheless, Naxos remained largely Venetian for three and a half centuries. Since the word *Frank* referred to almost any European nationality, including the Venetian, Phrangopoulo's French ascendance is possible but questionable. See W. Miller, *The Latin in the Levant: A History of Frankish Greece (1204-1566)* (London: 1908; reprinted Cambridge, 1964), pp. 570-610.

[15] The Portugese Yusef Nassi, who, as a favorite of Turkish Sultan Selim II, was Duke of Naxos from 1566 to 1574.

[16] The Lazarists or Vincentians were founded by Saint Vincent de Paul in 1529, originally to work in rural areas. They later succeeded the Jesuits in teaching and missionary work in the Middle East after the Society of Jesus was dissolved by Pope Clement XIV in 1773. The Ursulines mentioned here were more likely to be the Dominican or Vincentian sisters whom Gobineau as the French plenipotentiary had visited during the eruption of the Santorin volcano to give them official reassurance (letter to his sister, 2 Feb 1866, in BNUS, MS. 3520). Gobineau disdained both the Protestant and the Catholic missionaries (see Boissel, *Gobineau* , p. 173). break

[17] Gobineau remarks on this in his correspondence from Greece (various letters quoted in *Pl.* II, pp. 1213-1214 and notes). However, his interest in coats of arms and in the codes of conduct they symbolize lasted all his life. See *Ottar Jarl* , pp. 140-143.

[18] Gobineau's animal imagery is paradoxically dominated by references to birds, who symbolized for him freedom as well as loyalty, especially when nesting. See Smith, "Un Bestiaire de Gobineau," *Etudes gobiniennes* , 1976-1978, pp. 155-170.

[19] The *Revue des Deux Mondes* of January 15, 1846, had published Sainte-Beuve's *Mademoiselle Aïssé, a true story that had inspired Abbé Prévost's Histoire d'une Grecque moderne* . Moreover, Gobineau's mother-in-law, Mme Monnerot, often told her family the adventures of Aimée Dubuc, a Creole friend of hers who, after being abducted by an Algerian pirate and taken to Constantinople, became Sultan Selim's favorite and the mother of his children. See "Souvenirs inédits de Diane de Guldencrone" in *Etudes gobiniennes* , 1966, pp. 71-72. The literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries abounds in such predecessors of the contemporary L. Blanch's *Wilder Shores of Love* (Touchstone, 1970), or in antipodal versions such as the curious *Relation Historique de l'Amour de l'Empereur de Maroc pour Madame la Princesse Douairière de Conti* (Cologne: P. Marteau, 1707).

[20] People from the western mountains of Syria used to sell their girls as slaves to rich Christian and Moslem families in Lebanon and Syria. In turn, people from the Levantine coast emigrated to the Greek islands more willingly than the continental Greeks, who preferred looking toward the thriving commercial centers of Egypt and Turkey and even dreamed of making Constantinople the capital of the Pan-Hellenic Empire--a "great absurd idea" for Gobineau. See n. 10. Such a passage is representative of his position regarding the geographic migration of races: while he nostalgically deplores the islands not having preserved continue

their racial purity, he looks rather benevolently on the present coexistence or symbiosis of different races.

[21] Refers to Rubens's *Marie de Medicis Landing in Marseille* (Louvre Museum) on which the queen is shown surrounded by marine divinities.

[22] *Song of Solomon* , VIII, 6: "Set me a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave."

[23] The famous line from the *Aeneid* , I, v. 405: *Et vera incessu patuit dea* : "and her walk revealed a true goddess [Venus]."

[24] Lésétieux (*Pl.* II, p. 1236) advances the possibility that Gobineau remembered here *The Last of the Mohicans* , translated into French in 1856, as well as a Baudelaire poem imitating Longfellow, *Le Calumet de paix* . The American Indian was in fashion in Paris around 1860.

[25] See our Afterword, p. 281, for an interpretation of this strange scene. On Gobineau's special and lifelong relationship with dogs and his interest in animals, see Smith, *Gobineau et l'histoire naturelle* , p. 7.

[26] P.-L. Rey (*Univers romanesque* , pp. 125-139) analyzes as a Gobinian constant the theme of the starry sky and its relationship to the "ideal sphere" and the "inner light," particularly in *Les Pléiades* .

[27] See Samuel, XI. David is Ruth's great-grandson, not her son.

[28] P.-L. Rey (*Mademoiselle Irnois* , p. 366) connects this passage with the famous "crystallization" theory in Stendhal's *On Love* : the attributes we append to the loved one are compared to the scintillating crystals formed by salt on an ordinary twig burrowed at the bottom of the Salzburg salt mine. See H. Martineau edition, Garnier, 1959, pp. 8-9. break

[29] Akrivie's physical and psychological description echoes that of the Greek woman of Homeric times (see *Essai* , IV, chap. 3, in *Pl.* I, pp. 674-675) in which the mate of the Aryan Greek king, while steeped in the family system, is outspoken and not passively obedient. As Norton will soon discover, there is a subtle distinction here between autonomy and self-assurance, individualism and worth.

