Droll Stories, V. 1

Honore de Balzac

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DROLL STORIES
COLLECTED FROM THE ABBEYS OF TOURAINE
Volume I: THE FIRST TEN TALES
by HONORE DE BALZAC

TRANSLATORS PREFACE

When, in March, 1832, the first volume of the now famous Contes Drolatiques was published by Gosselin of Paris, Balzac, in a short preface, written in the publisher's name, replied to those attacks which he anticipated certain critics would make upon his hardy experiment. He claimed for his book the protection of all those to whom literature was dear, because it was a work of art—and a work of art, in the highest sense of the word, it undoubtedly is. Like Boccaccio, Rabelais, the Queen of Navarre, Ariosto, and Verville, the great author of The Human Comedy has painted an epoch. In the fresh and wonderful language of the Merry Vicar Of Meudon, he has given us a marvellous picture of French life and manners in the sixteenth century. The gallant knights and merry dames of that eventful period of French history stand out in bold relief upon his canvas. The background in these life−like figures is, as it were, “sketched upon the spot.” After reading the Contes Drolatiques, one could almost find one's way about the towns and villages of Touraine, unassisted by map or guide. Not only is this book a work of art from its historical information and topographical accuracy; its claims to that distinction rest upon a broader foundation. Written in the nineteenth century in imitation of the style of the sixteenth, it is a triumph of literary archaeology. It is a model of that which it professes to imitate; the production of a writer who, to accomplish it, must have been at once historian, linguist, philosopher, archaeologist, and anatomist, and each in no ordinary degree. In France, his work has long been regarded as a classic—as a faithful picture of the last days of the moyen age, when kings and princesses, brave gentlemen and haughty ladies laughed openly at stories and jokes which are considered disgraceful by their more fastidious descendants. In England the difficulties of the language employed, and the quaintness and peculiarity of its style, have placed it beyond the reach of all but those thoroughly acquainted with the French of the sixteenth century. Taking into consideration the vast amount of historical information enshrined in its pages, the archaeological value which it must always possess for the student, and the dramatic interest of its stories, the translator has thought that an English edition of Balzac's chef−d'oeuvre would be acceptable to many. It has, of course, been impossible to reproduce in all its vigour and freshness the language of the original. Many of the quips and cranks and puns have been lost in the process of Anglicising. These unavoidable blemishes apart, the writer ventures to hope that he has treated this great masterpiece in a reverent spirit, touched it with no sacrilegious hand, but, on the contrary, given as close a translation as the dissimilarities of the two languages permit. With this idea, no attempt had been made to polish or round many of the awkwardly constructed sentences which are characteristic of this volume. Rough, and occasionally obscure, they are far more in keeping with the spirit of the original than the polished periods of modern romance. Taking into consideration the many difficulties which he has had to overcome, and which those best acquainted with the French edition will best appreciate, the translator claims the indulgence of the critical reader for any shortcomings he may discover. The best plea that can be offered for such indulgence is the fact that, although Les Contes Drolatiques was completed and published in 1837, the present is the first English version ever brought before the public.

London, January, 1874

FIRST TEN TALES

PROLOGUE

This is a book of the highest flavour, full of right hearty merriment, spiced to the palate of the illustrious and very precious tosspots and drinkers, to whom our worthy compatriot, Francois Rabelais, the eternal honour of Touraine, addressed himself. Be it nevertheless understood, the author has no other desire than to be a good Touranian, and joyfully to chronicle the merry doings of the famous people of this sweet and productive land, more fertile in cuckolds, dandies and witty wags than any other, and which has furnished a good share of men of renown in France, as witness the departed Courier of piquant memory; Verville, author of Moyen de Parvenir, and others equally well known, among whom we will specially mention the Sieur Descartes, because he was a melancholy genius, and devoted himself more to brown studies than to drinks and dainties, a man of whom all the cooks and confectioners of Tours have a wise horror, whom they despise, and will not hear spoken of, and say, “Where does he live?” if his name is mentioned. Now this work is the production of the joyous leisure of good old monks, of whom there are many vestiges scattered about the country, at Grenadiere−les−St.−Cyr, in the village of Sacche−les−Azay−le−Rideau, at Marmoustiers, Veretz, Roche−Cobon, and the certain storehouses of good stories, which storehouses are the upper stories of old canons and wise dames, who remember the good old days when they could enjoy a hearty laugh without looking to see if their hilarity disturbed the sit of your ruffle, as do the young women of the present day, who wish to take their pleasure gravely—a custom which suits our Gay France as much as a water jug would the head of a queen. Since laughter is a privilege granted to man alone, and he has sufficient causes for tears within his reach, without adding to them by books, I have considered it a thing most patriotic to publish a drachm of merriment for these times, when weariness falls like a fine rain, wetting us, soaking into us, and dissolving those ancient customs which make the people to reap public amusement from the Republic. But of those old pantagruelists who allowed God and the king to conduct their own affairs without putting of their finger in the pie oftener than they could help, being content to look on and laugh, there are very few left. They are dying out day by day in such manner that I fear greatly to see these illustrious fragments of the ancient breviary spat upon, staled upon, set at naught, dishonoured, and blamed, the which I should be loath to see, since I have and bear great respect for the refuse of our Gallic antiquities.

Bear in mind also, ye wild critics, you scrapers−up of words, harpies who mangle the intentions and inventions of everyone, that as children only do we laugh, and as we travel onward laughter sinks down and dies out, like the light of the oil−lit lamp. This signifies, that to laugh you must be innocent, and pure of a heart, lacking which qualities you purse your lips, drop your jaws, and knit your brow, after the manner of men hiding vices and impurities. Take, then, this work as you would take a group of statue, certain features of which an artist could omit, and he would be the biggest of all big fools if he puts leaves upon them, seeing that these said works are not, any more than is this book, intended for nunneries. Nevertheless, I have taken care, much to my vexation, to weed from the manuscripts the old words, which, in spite of their age, were still strong, and which would have shocked the ears, astonished the eyes, reddened the cheeks and sullied the lips of trousered maidens, and Madame Virtue with three lovers; for certain things must be done to suit the vices of the age, and a periphrase is much more agreeable than the word. Indeed, we are old, and find long trifles, better than the short follies of our youth, because at that time our taste was better. Then spare me your slanders, and read this rather at night than in the daytime and give it not to young maidens, if there be any, because this book is inflammable. I will now rid you of myself. But I fear nothing from this book, since it is extracted from a high and splendid source, from which all that has issued has had a great success, as is amply proved by the royal orders of the Golden Fleece, of the Holy Ghost, of the Garter, of the Bath, and by many notable things which have been taken therefrom, under shelter of which I place myself.

'Now make ye merry, my hearties, and gayly read with ease of body and rest of reins, and may a cancer carry you if you disown me after having read me.' These words are those of our good Master Rabelais, before whom we must also stand, hat in hand, in token of reverence and honour to him, prince of all wisdom, and king of Comedy.

THE FAIR IMPERIA

The Archbishop of Bordeaux had added to his suite when going to the Council at Constance quite a good−looking little priest of Touraine whose ways and manner of speech was so charming that he passed for a son of La Soldee and the Governor. The Archbishop of Tours had willingly given him to his confrere for his journey to that town, because it was usual for archbishops to make each other presents, they well knowing how sharp are the itchings of theological palms. Thus this young priest came to the Council and was lodged in the establishment of his prelate, a man of good morals and great science.

Philippe de Mala, as he was called, resolved to behave well and worthily to serve his protector, but he saw in this mysterious Council many men leading a dissolute life and yet not making less, nay— gaining more indulgences, gold crowns and benefices than all the other virtuous and well−behaved ones. Now during one night—dangerous to his virtue—the devil whispered into his ear that he should live more luxuriously, since every one sucked the breasts of our Holy Mother Church and yet they were not drained, a miracle which proved beyond doubt the existence of God. And the priest of Touraine did not disappoint the devil. He promised to feast himself, to eat his bellyful of roast meats and other German delicacies, when he could do so without paying for them as he was poor. As he remained quite continent (in which he followed the example of the poor old archbishop who sinned no longer because he was unable to, and passed for a saint,) he had to suffer from intolerable desires followed by fits of melancholy, since there were so many sweet courtesans, well developed, but cold to the poor people, who inhabited Constance, to enlighten the understanding of the Fathers of the Council. He was savage that he did not know how to make up to these gallant sirens, who snubbed cardinals, abbots, councillors, legates, bishops, princes and margraves just as if they have been penniless clerks. And in the evening, after prayers, he would practice speaking to them, teaching himself the breviary of love. He taught himself to answer all possible questions, but on the morrow if by chance he met one of the aforesaid princesses dressed out, seated in a litter and escorted by her proud and well−armed pages, he remained open−mouthed, like a dog in the act of catching flies, at the sight of sweet countenance that so much inflamed him. The secretary of a Monseigneur, a gentleman of Perigord, having clearly explained to him that the Fathers, procureurs, and auditors of the Rota bought by certain presents, not relics or indulgences, but jewels and gold, the favour of being familiar with the best of these pampered cats who lived under the protection of the lords of the Council; the poor Touranian, all simpleton and innocent as he was, treasured up under his mattress the money given him by the good archbishop for writings and copying—hoping one day to have enough just to see a cardinal's lady−love, and trusting to God for the rest. He was hairless from top to toe and resembled a man about as much as a goat with a night−dress on resembles a young lady, but prompted by his desires he wandered in the evenings through the streets of Constance, careless of his life, and, at the risk of having his body halberded by the soldiers, he peeped at the cardinals entering the houses of their sweethearts. Then he saw the wax−candles lighted in the houses and suddenly the doors and the windows closed. Then he heard the blessed abbots or others jumping about, drinking, enjoying themselves, love−making, singing Alleluia and applauding the music with which they were being regaled. The kitchen performed miracles, the Offices said were fine rich pots−full, the Matins sweet little hams, the Vespers luscious mouthful, and the Lauhes delicate sweetmeats, and after their little carouses, these brave priests were silent, their pages diced upon the stairs, their mules stamped restively in the streets; everything went well—but faith and religion was there. That is how it came to pass the good man Huss was burned. And the reason? He put his finger in the pie without being asked. Then why was he a huguenot before the others?

To return, however to our sweet little Philippe, not unfrequently did he receive many a thump and hard blow, but the devil sustained him, inciting him to believe that sooner or later it would come to his turn to play the cardinal to some lovely dame. This ardent desire gave him the boldness of a stag in autumn, so much so that one evening he quietly tripped up the steps and into one of the first houses in Constance where often he had seen officers, seneschals, valets, and pages waiting with torches for their masters, dukes, kings, cardinals and archbishops.

“Ah!” said he, “she must be very beautiful and amiable, this one.”

A soldier well armed allowed him to pass, believing him to belong to the suite of the Elector of Bavaria, who

had just left, and that he was going to deliver a message on behalf of the above−mentioned nobleman. Philippe de Mala mounted the stairs as lightly as a greyhound in love, and was guided by delectable odour of perfume to certain chamber where, surrounded by her handmaidens, the lady of the house was divesting herself of her attire. He stood quite dumbfounded like a thief surprised by sergeants. The lady was without petticoat or head−dress. The chambermaid and the servants, busy taking off her stockings and undressing her, so quickly and dextrously had her stripped, that the priest, overcome, gave vent to a long Ah! which had the flavour of love about it.