[30] Gobineau considers (*Essai* , VI, chap. 5, in *Pl.* I, pp. 1064 ff.) that the heavily Celtic and Saxon population of England had been, so to speak, regenerated by the Scandinavian (i.e., pure Aryan) blood and culture brought there by the Vikings. Just as Akrivie is presented as the paragon of the ancient Aryan woman, so is Norton a paragon of those Aryan characteristics described at the outset of *Essai* (I, chap. 15, in *Pl.* I, pp. 341-342), namely, "the sense of the useful but in a much broader, elevated, more courageous, more ideal sense" than in other races, that is, a double capacity for practicality and idealism. Gobineau emphasizes the struggle of these two pulls in Norton.

[31] The cricketers' absurd costumes throw a different light on the Naxiotes' obsolete attire.

[32] See n. 16, above.

[33] In 1866, in Athens, Gobineau had started to sculpt and appropriately praises the lustrous Parian marble out of which the Venus de Medici was carved.

[34] Unidentified, but in view of his career, which would be hard to imagine, a type probably met by Gobineau on the islands.

[35] A word coined by Gobineau.

[36] De Lenda, the model for M. de Moncade, had a small museum of local history in his house (see n. 8). Gobineau's condescension may be colored by his own seriousness as a collector of medals and objets d'art both in Greece and in Persia. break

[37] Even more recently, in 1863, the French consul, Charles F. Champoiseau, had discovered the Victory of Samothrace.

[38] The Antiparos stalactite cave was already a tourist must in the nineteenth century. King Otto I and Lord Byron are among those who inscribed their names on the walls.

[39] The long description that follows, with its emphasis on the ridiculousness of amateur speleology and, more generally, of tourism, can be read antipodally. Rey sees in it an example of Gobineau's idealism, of his dislike of real nature as compared to an imagined, culturally re-created one (*Univers romanesque* , pp. 77-79, 95 ff.). More compelling to us, and abundantly documented by other texts, is the notion that Gobineau makes fun of nature whenever it is defiled by man's enterprise, as are most popular touristic scenes. The graffiti demonstrate the rape of nature by culture, while the untamed beauty of the volcanic eruption will leave Norton and Akrivie *speechless* (p. 144). Gobineau's ultimate position on the relationship of man and nature is stated in *A Traveling Life* , p. 232-233. See n. 11 to that story. For the Aristotelian sources of this mode of perception, see Smith, "Une écologie de l'écriture," in *Gobineau et l'histoire naturelle* , pp. 155-161 and 173-174. The more than thirty uses of the pronoun *on* in the French establishes an ironic distance between the author and an anonymous, banal, and dutiful tourist whose perception of nature is ready-made. All in all, Gobineau's characters enjoy the nature they deserve.

[40] The inscription is real. Marquis J. B. Chabert de Cogolin (1724-1805) was a member of the Academy of Sciences, a specialist of astronomy and hydrography, and a great traveler. Helène de Tascher, the wife of an attaché at the French Legation in Athens, was remotely connected to Gobineau through his wife's family in Martinique.

[41] Between 1861 and 1863, Gobineau drafted a long poem on *La Belle au bois dormant* , "The Sleeping Beauty." See Paola Berselli Ambri's *Poemi inediti di Arthur de Gobineau* . break

[42] The description of the volcano is rooted in Gobineau's own memories as well as in a number of literary sources, of which the most significant is Mme de Stael's *Corinne* (Bk. XIII, chap. 1), in which the contemplation of Vesuvius seals Oswald's and Corinne's love.

[43] The 1866 eruption.

[44] The two Kameni islets were formed in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The 1866 eruption created the islet of Aphroessa, which Gobineau took as the title of a poem and a collection.

[45] The oleanders at Akrivie's house are reminiscent of "the house with the pink oleander" where Gobineau spent many pleasant hours in the company of Zoé (the model for Akrivie) and Marie Dragoumis. See *Lettres à deux Athéniennes* (1868-1881) and A. Alesso, "La Maison au laurier rose," in *Etudes gobiniennes* , 1971, pp. 220-221.

[46] Gobineau has depicted the Sydney character in *Voyage à Terre-Neuve* (pp. 78-80) and created an older fictionalized version of it in *La Chasse au caribou (The Caribou Hunt)* , under the name of Mr. John (*Pl.* II, pp. 906 ff.). There is no reason to doubt he ran into the two others.

[47] Lady Hester Stanhope (1776-1839), niece of William Pitt. After 1810 she traveled in the Levant and settled down among the Lebanese Druses where, clad in male Oriental dress, she passed as a prophet and hosted distinguished European visitors such as Lamartine and Kinglake. Zanthe or Janthe is another English-woman who left high society around 1830 to live in Greece and Syria, where she ended marrying a sheik. She appears in Ed. About's *Greece and the Greeks of the Present Day* (New York: Dix, Edwards, 1857), pp. 27 ff. and 291.

[48] An allusion to *Ecclesiastes* , IV, 10: "Woe to him that is alone where he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." break

[49] Lésétieux (*Pl.* II, p. 1241) remarks that if Phrangopoulo exaggerates in the matter of keeping his rank, he leaves out the significant matter of the difference of religions.

[50] Norton is supposed to be an aristocrat since in reality his namesakes, the Fitzallans, went back to illustrious fourteenth-century counts.

[51] This brisk ending to a leisurely tale is typically Gobinian (see Smith, *Gobineau et l'histoire naturelle* , pp. 105-106). It particularly resembles the close of *Les Pléiades* , a long and complex novel that ends with the briefest glimpse of the hero's conjugal happiness (*Pléiades* , in *Pl.* III, p. 302).

Adélaïde

[1] The reason for this French name in a German salon remains unknown. Gobineau possibly imagines M. de Hautcastel as a French diplomat, inspired perhaps by Louis de Viel-Castel, his director at the Ministry when he was posted to Germany, July to November 1851. Lésétieux hypothesizes (*Pl.* II, p. 1264) that Countess de Castellane, a reputed femme fatale of Balzac's time, may also have been a remote model.

[2] Gobineau added this short preamble to the finished manuscript. See Introduction, pp. 23-25, on his storytelling techniques, and Afterword, pp. 283-285, on the background to the story.

[3] Note the irony of the name: Frederick can hardly be said to live up to his patronym ("Red Flag").

[4] The *Cheveaux-Légers* cavalry existed in France until 1789 and continued to exist in the Germanic states until 1914. At the time of the writing of "Adélaïde" (1869), that is during the Second Empire in France, its mention would evoke a traditional monarchic state. break

[5] We have respected Gobineau's erratic use of the particle, typical of this quickly written work. The name comes perhaps from the city of Hermann, Missouri, center of a region of heavy German immigration in the 1840s, mentioned in an article by Gobineau (*Revue Nouvelle* , t. II, 1845, pp. 37-38).

[6] Allusion to a famous episode in the story of Renaud and the Enchantress Armide in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* . Its romantic aura reinforces the cruel irony of the "aging cicadas," below.

[7] A position identical to that of Gobineau, who was consistently anticlerical and too deterministic in his worldview to make a good Catholic but who, like Montaigne, accommodated himself with the Church on grounds of tradition and common sense.

[8] On the consistent parallel to be made between the behavior of "Adélaïde's" threesome and various kinds of animal behaviors, especially those of aggression and bonding, see Smith, *Gobineau et l'histoire naturelle* , pp. 101, 117-118. The other chain of metaphors is, of course, military.

[9] Gobineau's mythology is at fault: far from making it up with Theseus, Ariadne became a priestess of Bacchus, who married her.

[10] The florin, originally minted in Florence in the thirteenth century, was current in all of Europe and maintained itself in Germany until 1871. Like the Chevaux-Légers, it refers to an older and more traditional economy.

[11] Franz J. Gall (1758-1828) emigrated to Paris in 1807. As the founder of craniology or cranioscopy (which assigned a precise cranial location for each of 27 mental faculties), he knew a great vogue between 1830 and 1840 and inspired Balzac and other writers.

[12] Probably Joseph (*Genesis* , XXXIX, 7-15) resisting the advances of Potiphar's wife. break

[13] According to Lésétieux (*Pl.* II, p. 1269) between 1850 and 1870 military weaponry knew a considerable development, particularly in Prussia under the leadership of Alfred Krupp (1812-1887). The howitzer had been a muzzle loader, but breech-loading mechanisms were being developed to increase its efficiency. While not in large-scale use until about 1870, they were on the drawing boards at the time of this story.

[14] Gobineau refers to the *draisienne* , a primitive type of bicycle very popular around 1820 and most unstable.

[15] Auguste H. Lafontaine (1756-1831), a German novelist in vogue in France around 1830 and in Germany until the 1860s, considered to be a "family novelist."

[16] Henriette Sontag (1806-1854), an operatic soprano famous in Austria, Germany, and France for singing Weber and Beethoven. After marrying the diplomat Count Rossi, she gave up her career in 1830 but resumed it in the 1850s for appearances in the United States and Mexico.