“What want you, little one?” said the lady to him.

“To yield my soul to you,” said he, flashing his eyes upon her.

“You can come again to−morrow,” said she, in order to be rid of him.

To which Philippe replied, blushing, “I will not fail.”

Then she burst out laughing. Philippe, struck motionless, stood quite at his ease, letting wander over her his eyes that glowed and sparkled with the flame of love. What lovely thick hair hung upon her ivory white back, showing sweet white places, fair and shining between the many tresses! She had upon her snow−white brow a ruby circlet, less fertile in rays of fire than her black eyes, still moist with tears from her hearty laugh. She even threw her slipper at a statue gilded like a shrine, twisting herself about from very ribaldry and allowed her bare foot, smaller than a swan's bill, to be seen. This evening she was in a good humour, otherwise she would have had the little shaven−crop put out by the window without more ado than her first bishop.

“He has fine eyes, Madame,” said one of her handmaids.

“Where does he comes from?” asked another.

“Poor child!” cried Madame, “his mother must be looking for him. Show him his way home.”

The Touranian, still sensible, gave a movement of delight at the sight of the brocaded bed where the sweet form was about to repose. This glance, full of amorous intelligence, awoke the lady's fantasy, who, half laughing and half smitten, repeated “To−morrow,” and dismissed him with a gesture which the Pope Jehan himself would have obeyed, especially as he was like a snail without a shell, since the Council had just deprived him of the holy keys.

“Ah! Madame, there is another vow of chastity changed into an amorous desire,” said one of her women; and the chuckles commenced again thick as hail.

Philippe went his way, bumping his head against a wall like a hooded rook as he was. So giddy had he become at the sight of this creature, even more enticing than a siren rising from the water. He noticed the animals carved over the door and returned to the house of the archbishop with his head full of diabolical longings and his entrails sophisticated.

Once in his little room he counted his coins all night long, but could make no more than four of them; and as that was all his treasure, he counted upon satisfying the fair one by giving her all he had in the world.

“What is it ails you?” said the good archbishop, uneasy at the groans and “oh! oh's!” of his clerk.

“Ah! my Lord,” answered the poor priest, “I am wondering how it is that so light and sweet a woman can weigh so heavily upon my heart.”

“Which one?” said the archbishop, putting down his breviary which he was reading for others—the good man.

“Oh! Mother of God! You will scold me, I know, my good master, my protector, because I have seen the lady of a cardinal at the least, and I am weeping because I lack more than one crown to enable me to convert her.”

The archbishop, knitting the circumflex accent that he had above his nose, said not a word. Then the very humble priest trembled in his skin to have confessed so much to his superior. But the holy man directly said to him, “She must be very dear then—”

“Ah!” said he, “she has swallowed many a mitre and stolen many a cross.”

“Well, Philippe, if thou will renounce her, I will present thee with thirty angels from the poor−box.”

“Ah! my lord, I should be losing too much,” replied the lad, emboldened by the treat he promised himself.

“Ah! Philippe,” said the good prelate, “thou wilt then go to the devil and displease God, like all our cardinals,” and the master, with sorrow, began to pray St. Gatien, the patron saint of Innocents, to save his servant. He made him kneel down beside him, telling him to recommend himself also to St. Philippe, but the wretched priest implored the saint beneath his breath to prevent him from failing if on the morrow that the lady should receive him kindly and mercifully; and the good archbishop, observing the fervour of his servant, cried out him, “Courage little one, and Heaven will exorcise thee.”

On the morrow, while Monsieur was declaiming at the Council against the shameless behaviour of the apostles of Christianity, Philippe de Mala spent his angels—acquired with so much labour—in perfumes, baths, fomentations, and other fooleries. He played the fop so well, one would have thought him the fancy cavalier of a gay lady. He wandered about the town in order to find the residence of his heart's queen; and when he asked the passers−by to whom belonged the aforesaid house, they laughed in his face, saying—

"Whence comes this precious fellow that has not heard of La Belle Imperia?"

He was very much afraid he and his angels were gone to the devil when he heard the name, and knew into what a nice mess he had voluntarily fallen.

Imperia was the most precious, the most fantastic girl in the world, although she passed for the most dazzling and the beautiful, and the one who best understood the art of bamboozling cardinals and softening the hardiest soldiers and oppressors of the people. She had brave captains, archers, and nobles, ready to serve her at every turn. She had only to breathe a word, and the business of anyone who had offended her was settled. A free fight only brought a smile to her lips, and often the Sire de Baudricourt—one of the King's Captains— would ask her if there were any one he could kill for her that day—a little joke at the expense of the abbots. With the exception of the potentates among the high clergy with whom Madame Imperia managed to accommodate her little tempers, she ruled everyone with a high hand in virtue of her pretty babble and enchanting ways, which enthralled the most virtuous and the most unimpressionable. Thus she lived beloved and respected, quite as much as the real ladies and princesses, and was called Madame, concerning which the good Emperor Sigismund replied to a lady who complained of it to him, "That they, the good ladies, might keep to their own proper way and holy virtues, and Madame Imperia to the sweet naughtiness of the goddess Venus"—Christian words which shocked the good ladies, to their credit be it said.

Philippe, then thinking over it in his mind that which on the preceding evening he had seen with his eyes, doubted if more did not remain behind. Then was he sad, and without taking bite or sup, strolled about the town waiting the appointed hour, although he was well−favoured and gallant enough to find others less difficult to overcome than was Madame Imperia.

The night came; the little Touranian, exalted with pride caparisoned with desire, and spurred by his "alacks" and "alases" which nearly choked him, glided like an eel into the domicile of the veritable Queen of the Council—for before her bowed humbly all the authority, science, and wisdom of Christianity. The major domo did not know him, and was going to bundle him out again, when one of the chamber−women called him from the top of the stairs—"Eh M. Imbert, it is Madame's young fellow," and poor Philippe, blushing like a wedding night, ran up the stairs, shaking with happiness and delight. The servant took him by the hand and led into the chamber where sat Madame, lightly attired like a brave woman who awaits her conqueror.

The dazzling Imperia was seated near a table covered with a shaggy cloth ornamented with gold, and with all the requisites for a dainty carouse. Flagons of wine, various drinking glasses, bottles of the hippocras, flasks full of good wine of Cyprus, pretty boxes full of spices, roast peacocks, green sauces, little salt hams—all that would gladden the eyes of the gallant if he had not so madly loved Madame Imperia.

She saw well that the eyes of the young priest were all for her. Although accustomed to the curl−paper devotion of the churchmen, she was well satisfied that she had made a conquest of the young priest who all day long had been in her head.

The windows had been closed; Madame was decked out in a manner fit to do honours to a prince of the Empire. Then the rogue, beatified by the holy beauty of Imperia, knew that Emperor, burgraf, nay, even a cardinal about to be elected pope, would willingly for that night have changed places with him, a little priest who, beneath his gown, had only the devil and love.

He put on a lordly air, and saluted her with a courtesy by no means ungraceful; and then the sweet lady said to him, regaling with a piercing glance—

"Come and sit close to me, that I may see if you have altered since yesterday."

"Oh yes," said he.

"And how?" said she.

"Yesterday," replied the artful fellow, "I loved you; today, we love each other, and from a poor sinner I have become richer than a king."

"Oh, little one, little one!" cried she, merrily; "yes, you are indeed changed, for from a young priest I see well

you have turned into an old devil."

And side by side they sat down before a large fire, which helped to spread their ecstasy around. They remained always ready to begin eating, seeing that they only thought of gazing into each other's eyes, and never touched a dish. Just as they were beginning to feel comfortable and at their ease, there came a great noise at Madame's door, as if people were beating against it, and crying out.

"Madame," cried the little servant hastily, "here's another of them."

"Who is it?" cried she in a haughty manner, like a tyrant, savage at being interrupted.

"The Bishop of Coire wishes to speak with you."

"May the devil take him!" said she, looking at Philippe gently.

"Madame he has seen the light through the chinks, and is making a great noise."

"Tell him I have the fever, and you will be telling him no lie, for I am ill of this little priest who is torturing my brain."

But just as she had finished speaking, and was pressing with devotion the hand of Philippe who trembled in his skin, appeared the fat Bishop of Coire, indignant and angry. The officers followed him, bearing a trout canonically dressed, fresh from the Rhine, and shining in a golden platter, and spices contained in little ornamental boxes, and a thousand dainties, such as liqueurs and jams, made by the holy nuns at his Abbey.

"Ah, ah!" said he, with his deep voice, "I haven't time to go to the devil, but you must give me a touch of him in advance, eh! my little one."

"Your belly will one day make a nice sheath for a sword," replied she, knitting her brows above her eyes, which from being soft and gentle had become mischievous enough to make one tremble.

"And this little chorus singer is here to offer that?" said the bishop, insolently turning his great rubicund face towards Philippe.

"Monseigneur, I'm here to confess Madame."

"Oh, oh, do you not know the canons? To confess the ladies at this time of night is a right reserved to bishops, so take yourself off; go and herd with simple monks, and never come back here again under pain of excommunication."

"Do not move," cried the blushing Imperia, more lovely with passion than she was with love, because now she was possessed both with passion and love. "Stop, my friend. Here you are in your own house." Then he knew that he was really loved by her.

"It is it not in the breviary, and an evangelical regulation, that you should be equal with God in the valley of Jehoshaphat?" asked she of the bishop.

"'Tis is an invention of the devil, who has adulterated the holy book," replied the great numskull of a bishop in a hurry to fall to.

"Well then, be equal now before me, who am here below your goddess," replied Imperia, "otherwise one of these days I will have you delicately strangled between the head and shoulders; I swear it by the power of my tonsure which is as good as the pope's." And wishing that the trout should be added to the feast as well as the sweets and other dainties, she added, cunningly, "Sit you down and drink with us." But the artful minx, being up to a trick or two, gave the little one a wink which told him plainly not to mind the German, whom she would soon find a means to be rid of.

The servant−maid seated the Bishop at the table, and tucked him up, while Philippe, wild with rage that closed his mouth, because he saw his plans ending in smoke, gave the archbishop to more devils than ever were monks alive. Thus they got halfway through the repast, which the young priest had not yet touched, hungering only for Imperia, near whom he was already seated, but speaking that sweet language which the ladies so well understand, that has neither stops, commas, accents, letters, figures, characters, notes, nor images. The fat bishop, sensual and careful enough of the sleek, ecclesiastical garment of skin for which he was indebted to his late mother, allowed himself to be plentifully served with hippocras by the delicate hand of Madame, and it was just at his first hiccough that the sound of an approaching cavalcade was heard in the street. The number of horses, the "Ho, ho!" of the pages, showed plainly that some great prince hot with love, was about to arrive. In fact, a moment afterwards the Cardinal of Ragusa, against whom the servants of Imperia had not dared to bar the door, entered the room. At this terrible sight the poor courtesan and her young lover became ashamed and embarrassed, like fresh cured lepers; for it would be tempting the devil to try and oust the cardinal, the more so as at that time it was

not known who would be pope, three aspirants having resigned their hoods for the benefit of Christianity. The cardinal, who was a cunning Italian, long bearded, a great sophist, and the life and soul of the Council, guessed, by the feeblest exercise of the faculties of his understanding, the alpha and omega of the adventure. He only had to weigh in his mind one little thought before he knew how to proceed in order to be able to hypothecate his manly vigour. He arrived with the appetite of a hungry monk, and to obtain its satisfaction he was just the man to stab two monks and sell his bit of the true cross, which were wrong.