[17] See n. 24 to "Akrivie Phrangopoulo."

[18] Louis III, or the Pious, landgrave of Thuringe, Count of Saxony, and a hero of the Second Crusade, was an ancestor of the house of Brunswick, one of the models for the setting of "Adélaïde."

The War with the Turcomans

[1] Originally Turkish for "older brother," later "master" or "leader" in the Ottoman Empire and used for various dignitaries. Ironically, "Goolam" means "servant or slave."

[2] A coin, formerly silver, but by Gobineau's time copper and of very low value. break

[3] Honorific title that did not have a specific function attached to it.

[4] Meshed, an important holy city in northeastern Iran, houses a shrine to Imam Riza (the eighth Imam) and the tomb of the Caliph Harun al Rashid. Imam or Imaum: a word that from "leader of the prayers" came to designate a spiritual leader and then the head of a Moslem community.

[5] A comptroller of finances.

[6] *The Koran* (II, 168-173) forbids eating hare as impure flesh.

[7] In 1855, this Persian coin was worth approximately five francs, that is, about one 1855 dollar.

[8] *Trois ans en Asie* (*Pl.* II, p. 339) mentions that the average dowry expected from a fiancé of comfortable family was thirty tomauns or approximately three hundred sixty francs of the time.

[9] The tomaun (originally Turkish) was worth ten sahebkrans (or fifty francs).

[10] Variously flavored liquor distilled from fermented rice, molasses, dates, figs, or raisins; similar versions are called arack (arrak/arak) in other parts of the Middle East. From Arabic *araq* , juice.

[11] "A heavy, short, double-edged, pointed saber" (*Trois ans en Asie, Pl.* II, p. 314).

[12] The Arabic form of this oath, formed from the name of Allah preceded by three different prepositions (Vallah! Billah! Tallah!), is frequently used by Gobineau in this and other Asiatic tales.

[13] Actually the administrator of a village appointed by its inhabitants.

[14] *Trois ans en Asie* (*Pl.* II, pp. 313-315) comments on the vagaries and corruption of the military service in Persia. break

[15] A means of corporal punishment then in common use in the Middle East. The culprit's legs are tied to a rod, he is thrown on his back, and the bottoms of his feet are beaten.

[16] Their duties ranged from spreading carpets and setting up camp to general police work and the administration of corporal punishment.

[17] A kind of flat (therefore easily concealed) bottle or flask; an example of Gobineau's frequent redundancies when using Oriental words.

[18] The Caliph Ali, assassinated in 661, is considered by the Shiite Moslems (the majority in Persia) as Mahomet's sole and rightful successor. He and his two sons, Hussan and Hossein, are venerated by the Shiites as the legitimate Imams.

[19] Honorific title ("Priest of the Law") given to various dignitaries.

[20] Described in *Trois ans en Asie* both as "a sort of short silk tunic of light color, embroidered with pearls" (*Pl.* II, p. 218) and as "of crude dark wool cloth" (ibid., p. 390).

[21] In *Trois ans en Asie* (ibid., p. 319-320), Gobineau colorfully depicts the vicissitudes of a tax collector's life in a country where there were too many parties entitled to collect taxes. They rarely came off as well as Aga Beg and his vekil.

[22] Teheran had twelve gates named after the directions they faced, where they led, who used them, or the purpose for which they were used. Shimran was a desirable summer retreat north of the capital.

[23] Head of a regiment.

[24] Its numerous versions (among which *Franks, Feringhees, Firangis, Franguis*) refer to Western Europeans. As a diplomat, Gobineau ran into difficulties with the French military instructors assigned to the Persian army. break

[25] Equivalent of a captain.

[26] This particular mullah appears in *Religions et Philosophies* (*Pl.* II, pp. 478-479), where Gobineau mentions the Persians' keen interest in metaphysical speculation, even among those of the humblest condition.

[27] Here Aga Beg simplifies to the extreme the doctrine of the Bab, which Gobineau was the first to expose to the Western world in *Religions et philosophies* (chaps. 7 to 12 and Appendix). Since Babism regards creation as an *emanation* and therefore as a dilution of the divine essence, it is by definition imperfect. However, the fact that this creation is ultimately reabsorbed into divine unity and perfection absolves matter itself of any responsibility for evil and makes Babism a fairly optimistic doctrine, which is described by Gobineau as "a moderate spiritualism." This all-inclusiveness allowed Babism to be relatively tolerant toward other religions and political systems and quite pragmatic in matters of individual ethics.

[28] "Gate of the State" or "of Power" (see n. 22). A nice irony in view of the forthcoming debacle of power.

[29] Three nomadic tribes from northern Persia. Gobineau encountered the second between Kazvin and Sultaniyeh in 1856 on his way back to France and the third the same year at the summer station of Gherk-Boulak.

[30] Commander of a mounted army.

[31] Variant of tumbak, a coarse tobacco used in the *kalian* .

[32] Popular word for a mythically rich Byzantium.

[33] See n. 4.

[34] The sign of a Ulema, or student of the sacred texts.

[35] Two Persian heroes from Firdousi's *Shah-Nameh* (a history of the kings of Persia) legendary for their strength and bravery. break

[36] Gobineau had to handle an official matter involving the swindling of the Persian government by a Frenchman, Captain Rous, who sold the army inoperable rifles.

[37] The Turcomans are Sunnite Moslems, followers of these caliphs, who are illegitimate in the eyes of the Shiites.

[38] Officer in charge of 100 men in the Persian army, which imitated the Ottoman. Equivalent of a brigadier general.

[39] Nomadic and rebellious Shiite tribes in southwestern Iran who claim to be of non-Iranian origin. Gobineau mentions them in *Trois ans en Asie* (*Pl.* II, pp. 130 ff.).

[39] Nomadic and rebellious Shiite tribes in southwestern Iran who claim to be of non-Iranian origin. Gobineau mentions them in *Trois ans en Asie* (*Pl.* II, pp. 130 ff.).

[40] Roustam is a legendary Persian hero, celebrated in Firdousi's *Shah-Nameh* . Iskender is the Arabic name for Alexander the Great, who is given an important place in the historical and legendary traditions of Persia and who is cited in the *Koran* (XVIII, 59).

[41] One of the five "legal prayers": dawn, noon, midafternoon or *asr* (when the shadow on the sun dial is twice the length of the needle itself), sunset, night. Gobineau notes in *Trois ans en Asie* (*Pl.* II, p. 345) that the Persians often omit it. Moslems are allowed to "interiorize" the prayers, a permission sometimes abused.

[42] After being successively under Arab, Turkish, Mongolian and Tartar rule, the Turcomans became subjects of the Khan of Khiva around 1800.

[43] Legendary lovers in Arabian poetry, later celebrated by the Persian poets Nizami and Jami.

[44] Jonah's legend is told in the *Koran* (XXXVII, 139-148) and is familiar to the Moslem world.

[45] The Hebrew word is also used by Moslems at the end of prayers. break

[46] The harem (literally, "the interior").

[47] In *Religions et philosophies* (*Pl.* II, pp. 498-499), Gobineau tells the parallel story of Hossein Kouli Aga as an example of westernized Persians distanced both from Europe and from Persia in whom he sees an intimation of what Persians might become.

A Traveling Life

[1] Though more dramatic, the Contis' financial plight is not unlike Gobineau's previous to his appointment in Persia. By staying in Basel, Gobineau risked seeing his modest salary cut in half at a period when he had emptied his pockets to publish the first part of the *Essai* at his own expense (1853). The post in Frankfort (1854) saved him from bankruptcy, which the Teheran and, later, the Rio appointments with their larger salaries and indemnities kept at bay until the desperate years of 1870 and 1871.

[2] A statue of Venus as a war goddess discovered on the site of the Roman theater at Arles in 1621.

[3] A famous Venetian woman who eloped to Florence with her young lover Buenaventuri in 1563 and who pretended to have a child by another lover, Duke Francis of Medici, in order to marry him.

[4] Probably Sicily and Malta.

[5] The name given in Flanders to the wandering Jew.

[6] Certainly inspired by travel notes made by Gobineau on his way back from Greece with Dom Pedro in 1876 (BNUS, MS. 3554) in which Gobineau rants against a similar group of travelers and shows equal contempt for the English, the Italians, and one Austrian Jew.

[7] Bellicose mountaineer type from northern Greece who, after the independence of Greece, continued to dress in the Albanian continue

fashion and to carry their distinctive weapons--a long rifle, a pair of pistols, and a dagger at the belt.

[8] Coastal range in Epirus, southern Albania, ending on the Adriatic at Cape Acroceraunia.

[9] Rather than Gobineau's preference for a "cultured" nature (see n. 39 to "Akrivie") this description shows Lucy approaching the Orient burdened by decidedly Western cultural baggage.

[10] Possible allusion to Canto VI, v. 103-111 of Dante's *Inferno* or to some Eastern thinker or legend. Gobineau admired the author of the *Divine Comedy* and considered writing a commentary on the *Paradiso* .

[11] The metaphor of a union, a marriage between nature and culture, is to be contrasted with the rape of nature implied in Akrivie's Antiparos cave expedition. See "Akrivie," n. 39.

[12] A barely disguised Baron Anton Prokesch-Osten (1795-1876), Austrian internuncio in Turkey from 1855 to 1871 and a brilliant mediator in Levantine affairs and supporter of the Ottoman Empire. He helped Clémence and Diane de Gobineau, stranded on the Caucasian shores, to sail to Constantinople after the French Embassy had turned its back on the unfortunate and exhausted travelers.