"Hulloa! friend," said he to Philippe, calling him towards him. The poor Tourainian, more dead than alive, and expecting the devil was about to interfere seriously with his arrangements, rose and said, "What is it?" to the redoubtable cardinal.

He taking him by the arm led him to the staircase, looked him in the white of the eye and said without any nonsense—"Ventredieu! You are a nice little fellow, and I should not like to have to let your master know the weight of your carcass. My revenge might cause me certain pious expenses in my old age, so choose to espouse an abbey for the remainder of your days, or to marry Madame to−night and die tomorrow."

The poor little Tourainian in despair murmured, "May I come back when your passion is over?"

The cardinal could scarcely keep his countenance, but he said sternly, "Choose the gallows or a mitre."

"Ah!" said the priest, maliciously; "a good fat abbey."

Thereupon the cardinal went back into the room, opened an escritoire, and scribbled upon a piece of parchment an order to the envoy of France.

"Monseigneur," said the Tourainian to him while he was spelling out the order, "you will not get rid of the Bishop of Coire so easily as you have got rid of me, for he has as many abbeys as the soldiers have drinking shops in the town; besides, he is in the favour of his lord. Now I fancy to show you my gratitude for this so fine Abbey I owe you good piece of advice. You know how fatal has been and how rapidly spread this terrible pestilence which has cruelly harassed Paris. Tell him that you have just left the bedside of your old friend the Archbishop of Bordeaux; thus you will make him scutter away like straw before a whirl−wind.

"Oh, oh!" cried the cardinal, "thou meritest more than an abbey. Ah, Ventredieu! my young friend, here are 100 golden crowns for thy journey to the Abbey of Turpenay, which I won yesterday at cards, and of which I make you a free gift."

Hearing these words, and seeing Philippe de Mala disappear without giving her the amorous glances she expected, the beautiful Imperia, puffing like a dolphin, denounced all the cowardice of the priest. She was not then a sufficiently good Catholic to pardon her lover deceiving her, by not knowing how to die for her pleasure. Thus the death of Philippe was foreshadowed in the viper's glance she cast at him to insult him, which glance pleased the cardinal much, for the wily Italian saw he would soon get his abbey back again. The Touranian, heeding not the brewing storm avoided it by walking out silently with his ears down, like a wet dog being kicked out of a Church. Madame drew a sigh from her heart. She must have had her own ideas of humanity for the little value she held in it. The fire which possessed her had mounted to her head, and scintillated in rays about her, and there was good reason for it, for this was the first time that she had been humbugged by priest. Then the cardinal smiled, believing it was all to his advantage: was not he a cunning fellow? Yes, he was the possessor of a red hat.

"Ah, ah! my friend," said he to the Bishop, "I congratulate myself on being in your company, and I am glad to have been able to get rid of that little wretch unworthy of Madame, the more so as if you had gone near him, my lovely and amiable creature, you would have perished miserably through the deed of a simple priest."

"Ah! How?"

"He is the secretary of the Archbishop of Bordeaux. The good man was seized this morning with the pestilence."

The bishop opened his mouth wide enough to swallow a Dutch cheese.

"How do you know that?" asked he.

"Ah!" said the cardinal, taking the good German's hand, "I have just administered to him, and consoled him; at this moment the holy man has a fair wind to waft him to paradise."

The Bishop of Coire demonstrated immediately how light fat man are; for when men are big−bellied, a merciful providence, in the consideration of their works, often makes their internal tubes as elastic as balloons. The aforesaid bishop sprang backwards with one bound, burst into a perspiration and coughed like a cow who finds feathers mixed with her hay. Then becoming suddenly pale, he rushed down the stairs without even bidding

Madame adieu. When the door had closed upon the bishop, and he was fairly in the street, the Cardinal of Ragusa began laughing fit to split his sides.

"Ah! my fair one, am I not worthy to be Pope, and better than that, thy lover this evening?"

But seeing Imperia thoughtful he approached her to take her in his arms, and pet her after the usual fashion of cardinals, men who embrace better than all others, even the soldiers, because they are lazy, and do not spare their essential properties.

"Ha!" said she, drawing back, "you wish to cause my death, you ecclesiastical idiot. The principal thing for you is to enjoy yourself; my sweet carcass, a thing accessory. Your pleasure will be my death, and then you'll canonise me perhaps? Ah, you have the plague, and you would give it to me. Go somewhere else, you brainless priest. Ah! touch me not," said she, seeing him about to advance, "or I will stab you with this dagger."

And the clever hussy drew from her armoire a little dagger, which she knew how to use with great skill when necessary.

"But my little paradise, my sweet one," said the other, laughing, "don't you see the trick? Wasn't it necessary to be get rid of that old bullock of Coire?"

"Well then, if you love me, show it" replied she. "I desire that you leave me instantly. If you are touched with the disease my death will not worry you. I know you well enough to know at what price you will put a moment of pleasure at your last hour. You would drown the earth. Ah, ah! you have boasted of it when drunk. I love only myself, my treasures, and my health. Go, and if tomorrow your veins are not frozen by the disease, you can come again. Today, I hate you, good cardinal," said she, smiling.

"Imperia!" cried the cardinal on his knees, "my blessed Imperia, do not play with me thus."

"No," said she, "I never play with blessed and sacred things."

"Ah! ribald woman, I will excommunicate thee tomorrow."

"And now you are out of your cardinal sense."

"Imperia, cursed daughter of Satan! Oh, my little beauty—my love—!"

"Respect yourself more. Don't kneel to me, fie for shame!"

"Wilt thou have a dispensation in articulo mortis? Wilt thou have my fortune—or better still, a bit of the veritable true Cross?—Wilt thou?"

"This evening, all the wealth of heaven above and earth beneath would not buy my heart," said she, laughing. "I should be the blackest of sinners, unworthy to receive the Blessed Sacrament if I had not my little caprices."

"I'll burn the house down. Sorceress, you have bewitched me. You shall perish at the stake. Listen to me, my love,—my gentle Dove—I promise you the best place in heaven. Eh? No. Death to you then—death to the sorceress."

"Oh, oh! I will kill you, Monseigneur."

And the cardinal foamed with rage.

"You are making a fool of yourself," said she. "Go away, you'll tire yourself."

"I shall be pope, and you shall pay for this!"

"Then you are no longer disposed to obey me?"

"What can I do this evening to please you?"

"Get out."

And she sprang lightly like a wagtail into her room, and locked herself in, leaving the cardinal to storm that he was obliged to go. When the fair Imperia found herself alone, seated before the fire, and without her little priest, she exclaimed, snapping angrily the gold links of her chain, "By the double triple horn on the devil, if the little one has made me have this row with the Cardinal, and exposed me to the danger of being poisoned tomorrow, unless I pay him over to my heart's content, I will not die till I have seen him burned alive before my eyes. Ah!" said she, weeping, this time real tears, "I lead a most unhappy life, and the little pleasure I have costs me the life of a dog, let alone my salvation."

As she finished this jeremiad, wailing like a calf that is being slaughtered, she beheld the blushing face of the young priest, who had hidden himself, peeping at her from behind her large Venetian mirror.

"Ah!" said she, "Thou art the most perfect monk that ever dwelt in this blessed and amorous town of Constance. Ah, ah! Come my gentle cavalier, my dear boy, my little charm, my paradise of delectation, let me drink thine eyes, eat thee, kill thee with my love. Oh! my ever−flourishing, ever−green, sempiternal god; from a

little monk I would make a king, emperor, pope, and happier than either. There, thou canst put anything to fire and sword, I am thine, and thou shalt see it well; for thou shalt be all a cardinal, even when to redden thy hood I shed all my heart's blood." And with her trembling hands all joyously she filled with Greek wine the golden cup, brought by the Bishop of Coire, and presented it to her sweetheart, whom she served upon her knee, she whose slipper princes found more to their taste than that of the pope.

But he gazed at her in silence, with his eye so lustrous with love, that she said to him, trembling with joy " Ah! be quiet, little one. Let us have supper."

THE VENIAL SIN

HOW THE GOOD MAN BRUYN TOOK A WIFE.

Messire Bruyn, he who completed the Castle of Roche−Corbon−les−Vouvray, on the banks of the Loire, was a boisterous fellow in his youth. When quite little, he squeezed young ladies, turned the house out of windows, and played the devil with everything, when he was called upon to put his Sire the Baron of Roche−Corbon some few feet under the turf. Then he was his own master, free to lead a life of wild dissipation, and indeed he worked very hard to get a surfeit of enjoyment. Now by making his crowns sweat and his goods scarce, draining his land, and a bleeding his hogsheads, and regaling frail beauties, he found himself excommunicated from decent society, and had for his friends only the plunderers of towns and the Lombardians. But the usurers turned rough and bitter as chestnut husks, when he had no other security to give them than his said estate of Roche−Corbon, since the Rupes Carbonis was held from our Lord the king. Then Bruyn found himself just in the humour to give a blow here and there, to break a collar−bone or two, and quarrel with everyone about trifles. Seeing which, the Abbot of Marmoustiers, his neighbour, and a man liberal with his advice, told him that it was an evident sign of lordly perfection, that he was walking in the right road, but if he would go and slaughter, to the great glory of God, the Mahommedans who defiled the Holy Land, it would be better still, and that he would undoubtedly return full of wealth and indulgences into Touraine, or into Paradise, whence all barons formerly came.