[13] In discriminating between the ordinarily Asiatic Turks and the descendants of the Janissaries, originally levies of Christian troops, Count P. shows a European prejudice: after 1600, the Janissaries consisted mostly of Moslems who had inherited their positions, and in 1826 their massacre was ordered by Mahmud II.

[14] On its way to Colchis, Jason's ship, the *Argo* , had, by means of divine intervention, made it safely between the Simplegades, two moving cliffs that crushed anything passing between them. After Jason's passage, they remained fixed in place, forming the entrance to the Black Sea. break

[15] Note that the *Essai* 's basic premises, illustrated by the first half of this paragraph, are immediately disarmed by the second half, an encapsulation of the Contis' forthcoming education, one that Gobineau himself (and to some extent his wife) underwent during the Oriental episode. Despite the odious descriptions of the black type in *Essai* , I, chap. 16 and II, chap. 1 (*Pl.* I, pp. 339-340, 350-351), Gobineau off and on finds himself seduced by the black race and on his way to Persia remarks in *Trois ans en Asie* (*Pl.* II, p. 63-64) on the intelligence and skill of the black Laskars and rhapsodizes on "the beauty and the agreeable proportions" of the Somalis, whom he compares to "antic bronzes of the best Greek period" (ibid., pp. 80-81).

[16] Gobineau confuses two episodes of the Medea legend: Medea's witchery did rejuvenate Jason's father, Aeson, and after Jason repudiated her, she killed their common children; however, it was not Aeson but Pelias who, on Medea's advice, was cut in strips and boiled by his daughters in the hope of rejuvenating him.

[17] Circassia (now part of the USSR, formerly part of the Ottoman Empire) was ceded to Russia in 1829 by the Treaty of Adrianople. Russia met fierce resistance, which was followed by the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Moslem Circassians to Turkey, where, contrary to Gobineau's statement, the Sultan gave them land.

[18] Abazia or Abkhazia, situated between the Black Sea and the Greater Caucasus, is a Mohammedan autonomous Soviet Republic, annexed by Russia from Turkey in 1810. Abazians also fled the Russian invasion and took refuge in Anatolia.

[19] A subversive rewording of Boileau's *Epitres* , V, v, 44 (Classiques Garnier, 1961, p. 124, v. 14-15): "In vain does a fool ride off to deceive his boredom, grief mounts his horse and travels with him."

[20] Members of a police corps in the Ottoman army. break

[21] A malevolent enchanter who appears in Bojardo's *Orlando Innamorato* , in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* , and in Walter Scott.

[22] Also, moucharaby, windows fitted with a latticework of turned wood that isolate the women's apartment from the rest of the house.

[23] Now Erzerum or Erzurum. Formerly Theodosiopolis, an important commercial center in northeast Turkey, in Armenia. In *Trois ans en Asie* (*Pl.* II, p. 394), Gobineau mentions that on his way out of Persia in 1858 he enjoyed the "eager hospitality" of the host described here.

[24] A kaimakam is a grand vizier's lieutenant in the Ottoman Empire. Baiburt is situated between Trebizond and Erzerum.

[25] A title in the Ottoman Empire for high-ranking officers or governors of provinces.

[26] The first, a liberal political journal founded in 1836; the second, a journal of general interest published from 1864 to 1883, was meant to compete with *L'Illustration* .

[27] Feminine of Khan.

[28] Perhaps the *Journal des modes et nouveautés* , published from 1797 to 1839, but more probably invented by Gobineau and based on various existing models.

[29] Gobineau, his family, and their escort traveled in caravan from Buchir to Teheran in 1855 (Pt. I of *Trois ans en Asie*), while he did the Erzerum-Tabriz leg with a smaller escort in 1858 (*Trois ans en Asie* , "Retour"). All details from this point on are therefore realistic if not always correct in their implications. On the caravan as an ecological simile and the motif of nomadism in Gobineau's works, see Smith, *Gobineau et l'histoire naturelle* , pp. 139-154.

[30] *Trois ans en Asie* (*Pl.* II, pp. 114-117) explains at length the character and functions of a head muleteer or *tcharvadar* . break

[31] Now Shustar in Khuzistan, southwest Iran. Logically, Kerbelai Hossein should be from Kerbela in central Irak, site of the tomb of the Shiite Saint Hossein, grandson of Mohammed.

[32] See n. 3 to "Turcomans."

[33] A town in the vicinity of Mount Ararat (16,946 ft.) in Armenia, identified as the place where Noah's ark came to rest.

[34] See n. 9 to "Turcomans."