The said Bruyn, admiring the great sense of the prelate, left the country equipped by the monastery, and blessed by the abbot, to the great delight of his friends and neighbours. Then he put to the sack enough many towns of Asia and Africa, and fell upon the infidels without giving them warning, burning the Saracens, the Greeks, the English, and others, caring little whether they were friends or enemies, or where they came from, since among his merits he had that of being in no way curious, and he never questioned them until after he had killed them. At this business, agreeable to God, to the King and to himself, Bruyn gained renown as a good Christian and loyal knight, and enjoyed himself thoroughly in these lands beyond the seas, since he more willingly gave a crown to the girls than to the poor, although he met many more poor people than perfect maids; but like a good Touranian he made soup of anything. At length, when he was satiated with the Turks, relics, and other blessings of the Holy Land, Bruyn, to the great astonishment of the people of Vouvrillons, returned from the Crusades laden with crowns and precious stones; rather differently from some who, rich when they set out, came back heavy with leprosy, but light with gold. On his return from Tunis, our Lord, King Philippe, made him a Count, and appointed him his seneschal in our country and that of Poitou. There he was greatly beloved and properly thought well of, since over and above his good qualities he founded the Church of the Carmes−Deschaulx, in the parish of Egrignolles, as the peace−offering to Heaven for the follies of his youth. Thus was he cardinally consigned to the good graces of the Church and of God. From a wicked youth and reckless man, he became a good, wise man, and discreet in his dissipations and pleasures; rarely was in anger, unless someone blasphemed God before him, the which he would not tolerate because he had blasphemed enough for every one in his wild youth. In short, he never quarrelled, because, being seneschal, people gave up to him instantly. It is true that he at that time beheld all his desires accomplished, the which would render even an imp of Satan calm and tranquil from his horns to his heels. And besides this he possessed a castle all jagged at the corners, and shaped and pointed like a Spanish doublet, situated upon a bank from which it was reflected in the Loire. In the rooms were royal tapestries, furniture, Saracen pomps, vanities, and inventions which were much admired by people of Tours, and even by the archbishop and clerks of St. Martin, to whom he sent as a free gift a banner fringed with fine gold. In the neighbourhood of the said castle abounded fair domains, wind−mills, and forests, yielding a harvest of rents of all kinds, so that he was one of the strongest knights−banneret of the province, and could easily have led to battle for our lord the king a thousand men. In his old days, if by chance his bailiff, a diligent man at hanging, brought before him a poor peasant suspected of some offence, he would say, smiling—

“Let this one go, Brediff, he will count against those I inconsiderately slaughtered across the seas”; oftentimes, however, he would let them bravely hang on a chestnut tree or swing on his gallows, but this was solely that justice might be done, and that the custom should not lapse in his domain. Thus the people on his lands were good and orderly, like fresh veiled nuns, and peaceful since he protected them from the robbers and

vagabonds whom he never spared, knowing by experience how much mischief is caused by these cursed beasts of prey. For the rest, most devout, finishing everything quickly, his prayers as well as good wine, he managed the processes after the Turkish fashion, having a thousand little jokes ready for the losers, and dining with them to console them. He had all the people who had been hanged buried in consecrated ground like godly ones, some people thinking they had been sufficiently punished by having their breath stopped. He only persecuted the Jews now and then, and when they were glutted with usury and wealth. He let them gather their spoil as the bees do honey, saying that they were the best of tax−gatherers. And never did he despoil them save for the profit and use of the churchmen, the king, the province, or himself.

This jovial way gained for him the affection and esteem of every one, great and small. If he came back smiling from his judicial throne, the Abbot of Marmoustiers, an old man like himself, would say, “Ho, ha! messire, there is some hanging on since you laugh thus!” And when coming from Roche−Corbon to Tours he passed on horseback along the Fauborg St. Symphorien, the little girls would say, “Ah! this is the justice day, there is the good man Bruyn,” and without being afraid they would look at him astride on a big white hack, that he had brought back with him from the Levant. On the bridge the little boys would stop playing with the ball, and would call out, “Good day, Mr. Seneschal" and he would reply, jokingly, “Enjoy yourselves, my children, until you get whipped.” “Yes, Mr. Seneschal.”

Also he made the country so contented and so free from robbers that during the year of the great over−flowing of the Loire there were only twenty−two malefactors hanged that winter, not counting a Jew burned in the Commune of Chateau−Neuf for having stolen a consecrated wafer, or bought it, some said, for he was very rich.

One day, in the following year about harvest time, or mowing time, as we say in Touraine, there came Egyptians, Bohemians, and other wandering troupes who stole the holy things from the Church of St. Martin, and in the place and exact situation of Madam the Virgin, left by way of insult and mockery to our Holy Faith, an abandoned pretty little girl, about the age of an old dog, stark naked, an acrobat, and of Moorish descent like themselves. For this almost nameless crime it was equally decided by the king, people, and the churchmen that the Mooress, to pay for all, should be burned and cooked alive in the square near the fountain where the herb market is. Then the good man Bruyn clearly and dextrously demonstrated to the others that it would be a thing most profitable and pleasant to God to gain over this African soul to the true religion, and if the devil were lodged in this feminine body the faggots would be useless to burn him, as said the said order. To which the archbishop sagely thought most canonical and conformable to Christian charity and the gospel. The ladies of the town and other persons of authority said loudly that they were cheated of a fine ceremony, since the Mooress was crying her eyes out in the jail and would certainly be converted to God in order to live as long as a crow, if she were allowed to do so, to which the seneschal replied that if the foreigner would wholly commit herself to the Christian religion there would be a gallant ceremony of another kind, and that he would undertake that it should be royally magnificent, because he would be her sponsor at the baptismal font, and that a virgin should be his partner in the affair in order the better to please the Almighty, while himself was reputed never to have lost the bloom or innocence, in fact to be a coquebin. In our country of Touraine thus are called the young virgin men, unmarried or so esteemed to distinguish them from the husbands and the widowers, but the girls always pick them without the name, because they are more light−hearted and merry than those seasoned in marriage.

The young Mooress did not hesitate between the flaming faggots and the baptismal water. She much preferred to be a Christian and live than be Egyptian and be burned; thus to escape a moment's baking, her heart would burn unquenched through all her life, since for the greater surety of her religion she was placed in the convent of nuns near Chardonneret, where she took the vow of sanctity. The said ceremony was concluded at the residence of the archbishop, where on this occasion, in honour of the Saviour or men, the lords and ladies of Touraine hopped, skipped and danced, for in this country the people dance, skip, eat, flirt, have more feasts and make merrier than any in the whole world. The good old seneschal had taken for his associate the daughter of the lord of Azay−le−Ridel, which afterwards became Azay−le−Brusle, the which lord being a Crusader was left before Acre, a far distant town, in the hands of a Saracen who demanded a royal ransom for him because the said lord was of high position.

The lady of Azay having given his estate as security to the Lombards and extortioners in order to raise the sum, remained, without a penny in the the world, awaiting her lord in a poor lodging in the town, without a carpet to sit upon, but proud as the Queen of Sheba and brave as a mastiff who defends the property of his master.

Seeing this great distress the seneschal went delicately to request this lady's daughter to be the godmother of the said Egyptian, in order that he might have the right of assisting the Lady of Azay. And, in fact, he kept a heavy chain of gold which he had preserved since the commencement of the taking of Cyprus, and the which he determined to clasp about the neck of his pretty associate, but he hung there at the same time his domain, and his white hairs, his money and his horses; in short, he placed there everything he possessed, directly he had seen Blanche of Azay dancing a pavan among the ladies of Tours. Although the Moorish girl, making the most of her last day, had astonished the assembly by her twists, jumps, steps, springs, and elevations and artistic efforts, Blanche had the advantage of her, as everyone agreed, so virginally and delicately did she dance.

Now Bruyn, admiring this gentle maiden whose toes seemed to fear the boards, and who amused herself so innocently for her seventeen years— like a grasshopper trying her first note—was seized with an old man's desire; a desire apoplectic and vigorous from weakness, which heated him from the sole of foot to the nape of his neck—for his head had too much snow on the top of it to let love lodge there. Then the good man perceived that he needed a wife in his manor, and it appeared more lonely to him than it was. And what then was a castle without a chatelaine? As well have a clapper without its bell. In short, a wife was the only thing that he had to desire, so he wished to have one promptly, seeing that if the Lady of Azay made him wait, he had just time to pass out of this world into the other. But during the baptismal entertainment, he thought little of his severe wounds, and still less of the eighty years that had stripped his head; he found his eyes clear enough to see distinctly his young companion, who, following the injunctions of the Lady of Azay, regaled him well with glance and gesture, believing there could be no danger near so old a fellow, in such wise that Blanche—naive and nice as she was in contradistinction to the girls of Touraine, who are as wide−awake as a spring morning—permitted the good man first to kiss her hand, and afterwards her neck, rather low−down; at least so said the archbishop who married them the week after; and that was a beautiful bridal, and a still more beautiful bride.

The said Blanche was slender and graceful as no other girl, and still better than that, more maidenly than ever maiden was; a maiden all ignorant of love, who knew not why or what it was; a maiden who wondered why certain people lingered in their beds; a maiden who believed that children were found in parsley beds. Her mother had thus reared her in innocence, without even allowing her to consider, trifle as it was, how she sucked in her soup between her teeth. Thus she was a sweet flower, and intact, joyous and innocent; an angel, who needed but the wings to fly away to Paradise. When she left the poor lodging of her weeping mother to consummate her betrothal at the cathedral of St. Gatien and St. Maurice, the country people came to a feast their eyes upon the bride, and on the carpets which were laid down all along the the Rue de la Scellerie, and all said that never had tinier feet pressed the ground of Touraine, prettier eyes gazed up to heaven, or a more splendid festival adorned the streets with carpets and with flowers. The young girls of St. Martin and of the boroughs of Chateau−Neuf, all envied the long brown tresses with which doubtless Blanche had fished for a count, but much more did they desire the gold embroidered dress, the foreign stones, the white diamonds, and the chains with which the little darling played, and which bound her for ever to the said seneschal. The old soldier was so merry by her side, that his happiness showed itself in his wrinkles, his looks, and his movements. Although he was hardly as straight as a billhook, he held himself so by the side of Blanche, that one would have taken him for a soldier on parade receiving his officer, and he placed his hand on his diaphragm like a man whose pleasure stifles and troubles him. Delighted with the sound of the swinging bells, the procession, the pomps, and the vanities of the said marriage, which was talked of long after the episcopal rejoicings, the women desired a harvest of Moorish girls, a deluge of old seneschals, and baskets full of Egyptian baptisms. But this was the only one that ever happened in Touraine, seeing that the country is far from Egypt and from Bohemia. The Lady of Azay received a large sum of money after the ceremony, which enabled her to start immediately for Acre to go to her spouse, accompanied by the lieutenant and soldiers of the Count of Roche− Corbon, who furnished them with everything necessary. She set out on the day of the wedding, after having placed her daughter in the hands of the seneschal, enjoining him to treat her well; and later on she returned with the Sire d'Azay, who was leprous, and she cured him, tending him herself, running the risk of being contaminated, the which was greatly admired.

The marriage ceremony finished and at an end—for it lasted three days, to the great contentment of the people—Messire Bruyn with great pomp led the little one to his castle, and, according to the custom of husbands, had her put solemnly to bed in his couch, which was blessed by the Abbot of Marmoustiers; then came and placed himself beside her in the great feudal chamber of Roche−Corbon, which had been hung with green blockade and

ribbon of golden wire. When old Bruyn, perfumed all over, found himself side by side with his pretty wife, he kissed her first upon the forehead, and then upon the little round, white breast, on the same spot where she had allowed him to clasp the fastenings of the chain, but that was all. The old fellow had too great confidence in himself in fancying himself able to accomplish more; so then he abstained from love in spite of the merry nuptial songs, the epithalamiums and jokes which were going on in the rooms beneath where the dancing was still kept up. He refreshed himself with a drink of the marriage beverage, which according to custom, had been blessed and placed near them in a golden cup. The spices warned his stomach well enough, but not the heart of his dead ardour. Blanche was not at all astonished at the demeanour of her spouse, because she was a virgin in mind, and in marriage she saw only that which is visible to the eyes of young girls—namely dresses, banquets, horses, to be a lady and mistress, to have a country seat, to amuse oneself and give orders; so, like the child that she was, she played with the gold tassels on the bed, and marvelled at the richness of the shrine in which her innocence should be interred. Feeling, a little later in the day, his culpability, and relying on the future, which, however, would spoil a little every day that with which he pretended to regale his wife, the seneschal tried to substitute the word for the deed. So he entertained his wife in various ways, promised her the keys of his sideboards, his granaries and chests, the perfect government of his houses and domains without any control, hanging round her neck “the other half of the loaf,” which is the popular saying in Touraine. She became like a young charger full of hay, found her good man the most gallant fellow in the world, and raising herself upon her pillow began to smile, and beheld with greater joy this beautiful green brocaded bed, where henceforward she would be permitted, without any sin, to sleep every night. Seeing she was getting playful, the cunning lord, who had not been used to maidens, but knew from experience the little tricks that women will practice, seeing that he had much associated with ladies of the town, feared those handy tricks, little kisses, and minor amusements of love which formerly he did not object to, but which at the present time would have found him cold as the obit of a pope. Then he drew back towards the end of the bed, afraid of his happiness, and said to his too delectable spouse, “Well, darling, you are a seneschal's wife now, and very well seneschaled as well.”

“Oh no!” said she.

“How no!” replied he in great fear; “are you not a wife?”

“No!” said she. “Nor shall I be till I have had a child.”

“Did you while coming here see the meadows?” began again the old fellow.

“Yes,” said she.

“Well, they are yours.”

“Oh! Oh!” replied she laughing, “I shall amuse myself much there catching butterflies.”

“That's a good girl,” says her lord. “And the woods?”

“Ah! I should not like to be there alone, you will take me there. But,” said she, “give me a little of that liquor which La Ponneuse has taken such pains to prepare for us.”

“And why, my darling? It would put fire in your body.”

“Oh! That's what I should like,” said she, biting her lip with vexation, “because I desire to give you a child as soon as possible; and I'm sure that liquor is good for the purpose.”

“Ah! my little one,” said the seneschal, knowing by this that Blanche was a virgin from head to foot, “the goodwill of God is necessary for this business, and women must be in a state of harvest.”

“And when should I be in a state of harvest?” asked she, smiling.

“When nature so wills it,” said he, trying to laugh.

“What is it necessary to do for this?” replied she.

“Ah! A cabalistical and alchemical operation which is very dangerous.”

“Ah!” said she, with a dreamy look, “that's the reason why my mother cried when thinking of the said metamorphosis; but Bertha de Breuilly, who is so thankful for being made a wife, told me it was the easiest thing in the world.”

“That's according to the age,” replied the old lord. “But did you see at the stable the beautiful white mare so much spoken of in Touraine?”

“Yes, she is very gentle and nice.”

“Well, I give her to you, and you can ride her as often as the fancy takes you.”

“Oh, you are very kind, and they did not lie when they told me so.”

"Here," continued he, "sweetheart; the butler, the chaplain, the treasurer, the equerry, the farrier, the bailiff, even the Sire de Montsoreau, the young varlet whose name is Gauttier and bears my banner, with his men at arms, captains, followers, and beasts—all are yours, and will instantly obey your orders under pain of being incommoded with a hempen collar."

"But," replied she, "this mysterious operation—cannot it be performed immediately?"

"Oh no!" replied the seneschal. "Because it is necessary above all things that both the one and the other of us should be in a state of grace before God; otherwise we should have a bad child, full of sin; which is forbidden by the canons of the church. This is the reason that there are so many incorrigible scapegraces in the world. Their parents have not wisely waited to have their souls pure, and have given wicked souls to their children. The beautiful and the virtuous come of immaculate fathers; that is why we cause our beds to be blessed, as the Abbot of Marmoustiers has done this one. Have you not transgressed the ordinances of the Church?"

"Oh no," said she, quickly, "I received before Mass absolution for all my faults and have remained since without committing the slightest sin."

"You are very perfect," said the cunning lord, "and I am delighted to have you for a wife; but I have sworn like an infidel."

"Oh! and why?"

"Because the dancing did not finish, and I could not have you to myself to bring you here and kiss you."

Thereupon he gallantly took her hands and covered them with kisses, whispering to her little endearments and superficial words of affection which made her quite pleased and contented.

Then, fatigued with the dance and all the ceremonies, she settled down to her slumbers, saying to the seneschal—

"I will take care tomorrow that you shall not sin," and she left the old man quite smitten with her white beauty, amorous of her delicate nature, and as embarrassed to know how he should be able to keep her in her innocence as to explain why oxen chew their food twice over. Although he did not augur to himself any good therefrom, it inflamed him so much to see the exquisite perfections of Blanche during her innocent and gentle sleep, that he resolved to preserve and defend this pretty jewel of love. With tears in his eyes he kissed her sweet golden tresses, the beautiful eyelids, and her ripe red mouth, and he did it softly for fear of waking her. There was all his fruition, the dumb delight which still inflamed his heart without in the least affecting Blanche. Then he deplored the snows of his leafless old age, the poor old man, that he saw clearly that God had amused himself by giving him nuts when his teeth were gone.

HOW THE SENESCHAL STRUGGLED WITH HIS WIFE'S MODESTY.

During the first days of his marriage the seneschal imprinted many fibs to tell his wife, whose so estimable innocence he abused. Firstly, he found in his judicial functions good excuses for leaving her at times alone; then he occupied himself with the peasants of the neighbourhood, and took them to dress the vines on his lands at Vouvray, and at length pampered her up with a thousand absurd tales.

At one time he would say that lords did not behave like common people, that the children were only planted at certain celestial conjunctions ascertained by learned astrologers; at another that one should abstain from begetting children on feast days, because it was a great undertaking; and he observed the feasts like a man who wished to enter into Paradise without consent. Sometimes he would pretend that if by chance the parents were not in a state of grace, the children commenced on the date of St. Claire would be blind, of St. Gatien had the gout, of St. Agnes were scaldheaded, of St. Roch had the plague; sometimes that those begotten in February were chilly; in March, too turbulent; in April, were worth nothing at all; and that handsome boys were conceived in May. In short, he wished his child to be perfect, to have his hair of two colours; and for this it was necessary that all the required conditions should be observed. At other times he would say to Blanche that the right of a man was to bestow a child upon his wife according to his sole and unique will, and that if she pretended to be a virtuous woman she should conform to the wishes of her husband; in fact it was necessary to await the return of the Lady of Azay in order that she should assist at the confinement; from all of which Blanche concluded that the seneschal was annoyed by her requests, and was perhaps right, since he was old and full of experience; so she submitted herself and thought no more, except to herself, of this so much−desired child, that is to say, she was always thinking of it, like a woman who has a desire in her head, without suspecting that she was behaving like a gay lady or a town−walker running after her enjoyment. One evening, by accident, Bruyn spoke of children, a discourse that he avoided as cats avoid water, but he was complaining of a boy condemned by him that morning for great misdeeds, saying for certain he was the offspring of people laden with mortal sins.

“Alas!” said Blanche, “if you will give me one, although you have not got absolution, I will correct so well that you will be pleased with him.”

Then the count saw that his wife was bitten by a warm desire, and that it was time to dissipate her innocence in order to make himself master of it, to conquer it, to beat it, or to appease and extinguish it.

“What, my dear, you wish to be a mother?” said he; “you do not yet know the business of a wife, you are not accustomed to being mistress of the house.”

“Oh! Oh!” said she, “to be a perfect countess, and have in my loins a little count, must I play the great lady? I will do it, and thoroughly.”

Then Blanche, in order to obtain issue, began to hunt the fawns and stags, leaping the ditches, galloping upon her mare over valleys and mountain, through the woods and the fields, taking great delight in watching the falcons fly, in unhooding them and while hunting always carried them gracefully upon her little wrist, which was what the seneschal had desired. But in this pursuit, Blanche gained an appetite of nun and prelate, that is to say, wished to procreate, had her desires whetted, and could scarcely restrain her hunger, when on her return she gave play to her teeth. Now by reason of reading the legends written by the way, and of separating by death the embraces of birds and wild beasts, she discovered a mystery of natural alchemy, while colouring her complexion, and superagitating her feeble imagination, which did little to pacify her warlike nature, and strongly tickled her desire which laughed, played, and frisked unmistakably. The seneschal thought to disarm the rebellious virtue of his wife by making her scour the country; but his fraud turned out badly, for the unknown lust that circulated in the veins of Blanche emerged from these assaults more hardy than before, inviting jousts and tourneys as the herald the armed knight.

The good lord saw then that he had grossly erred and that he was now upon the horns of a dilemma; also he no longer knew what course to adopt; the longer he left it the more it would resist. From this combat, there must result one conquered and one contused—a diabolical contusion which he wished to keep distant from his physiognomy by God's help until after his death. The poor seneschal had already great trouble to follow his lady to the chase, without being dismounted; he sweated under the weight of his trappings, and almost expired in that

pursuit wherein his frisky wife cheered her life and took great pleasure. Many times in the evening she wished to dance. Now the good man, swathed in his heavy clothing, found himself quite worn out with these exercises, in which he was constrained to participate either in giving her his hand, when she performed the vaults of the Moorish girl, or in holding the lighted fagot for her, when she had a fancy to do the torchlight dance; and in spite of his sciaticas, accretions, and rheumatisms, he was obliged to smile and say to her some gentle words and gallantries after all the evolutions, mummeries, and comic pantomimes, which she indulged in to divert herself; for he loved her so madly that if she had asked him for an impossibility he would have sought one for her immediately.

Nevertheless, one fine day he recognised the fact that his frame was in a state of too great debility to struggle with the vigorous nature of his wife, and humiliating himself before his wife's virtue he resolved to let things take their course, relying a little upon the modesty, religion, and bashfulness of Blanche, but he always slept with one eye open, for he suspected that God had perhaps made virginities to be taken like partridges, to be spitted and roasted. One wet morning, when the weather was that in which the snails make their tracks, a melancholy time, and suitable to reverie, Blanche was in the house sitting in her chair in deep thought, because nothing produces more lively concoctions of the substantive essences, and no receipt, specific or philter is more penetrating, transpiercing or doubly transpiercing and titillating than the subtle warmth which simmers between the nap of the chair and a maiden sitting during certain weather.

Now without knowing it the Countess was incommoded by her innocence, which gave more trouble than it was worth to her brain, and gnawed her all over. Then the good man, seriously grieved to see her languishing, wished to drive away the thoughts which were ultra−conjugal principles of love.

“Whence comes your sadness, sweetheart?” said he.

“From shame.”

“What then affronts you?”

“The not being a good woman; because I am without a child, and you without lineage! Is one a lady without progeny? Nay! Look! . . . All my neighbours have it, and I was married to have it, as you to give it to me; the nobles of Touraine are all amply furnished with children, and their wives give them lapfuls, you alone have none, they laugh at you there. What will become of your name and your fiefs and your seigniories? A child is our natural company; it is a delight to us to make a fright of it, to fondle it, to swaddle it, to dress and undress it, to cuddle it, to sing it lullabies, to cradle it, to get it up, to put it to bed, and to nourish it, and I feel that if I had only the half of one, I would kiss it, swaddle it, and unharness it, and I would make it jump and crow all day long, as the other ladies do.”

“Were it not that in giving them birth women die, and that for this you are still too delicate and too close in the bud, you would already be a mother,” replied the seneschal, made giddy with the flow of words. “But will you buy one ready−made?—that will cost you neither pain nor labour.”

“But,” said she, “I want the pain and labour, without which it will not be ours. I know very well it should be the fruit of my body, because at church they say that Jesus was the fruit of the Virgin's womb.”

“Very well, then pray God that it may be so,” cried the seneschal, “and intercede with the Virgin of Egrignolles. Many a lady has conceived after the neuvaine; you must not fail to do one.”