[35] In Turkish, "Sir," placed after a first name, a title less prestigious than "beg."

[36] A polite Persian way of talking to a man about his wife.

[37] See n. 24 to "Turcomans."

[38] A double basket hanging on either side of a mule's back.

[39] Gobineau seems to mix a Kurdish Yezidi, worshipper of the devil, with a descendant of the Zoroastrian Ghebres, adorers of the sun. See a similar incident in *Trois ans* (*Pl.* II, p. 394).

[40] Iranian village at the Turko-Persian border.

[41] See n. 37 to "Turcomans."

[42] The liberal reforms promulgated by the Hatt-i Sherif of Gulhané in 1839 and by the Tanzimat (after 1856) making Turks of all religions equal before the law. They were met by a great deal of resistance, and non-Moslems were often massacred as a result.

[43] *Ahl al-Kitab* , that is, the monotheistic Christian and Jew, were more tolerated by Islam than were polytheists.

[44] Minister of a prince.

[45] See n. 19 to "Turcomans."

[46] Long, loose tunic worn by nomads, and today mostly by the clergy. break

[47] Transposition of a real character who joined the Gobineaus' caravan, a Syrian (rather than Italian) woman, equally unappealing, although equally seasoned as a traveler and preposterous as a writer (*Trois ans en Asie*, *Pl.* II, p. 182).

[48] Gobineau is indulging in a bit of self-irony here, as the poet resembles him when young, including the reading of Thomas Moore. *Lalla-Rookh* includes the story of an adorer of the sun and is one of the sources of Gobineau's first poem, *Dilfiza* .

[49] Two provincial cities, the first in Switzerland, the second in Savoy.

[50] Important market town in the province of Kerman, central Iran.

[51] See n. 31, above.

[52] The Koran (II, 192 and III, 91) authorizes such a substitution.

[53] The story has points of resemblance with another of the *Nouvelles Asiatiques* , "The Illustrious Magician," in which a young man, mesmerized by an old dervish, abandons everything to follow him.

[54] Gobineau's spelling of Khazar, one of the ancient names of the Caspian Sea derived from a nomadic, Turkic-speaking tribe, the Khazars, who inhabited its shores.

[55] Today, Shufu, a caravan center in west Sinkiang Province, China.

[56] An example of Gobineau's occasionally prophetic view of history. Saiyid Adurraman's opinions correspond to those of Gobineau himself, including the agnostic tendencies expressed at the end.

[57] Turkish *buyurultu* , an order given to a subordinate, by extension a pass or a permit. break

[58] Persian equivalent of the above.

[59] From the Arabic *tadzkirat* , a certificate or passport.

[60] A brass coin of very small value.

[61] An Arabic word meaning "rule" or "regulation."

[62] In a diplomatic dispatch dated 20 Feb 1862 (in *Dépêches diplomatiques* , p. 170) Gobineau mentions that the Persian government had started installing telegraph lines.

[63] Gobineau paraphrases Peter's words upon seeing a vision of Jesus transfigured and talking with Moses and Elias: "Let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias" (Matthew, xvii, 4; Mark, ix, 5; Luke, ix, 33).

[64] For instance, Kansu and Shensi provinces.

[65] A peninsula on the western coast of the Caspian Sea in the Kazakh SSR.

[66] Meshed, see n. 4 to "Turcomans;" Kum (Qum, Qom), a city in central Iran and a Shiite holy place; Kerbela, see n. 31, above.

[67] Transcription of an Arabic word meaning "guardian of the order."

[68] Turkish participants in periodic revolts against the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

[69] See n. 39 to "Turcomans."

[70] Clémence de Gobineau used the same words to describe her isolation and malaise in her letters to her mother (see Boissel, *Gobineau* , p. 167).

[71] Perhaps an inadvertence. Gobineau had written earlier that the poet died before reaching the Persian border. break

Afterword

[1] From an undated letter to his father (received August 27, 1843) in BNUS, MS. 3518.

[2] Published on January 29, 30, and 31 and February 13, 14, 18, and 20, 1847, in *Le National* . Subsequent editions: Tancrède de Visan (NRF, 1920 and 1924); A. Rowbotham (New York & London: Harpers, 1921); J. Mistler with preface by P. Morand (Paris: Livre de poche, 1959); in *Nouvelles* (Paris: J. J. Pauvert, 1956 and 1962); A. B. Duff and F. R. Bastide (Paris: Livre de poche, 1961); J. Mistler (Paris: Hachette, 1961); J. Gaulmier in *Le Mouchoir rouge et autres nouvelles* (Paris: Garnier, 1968); J. Boissel, in *Pl.* I; P.-L. Rey, *Mademoiselle Irnois, Adélaïde et autres nouvelles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); German translation by R. Linke (Leipzig: Matthes, 1921) as *Fraulein Irnois* ; no previous English translation.