Then the same day Blanche set out towards Notre−Dame de l'Egrignolles, decked out like a queen riding her beautiful mare, having on her a robe of green velvet, laced down with fine gold lace, open at the breast, having sleeves of scarlet, little shoes and a high hat ornamented with precious stones, and a gold waistband that showed off her little waist, as slim as a pole. She wished to give her dress to Madame the Virgin, and in fact promised it to her, for the day of her churching. The Sire de Montsoreau galloped before her, his eye bright as that of a hawk, keeping the people back and guarding with his knights the security of the journey. Near Marmoustiers the seneschal, rendered sleepy by the heat, seeing it was the month of August, waggled about in his saddle, like a diadem upon the head of a cow, and seeing so frolicsome and so pretty a lady by the side of so old a fellow, a peasant girl, who was squatting near the trunk of a tree and drinking water out of her stone jug inquired of a toothless old hag, who picked up a trifle by gleaning, if this princess was going to bury her dead.

“Nay,” said the old woman, “it is our lady of Roche−Corbon, wife of the seneschal of Poitou and Touraine, in quest of a child.”

“Ah! Ah!” said the young girl, laughing like a fly just satisfied; then pointing to the handsome knight who was

at the head of the procession—“he who marches at the head would manage that; she would save the wax−candles and the vow.”

“Ha! my little one,” replied the hag, “I am rather surprised that she should go to Notre−Dame de l'Egrignolles seeing that there are no handsome priests there. She might very well stop for a short time beneath the shadow the belfry of Marmoustiers; she would soon be fertile, those good fathers are so lively.”

“By a nun's oath!” said a tramp walking up, “look; the Sire de Montsoreau is lively and delicate enough to open the lady's heart, the more so as he is well formed to do so.”

And all commenced a laugh. The Sire de Montsoreau wished to go to them and hang them in lime−tree by the road as a punishment for their bad words, but Blanche cried out quickly—

“Oh, sir, do not hang them yet. They have not said all they mean; and we shall see them on our return.”

She blushed, and the Sire de Montsoreau looked at her eagerly, as though to shoot into her the mystic comprehensions of love, but the clearing out of her intelligence had already been commenced by the sayings of the peasants which were fructifying in her understanding— her innocence was like touchwood, there was only need for a word to inflame it.

Thus Blanche perceived now the notable and physical differences between the qualities of her old husband and perfections of the said Gauttier, a gentleman who was not over affected with his twenty−three years, but held himself upright as a ninepin in the saddle, and as wide−awake as the matin chimes, while in contrast to him, slept the seneschal; he had courage and dexterity there where his master failed. He was one of those smart fellows whom the jades would sooner wear at night than a leathern garment, because they then no longer fear the fleas; there are some who vituperate them, but no one should be blamed, because every one should sleep as he likes.

So much did the seneschal's lady think, and so imperially well, that by the time she arrived at the bridge of Tours, she loved Gauttier secretly, as a maiden loves, without suspecting that it is love. From that she became a proper woman, that is to say, she desired the good of others, the best that men have, she fell into a fit of love−sickness, going at the first jump to the depth of her misery, seeing that all is flame between the first coveting and the last desire, and she knew not how she then learned that by the eyes can flow in a subtle essence, causing such powerful corrosions in all the veins of the body, recesses of the heart, nerves of the members, roots of the hair, perspiration of the substance, limbo of the brain, orifices of the epidermis, windings of the pluck, tubes of the hypochondriac and other channels which in her was suddenly dilated, heated, tickled, envenomed, clawed, harrowed, and disturbed, as if she had a basketful of needles in her inside. This was a maiden's desire, a well−conditioned desire, which troubled her sight to such a degree that she no longer saw her old spouse, but clearly the young Gauttier, whose nature was as ample as the glorious chin of an abbot. When the good man entered Tours the Ah! Ah! of the crowd woke him up, and he came with great pomp with his suite to the Church of Notre−Dame de l'Egrignolles, formerly called la greigneur, as if you said that which has the most merit. Blanche went into the chapel where children are asked to God and of the Virgin, and went there alone, as was the custom, always however in the presence of the seneschal, of his varlets and the loiterers who remained outside the grill. When the countess saw the priest come who had charge of the masses said for children, and who received the said vows, she asked him if there were many barren women. To which the good priest replied, that he must not complain, and that the children were good revenue to the Church.

“And do you often see,” said Blanche, “young women with such old husbands as my lord?”

“Rarely,” said he.

“But have those obtained offspring?”

“Always,” replied the priest smiling.

“And the others whose companions are not so old?”

“Sometimes.”

“Oh! Oh!” said she, “there is more certainty then with one like the seneschal?”

“To be sure,” said the priest.

“Why?” said she.

“Madame,” gravely replied priest, “before that age God alone interferes with the affair, after, it is the men.”

At this time it was a true thing that all the wisdom had gone to the clergy. Blanch made her vow, which was a very profitable one, seeing that her decorations were worth quite two thousand gold crowns.

“You are very joyful!” said the old seneschal to her when on the home journey she made her mare prance,

jump, and frisk.

“Yes, yes!” said she. “There is no longer any doubt about my having a child, because any one can help me, the priest said: I shall take Gauttier.”

The seneschal wished to go and slay the monk, but he thought that was a crime which would cost him too much, and he resolved cunningly to arrange his vengeance with the help of the archbishop; and before the housetops of Roche−Corbon came in sight he had ordered the Sire de Montsoreau to seek a little retirement in his own country, which the young Gauttier did, knowing the ways of the lord. The seneschal put in the place of the said Gauttier the son of the Sire de Jallanges, whose fief was held from Roche−Corbon. He was a young boy named Rene, approaching fourteen years, and he made him a page, awaiting the time when he should be old enough to be an equerry, and gave the command of his men to an old cripple, with whom he had knocked about a great deal in Palestine and other places. Thus the good man believed he would avoid the horned trappings of cuckoldom, and would still be able to girth, bridle, and curb the factious innocence of his wife, which struggled like a mule held by a rope.

THAT WHICH IS ONLY A VENIAL SIN.

The Sunday following the arrival of Rene at the manor of Roche−Corbon, Blanche went out hunting without her goodman, and when she was in the forest near Les Carneaux, saw a monk who appeared to be pushing a girl about more than was necessary, and spurred on her horse, saying to her people, “Ho there! Don't let him kill her.” But when the seneschal's lady arrived close to them, she turned her horse's head quickly and the sight she beheld prevented her from hunting. She came back pensive, and then the lantern of her intelligence opened, and received a bright light, which made a thousand things clear, such as church and other pictures, fables, and lays of the troubadours, or the domestic arrangements of birds; suddenly she discovered the sweet mystery of love written in all languages, even in that of the Carps'. Is it not silly thus to seal this science from maidens? Soon Blanche went to bed, and soon said she to the seneschal—

“Bruyn, you have deceived me, you ought to behave as the monk of the Carneaux behaved to the girl.”

Old Bruyn suspected the adventure, and saw well that his evil hour was at hand. He regarded Blanche with too much fire in his eyes for the same ardour to be lower down, and answered her softly—

“Alas! sweetheart, in taking you for my wife I had more love than strength, and I have taken advantage of your clemency and virtue. The great sorrow of my life is to feel all my capability in my heart only. This sorrow hastens my death little by little, so that you will soon be free. Wait for my departure from this world. That is the sole request that he makes of you, he who is your master, and who could command you, but who wishes only to be your prime minister and slave. Do not betray the honour of my white hairs! Under these circumstances there have been lords who have slain their wives.

“Alas! you will not kill me?” said she.

“No,” replied the old man, “I love thee too much, little one; why, thou art the flower of my old age, the joy of my soul. Thou art my well−beloved daughter; the sight of thee does good to mine eyes, and from thee I could endure anything, be it a sorrow or a joy, provided that thou does not curse too much the poor Bruyn who has made thee a great lady, rich and honoured. Wilt thou not be a lovely widow? And thy happiness will soften the pangs of death.”

And he found in his dried−up eyes still one tear which trickled quite warm down his fir−cone coloured face, and fell upon the hand of Blanche, who, grieved to behold this great love of her old spouse who would put himself under the ground to please her, said laughingly—

“There! there! don't cry, I will wait.”

Thereupon the seneschal kissed her hands and regaled her with little endearments, saying with a voice quivering with emotion—

“If you knew, Blanche my darling, how I devour thee in thy sleep with caresses, now here, now there!” And the old ape patted her with his two hands, which were nothing but bones. And he continued, “I dared not waken the cat that would have strangled my happiness, since at this occupation of love I only embraced with my heart.”

“Ah!” replied she, “you can fondle me thus even when my eyes are open; that has not the least effect upon me.”

At these words the poor seneschal, taking the little dagger which was on the table by the bed, gave it to her, saying with passion—

“My darling, kill me, or let me believe that you love me a little!”

“Yes, yes,” said she, quite frightened, “I will try to love you much.”

Behold how this young maidenhood made itself master of this old man and subdued him, for in the name of the sweet face of Venus, Blanche, endowed with the natural artfulness of women, made her old Bruyn come and go like a miller's mule.

“My good Bruyn, I want this! Bruyn, I want that—go on Bruyn!” Bruyn! Bruyn! And always Bruyn in such a way that Bruyn was more worn−out by the clemency of his wife than he would have been by her unkindness. She turned his brain wishing that everything should be in scarlet, making him turn everything topsy−turvy at the least movement of her eyebrow, and when she was sad the seneschal distracted, would say to everything from his judicial seat, “Hang him!” Another would have died like a fly at this conflict with the maid's innocence, but Bruyn

was of such an iron nature that it was difficult to finish him off. One evening that Blanche had turned the house upside−down, upset the men and the beasts, and would by her aggravating humour have made the eternal father desperate—he who has such an infinite treasure of patience since he endures us—she said to the seneschal while getting into bed, “My good Bruyn, I have low down fancies, that bite and prick me; thence they rise into my heart, inflame my brain, incite me therein to evil deeds, and in the night I dream of the monk of the Carneaux.”

“My dear,” replied the seneschal, “these are devilries and temptations against which the monks and nuns know how to defend themselves. If you will gain salvation, go and confess to the worthy Abbot of Marmoustiers, our neighbour; he will advise you well and will holily direct you in the good way.”

“Tomorrow I will go,” said she.

And indeed directly it was day, she trotted off to the monastery of the good brethren, who marvelled to see among them so pretty a lady; committed more than one sin through her in the evening; and for the present led her with great ceremony to their reverend abbot.

Blanche found the said good man in a private garden near the high rock under a flower arcade, and remained stricken with respect at the countenance of the holy man, although she was accustomed not to think much of grey hairs.

“God preserve you, Madame; what can you have to seek of one so near death, you so young?”

“Your precious advice,” said she, saluting him with a courtesy; “and if it will please you to guide so undutiful a sheep, I shall be well content to have so wise a confessor.”

“My daughter,” answered the monk, with whom old Bruyn had arranged this hypocrisy and the part to play, “if I had not the chills of a hundred winters upon this unthatched head, I should not dare to listen to your sins, but say on; if you enter paradise, it will be through me.”

Then the seneschal's wife set forth the small fry of her stock in hand, and when she was purged of her little iniquities, she came to the postscript of her confession.

“Ah! my father!” said she, “I must confess to you that I am daily exercised by the desire to have a child. Is it wrong?”

“No,” said the abbot.

But she went on, “It is by nature commanded to my husband not to draw from his wealth to bring about his poverty, as the old women say by the way.”

“Then,” replied the priest, “you must live virtuously and abstain from all thoughts of this kind.”

“But I have heard it professed by the Lady of Jallanges, that it was not a sin when from it one derived neither profit nor pleasure.”

“There always is pleasure,” said the abbot, “but don't count upon the child as a profit. Now fix this in your understanding, that it will always be a mortal sin before God and a crime before men to bring forth a child through the embraces of a man to whom one is not ecclesiastically married. Thus those women who offend against the holy laws of marriage, suffer great penalties in the other world, are in the power of horrible monsters with sharp and tearing claws, who thrust them into flaming furnaces in remembrance of the fact that here below they have warmed their hearts a little more than was lawful.”

Thereupon Blanche scratched her ear, and having thought to herself for a little while, she said to the priest, “How then did the Virgin Mary?”

“Ah!” replied abbot, “that it is a mystery.”

“And what is a mystery?”

“A thing that cannot be explained, and which one ought to believe without enquiring into it.”

“Well then,” said she, “cannot I perform a mystery?”

“This one,” said the Abbot, “only happened once, because it was the Son of God.”

“Alas! my father, is it then the will of God that I should die, or that from wise and sound comprehension my brain should be turned? Of this there is a great danger. Now in me something moves and excites me, and I am no longer in my senses. I care for nothing, and to find a man I would leap the walls, dash over the fields without shame and tear my things into tatters, only to see that which so much excited the monk of the Carneaux; and during these passions which work and prick my mind and body, there is neither God, devil, nor husband. I spring, I run, I smash up the wash−tubs, the pots, the farm implements, a fowl−house, the household things, and everything, in a way that I cannot describe. But I dare not confess to you all my misdeeds, because speaking of

them makes my mouth water, and the thing with which God curses me makes me itch dreadfully. If this folly bites and pricks me, and slays my virtue, will God, who has placed this great love in my body, condemn me to perdition?"

At this question it was the priest who scratched his ear, quite dumbfounded by the lamentations, profound wisdom, controversies and intelligence that this virginity secreted.

"My daughter," said he, "God has distinguished us from the beasts and made us a paradise to gain, and for this given us reason, which is a rudder to steer us against tempests and our ambitious desires, and there is a means of easing the imaginations of one's brain by fasting, excessive labours, and other virtues; and instead of frisking and fretting like a child let loose from school, you should pray to the virgin, sleep on a hard board, attend to your household duties, and never be idle."

"Ah! my father, when I am at church in my seat, I see neither the priest nor the altar, only the infant Jesus, who brings the thing into my head. But to finish, if my head is turned and my mind wanders, I am in the lime−twigs of love."

"If thus you were," said the abbot, imprudently, "you would be in the position of Saint Lidoire, who in a deep sleep one day, one leg here and one leg there, through the great heat and scantily attired, was approached by a young man full of mischief, who dexterously seduced her, and as of this trick the saint was thoroughly ignorant, and much surprised at being brought to bed, thinking that her unusual size was a serious malady, she did penance for it as a venial sin, as she had no pleasure in this wicked business, according to the statement of the wicked man, who said upon the scaffold where he was executed, that the saint had in nowise stirred."

"Oh, my father," said she, "be sure that I should not stir more than she did!"

With this statement she went away prettily and gracefully, smiling and thinking how she could commit a venial sin. On her return from the great monastery, she saw in the courtyard of her castle the little Jallanges, who under the superintendence of an old groom was turning and wheeling about on a fine horse, bending with the movements of the animal, dismounting and mounting again with vaults and leaps most gracefully, and with lissome thighs, so pretty, so dextrous, so upright as to be indescribable, so much so, that he would have made the Queen Lucrece long for him, she who killed herself from having been contaminated against her will.

"Ah!" said Blanche, "if only this page were fifteen, I would go to sleep comfortably very near to him."

Then, in spite of the too great youth of this charming servitor, during the collation and supper, she eyed frequently the black hair, the white skin, the grace of Rene, above all his eyes, where was an abundance of limpid warmth and a great fire of life, which he was afraid to shoot out—child that he was.

Now in the evening, as the seneschal's wife sat thoughtfully in her chair in the corner of the fireplace, old Bruyn interrogated her as to her trouble.

"I am thinking." said she, "that you must have fought the battles of love very early, to be thus completely broken up."

"Oh!" smiled he, smiling like all old men questioned upon their amorous remembrances, "at the age of thirteen and a half I had overcome the scruples of my mother's waiting woman."

Blanche wished to hear nothing more, but believed the page Rene should be equally advanced, and she was quite joyous and practised little allurements on the good man, and wallowed silently in her desire, like a cake which is being floured.

HOW AND BY WHOM THE SAID CHILD WAS PROCURED.

The seneschal's wife did not think long over the best way quickly to awaken the love of the page, and had soon discovered the natural ambuscade in the which the most wary are taken. This is how: at the warmest hour of the day the good man took his siesta after the Saracen fashion, a habit in which he had never failed, since his return from the Holy Land. During this time Blanche was alone in the grounds, where the women work at their minor occupations, such as broidering and stitching, and often remained in the rooms looking after the washing, putting the clothes tidy, or running about at will. Then she appointed this quiet hour to complete the education of the page, making him read books and say his prayers. Now on the morrow, when at the mid−day hour the seneschal slept, succumbing to the sun which warms with its most luminous rays the slopes of Roche−Corbon, so much so that one is obliged to sleep, unless annoyed, upset, and continually roused by a devil of a young woman. Blanche then gracefully perched herself in the great seignorial chair of her good man, which she did not find any too high, since she counted upon the chances of perspective. The cunning jade settled herself dextrously therein, like a swallow in its nest, and leaned her head maliciously upon her arm like a child that sleeps; but in making her preparations she opened fond eyes, that smiled and winked in advance of the little secret thrills, sneezes, squints, and trances of the page who was about to lie at her feet, separated from her by the jump of an old flea; and in fact she advanced so much and so near the square of velvet where the poor child should kneel, whose life and soul she trifled with, that had he been a saint of stone, his glance would have been constrained to follow the flexousities of the dress in order to admire and re−admire the perfections and beauties of the shapely leg, which moulded the white stocking of the seneschal's lady. Thus it was certain that a weak varlet would be taken in the snare, wherein the most vigorous knight would willingly have succumbed. When she had turned, returned, placed and displaced her body, and found the situation in which the page would be most comfortable, she cried, gently. “Rene!” Rene, whom she knew well was in the guard−room, did not fail to run in and quickly thrust his brown head between the tapestries of the door.

“What do you please to wish?” said the page. And he held with great respect in his hand his shaggy scarlet cap, less red than his fresh dimpled cheeks.

“Come hither,” replied she, under her breath, for the child attracted her so strongly that she was quite overcome.

And forsooth there were no jewels so sparkling as the eyes of Rene, no vellum whiter than his skin, no woman more exquisite in shape—and so near to her desire, she found him still more sweetly formed—and was certain that the merry frolics of love would radiate well from this youth, the warm sun, the silence, et cetera.

“Read me the litanies of Madame the Virgin,” said she to him, pushing an open book him on her prieu−dieu. “Let me see if you are well taught by your master.”

“Do you not think the Virgin beautiful?” asked she of him, smiling when he held the illuminated prayer−book in which glowed the silver and gold.

“It is a painting,” replied he, timidly, and casting a little glance upon his so gracious mistress.

“Read! read!”

Then Rene began to recite the so sweet and so mystic litanies; but you may imagine that the “Ora pro nobis” of Blanche became still fainter and fainter, like the sound of the horn in the woodlands, and when the page went on, “Oh, Rose of mystery,” the lady, who certainly heard distinctly, replied by a gentle sigh. Thereupon Rene suspected that his mistress slept. Then he commenced to cover her with his regard, admiring her at his leisure, and had then no wish to utter any anthem save the anthem of love. His happiness made his heart leap and bound into his throat; thus, as was but natural, these two innocents burned one against the other, but if they could have foreseen never would have intermingled. Rene feasted his eyes, planning in his mind a thousand fruitions of love that brought the water into his mouth. In his ecstasy he let his book fall, which made him feel as sheepish as a monk surprised at a child's tricks; but also from that he knew that Blanche was sound asleep, for she did not stir, and the wily jade would not have opened her eyes even at the greatest dangers, and reckoned on something else falling as well as the book of prayer.

There is no worse longing than the longing of a woman in certain condition. Now, the page noticed his lady's

foot, which was delicately slippered in a little shoe of a delicate blue colour. She had angularly placed it on a footstool, since she was too high in the seneschal's chair. This foot was of narrow proportions, delicately curved, as broad as two fingers, and as long as a sparrow, tail included, small at the top—a true foot of delight, a virginal foot that merited a kiss as a robber does the gallows; a roguish foot; a foot wanton enough to damn an archangel; an ominous foot; a devilishly enticing foot, which gave one a desire to make two new ones just like it to perpetuate in this lower world the glorious works of God. The page was tempted to take the shoe from this persuasive foot. To accomplish this his eyes glowing with the fire of his age, went swiftly, like the clapper of a bell, from this said foot of delectation to the sleeping countenance of his lady and mistress, listening to her slumber, drinking in her respiration again and again, it did not know where it would be sweetest to plant a kiss—whether on the ripe red lips of the seneschal's wife or on this speaking foot. At length, from respect or fear, or perhaps from great love, he chose the foot, and kissed it hastily, like a maiden who dares not. Then immediately he took up his book, feeling his red cheeks redder still, and exercised with his pleasure, he cried like a blind man—“Janua coeli,: gate of Heaven.” But Blanche did not move, making sure that the page would go from foot to knee, and thence to “Janua coeli,: gate of Heaven.” She was greatly disappointed when the litanies finished without any other mischief, and Rene, believing he had had enough happiness for one day, ran out of the room quite lively, richer from this hardy kiss than a robber who has robbed the poor−box.

When the seneschal's lady was alone, she thought to herself that this page would be rather a long time at his task if he amused himself with the singing of the Magnificat at matins. Then she determined on the morrow to raise her foot a little, and then to bring to light those hidden beauties that are called perfect in Touraine, because they take no hurt in the open air, and are always fresh. You can imagine that the page, burned by his desire and his imagination, heated by the day before, awaited impatiently the hour to read in this breviary of gallantry, and was called; and the conspiracy of the litanies commenced again, and Blanche did not fail to fall asleep. This time the said Rene fondled with his hand the pretty limb, and even ventured so far as to verify if the polished knee and its surroundings were satin. At this sight the poor child, armed against his desire, so great was his fear, dared only to make brief devotion and curt caresses, and although he kissed softly this fair surface, he remained bashful, the which, feeling by the senses of her soul and the intelligence of her body, the seneschal's lady who took great care not to move, called out to him—“Ah, Rene, I am asleep.”

Hearing what he believed to be a stern reproach, the page frightened ran away, leaving the books, the task, and all. Thereupon, the seneschal's better half added this prayer to the litany—“Holy Virgin, how difficult children are to make.”