[3] See *Une Vie de femme liée aux événements de l'époque* (Paris and Brussels: Editions Erasme, 1959), p. 87.

[4] *Madame Bovary* , translated by P. de Man (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), p. 2.

[5] *Univers romanesque* , pp. 122-125.

[6] Ibid., pp. 349 ff.

[5] *Univers romanesque* , pp. 122-125.

[6] Ibid., pp. 349 ff.

[7] Letter to Dom Pedro, 18 Oct 1879, in *Corr. Pedro* , p. 573.

[8] First published in *Souvenirs de voyage: Cephalonie, Naxie et Terre-Neuve* (Paris: Plon, 1872) and in subsequent editions of same volume (see n. 9); by J. Gaulmier, in *Le Mouchoir rouge* (see n. 2).

[9] First published in *Nouvelle Revue Française* , no. 60, December 1, 1913, pp. 864-892; republished by Editions NRF (1914, 1924); by Editions de l'Arrière-boutique (1950); in the Livre de poche (1959 and 1961), Pauvert, Hachette, and Garnier editions of the short stories (see n. 2); prefaced by J. Buenzod (Lausanne: Guilde du livre, 1962); German translations by continue

R. Schlosser (Braunschweig and Berlin: Westermanns Monatshefte, 1917) and R. Linke (Leipzig: Matthes, 1921); English translation by E. Marielle, in *The Penguin Book of French Short Stories* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968).

[10] For original edition see note 8. Republished by B. Grasset in 1922 and 1927, by "La Pléiade" in 1926 (illustrated by D. Galanis), by Editions du Rocher (Monaco) in 1948 (ed. J. Mistler), in German translated by F. Hahne as *Reisefruchte aus Kephalonia* . . . .(Leipzig: Reclam, 1905).

[11] See *Lettres à deux Athéniennes* , pp. 107-108.

[12] The phrase is from a letter to Zoé Dragoumis, August 24, 1869, quoted in *Pl.* II, p. 1210.

[13] See Rey, *Univers romanesque* , pp. 325-328.

[14] Dated 6 Aug 1851 (BNUS, MS. 3519).

[15] *Etudes critiques* , p. 86 (in an article on Musset's prose work).

[16] See *De l'Amour* , ed. Martineau (Garnier, 1959), chap. 39. "Adélaïde" is also reminiscent of the chapter "Exemples de l'amour en France dans la classe riche" in which Mme de Féline realizes that she is saddled with "une bête pour tête-à-tête; et, ce qui est bien plus affreux, une bête quelquefois ridicule dans le monde."

[17] See *Oeuvre complètes* (Geneva: Slatkin Reprints, 1970), 6 vols., vol. 3/4, p. 9.

[18] First published by Didier, 1876. Subsequent editions: Perrin, 1913; Crès, 1924; Devambez, 1927; Gallimard, 1939 (preface by C. Serpeille de Gobineau); Club français du livre, 1948; Bibliothèque mondiale, 1956; Bibliolâtres de France, 1957; Pauvert, 1963; Garnier, 1965 (ed. and intro. by J. Gaulmier). Translated as *Novelas Asiaticas* (Madrid: 1923; as *Asiatische Novellen* (Vienna: Schroll, 1924); as *Der Turkmen Krieg* (Leipzig: Matthes, continue

1924); minus "A Traveling Life" as *Romances of the East* (New York: Appleton, 1878, repr. by Arno Press, 1973) and as *Five Oriental Tales* (New York: Viking Press, 1925, repr. by Harcourt Brace, 1926, under the title, *The Dancing Girl of Shamakha and other Asiatic Tales*); translated by J. Lewis May as *Tales of Asia* (London: G. Bles, 1947); translated by Pedro Vances under the title *La danzarina de Shamakha y otras novelas asiáticas* (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, 1949. "The War with the Turcomans" appears in *Nineteenth-Century French Tales* (New York: Ungar, 1967).

[19] Quoted along with other enthusiastic endorsements of Gobineau's fiction by twentieth-century writers in *Pl.* I, p. *lv.*

[20] In *Trois ans en Asie* (*Pl.* II, p. 140) Gobineau quotes a standard Persian joke: Two people meet on the street in Asterabad; one asks, "What's new?" "Nothing in the last two hours," the other answers, "the Turcomans have gone to lunch."

[21] See n. 38 to our introduction.

[22] *Pl.* III, p. 306.

[23] *Les Pléiades, Pl.* III, p. 15.

[24] See a list of such complaints quoted from his correspondence in Rey's *Univers romanesque* , p. 78, n. 4; also *Trois ans en Asie, Pl.* II, pp. 65, 78, 204 ff. break