At dinner her page perspired all down his back while waiting on his lady and her lord; but he was very much surprised when he received from Blanche the most shameless of all glances that ever woman cast, and very pleasant and powerful it was, seeing that it changed this child into a man of courage. Now, the same evening Bruyn staying a little longer than was his custom in his own apartment, the page went in search of Blanche, and found her asleep, and made her dream a beautiful dream.

He knocked off the chains that weighed so heavily upon her, and so plentifully bestowed upon her the sweets of love, that the surplus would have sufficed to render to others blessed with the joys of maternity. So then the minx, seizing the page by the head and squeezing him to her, cried out—“Oh, Rene! Thou hast awakened me!”

And in fact there was no sleep could stand against it, and it is certain that saints must sleep very soundly. From this business, without any other mystery, and by a benign faculty which is the assisting principle of spouses, the sweet and graceful plumage, suitable to cuckolds, was placed upon the head of the good husband without his experiencing the slightest shock.

After this sweet repast, the seneschal's lady took kindly to her siesta after the French fashion, while Bruyn took his according to the Saracen. But by the said siesta she learned how the good youth of the page had a better taste than that of the old seneschal, and at night she buried herself in the sheets far away from her husband, whom she found strong and stale. And from sleeping and waking up in the day, from taking siestas and saying litanies, the seneschal's wife felt growing within her that treasure for which she had so often and so ardently sighed; but now she liked more the commencement than the fructifying of it.

You may be sure that Rene knew how to read, not only in books, but in the eyes of his sweet lady, for whom he would have leaped into a flaming pile, had it been her wish he should do so. When well and amply, more than a hundred times, the train had been laid by them, the little lady became anxious about her soul and the future of

her friend the page. Now one rainy day, as they were playing at touch−tag, like two children, innocent from head to foot, Blanche, who was always caught, said to him—

“Come here, Rene; do you know that while I have only committed venial sins because I was asleep, you have committed mortal ones?”

“Ah, Madame!” said he, “where then will God stow away all the damned if that is to sin!”

Blanche burst out laughing, and kissed his forehead.

“Be quiet, you naughty boy; it is a question of paradise, and we must live there together if you wish always to be with me.”

“Oh, my paradise is here.”

“Leave off,” said she. “You are a little wretch—a scapegrace who does not think of that which I love—yourself! You do not know that I am with child, and that in a little while I shall be no more able to conceal it than my nose. Now, what will the abbot say? What will my lord say? He will kill you if he puts himself in a passion. My advice is little one, that you go to the abbot of Marmoustiers, confess your sins to him, asking him to see what had better be done concerning my seneschal.

“Alas,” said the artful page, “if I tell the secret of our joys, he will put his interdict upon our love.”

“Very likely,” said she; “but thy happiness in the other world is a thing so precious to me.”

“Do you wish it my darling?”

“Yes,” replied she rather faintly.

“Well, I will go, but sleep again that I may bid you adieu.”

And the couple recited the litany of Farewells as if they had both foreseen that their love must finish in its April. And on the morrow, more to save his dear lady than to save himself, and also to obey her, Rene de Jallanges set out towards the great monastery.

HOW THE SAID LOVE−SIN WAS REPENTED OF AND LED TO GREAT MOURNING.

"Good God!" cried the abbot, when the page had chanted the Kyrie eleison of his sweet sins, "thou art the accomplice of a great felony, and thou has betrayed thy lord. Dost thou know page of darkness, that for this thou wilt burn through all eternity? and dost thou know what it is to lose forever the heaven above for a perishable and changeful moment here below? Unhappy wretch! I see thee precipitated for ever in the gulfs of hell unless thou payest to God in this world that which thou owest him for such offence."

Thereupon the good old abbot, who was of that flesh of which saints are made, and who had great authority in the country of Touraine, terrified the young man by a heap of representations, Christian discourses, remembrances of the commandments of the Church, and a thousand eloquent things—as many as a devil could say in six weeks to seduce a maiden—but so many that Rene, who was in the loyal fervour of innocence, made his submission to the good abbot. The said abbot, wishing to make forever a good and virtuous man of this child, now in a fair way to be a wicked one, commanded him first to go and prostrate himself before his lord, to confess his conduct to him, and then if he escaped from this confession, to depart instantly for the Crusades, and go straight to the Holy Land, where he should remain fifteen years of the time appointed to give battle to the Infidels.

"Alas, my reverend father," said he, quite unmoved, "will fifteen years be enough to acquit me of so much pleasure? Ah! If you knew, I have had joy enough for a thousand years."

"God will be generous. Go," replied the old abbot, "and sin no more. On this account ego te absolvo."

Poor Rene returned thereupon with great contrition to the castle of Roche−Corbon and the first person he met was the seneschal, who was polishing up his arms, helmets, gauntlets, and other things. He was sitting on a great marble bench in the open air, and was amusing himself by making shine again the splendid trappings which brought back to him the merry pranks in the Holy Land, the good jokes, and the wenches, et cetera. When Rene fell upon his knees before him, the good lord was much astonished.

"What is it?" said he.

"My lord," replied Rene, "order these people to retire."

Which the servants having done, the page confessed his fault, recounting how he had assailed his lady in her sleep, and that for certain he had made her a mother in imitation of the man and the saint, and came by order of the confessor to put himself at the disposition of the offended person. Having said which, Rene de Jallanges cast down his lovely eyes, which had produced all the mischief, and remained abashed, prostrate without fear, his arms hanging down, his head bare, awaiting his punishment, and humbling himself to God. The seneschal was not so white that he could not become whiter, and now he blanched like linen newly dried, remaining dumb with passion. And this old man who had not in his veins the vital force to procreate a child, found in this moment of fury more vigour than was necessary to undo a man. He seized with his hairy right hand his heavy club, lifted it, brandished it and adjusted it so easily you could have thought it a bowl at a game of skittles, to bring it down upon the pale forehead of the said Rene, who knowing that he was greatly in fault towards his lord, remained placid, and stretching his neck, thought that he was about to expiate his sin for his sweetheart in this world and in the other.

But his fair youth, and all the natural seductions of this sweet crime, found grace before the tribunal of the heart of this old man, although Bruyn was still severe, and throwing his club away on to a dog who was catching beetles, he cried out, "May a thousand million claws, tear during all eternity, all the entrails of him, who made him, who planted the oak, that made the chair, on which thou hast antlered me—and the same to those who engendered thee, cursed page of misfortune! Get thee to the devil, whence thou camest—go out from before me, from the castle, from the country, and stay not here one moment more than is necessary, otherwise I will surely prepare for thee a death by slow fire that shall make thee curse twenty times an hour thy villainous and ribald partner!"

Hearing the commencement of these little speeches of the seneschal, whose youth came back in his oaths, the page ran away, escaping the rest: and he did well. Bruyn, burning with a fierce rage, gained the gardens speedily, reviling everything by the way, striking and swearing; he even knocked over three large pans held by one of his

servants, was carrying the mess to the dogs, and he was so beside himself that he would have killed a labourer for a “thank you.” He soon perceived his unmaidenly maiden, who was looking towards the road to the monastery, waiting for the page, and unaware that she would never see him again.

“Ah, my lady! By the devil's red three−pronged fork, am I a swallower of tarradiddles and a child, to believe that you are so fashioned that a page can behave in this manner and you not know it? By the death! By the head! By the blood!”

“Hold!” she replied, seeing that the mine was sprung, “I knew it well enough, but as you had not instructed me in these matters I thought that I was dreaming!”

The great ire of the seneschal melted like snow in the sun, for the direst anger of God himself would have vanished at a smile from Blanche.

“May a thousand millions of devils carry off this alien child! I swear that—”

“There! there! do not swear,” said she. “If it is not yours, it is mine; and the other night did you not tell me you loved everything that came from me?”

Thereupon she ran on with such a lot of arguments, hard words, complaints, quarrels, tears, and other paternosters of women; such as —firstly the estates would not have to be returned to the king; that never had a child been brought more innocently into the world, that this, that that, a thousand things; until the good cuckold relented, and Blanche, seizing a propitious interruption said—

“And where it is the page?”

“Gone to the devil!”

“What, have you killed him?” said she. She turned pale and tottered.

Bruyn did not know what would become of him when he saw thus fall all the happiness of his old age, and he would to save her have shown her this page. He ordered him to be sought, but Rene had run off at full speed, fearing he should be killed; and departed for the lands beyond the seas, in order to accomplish his vow of religion. When Blanche had learned from the above−mentioned abbot the penitence imposed upon her well beloved, she fell into a state of great melancholy, saying at times, “Where is he, the poor unfortunate, who is in the middle of great dangers for love of me?”

And always kept on asking, like a child who gives its mother no rest until its request be granted it. At these lamentations the poor seneschal, feeling himself to blame, endeavoured to do a thousand things, putting one out of the question, in order to make Blanche happy; but nothing was equal to the sweet caresses of the page. However, she had one day the child so much desired. You may be sure that was a fine festival for the good cuckold, for the resemblance to the father was distinctly engraved upon the face of this sweet fruit of love. Blanche consoled herself greatly, and picked up again a little of her old gaiety and flower of innocence, which rejoiced the aged hours of the seneschal. From constantly seeing the little one run about, watching its laughs answer those of the countess, he finished by loving it, and would have been in a great rage with anyone who had not believed him its father.

Now as the adventure of Blanche and her page had not been carried beyond the castle, it was related throughout Touraine that Messire Bruyn had still found himself sufficiently in funds to afford a child. Intact remained the virtue of Blanche, and by the quintessence of instruction drawn by her from the natural reservoir of women, she recognised how necessary it was to be silent concerning the venial sin with which her child was covered. So she became modest and good, and was cited as a virtuous person. And then to make use of him she experimented on the goodness of her good man, and without giving him leave to go further than her chin, since she looked upon herself as belonging to Rene, Blanche, in return for the flowers of age which Bruyn offered her, coddled him, smiled upon him, kept him merry, and fondled him with pretty ways and tricks, which good wives bestow upon the husbands they deceive; and all so well, that the seneschal did not wish to die, squatted comfortably in his chair, and the more he lived the more he became partial to life. But to be brief, one night he died without knowing where he was going, for he said to Blanche, “Ho! ho! My dear, I see thee no longer! Is it night?”

It was the death of the just, and he had well merited it as a reward for his labours in the Holy Land.

Blanche held for his death a great and true mourning, weeping for him as one weeps for one's father. She remained melancholy, without wishing to lend her ear to the music of a second wedding, for which she was praised by all good people, who knew not that she had a husband in her heart, a life in hope; but she was the

greater part of her time a widow in fact and widow in heart, because hearing no news of her lover at the Crusades, the poor Countess reputed him dead, and during certain nights seeing him wounded and lying at full length, she would wake up in tears. She lived thus for fourteen years in the remembrance of one day of happiness. Finally, one day when she had with her certain ladies of Touraine, and they were talking together after dinner, behold her little boy, who was at that time about thirteen and a half, and resembled Rene more than it is allowable for a child to resemble his father, and had nothing of the Sire Bruyn about him but his name—behold the little one, a madcap and pretty like his mother, who came in from the garden, running, perspiring, panting, jumping, scattering all things in his way, after the uses and customs of infancy, and who ran straight to his well−beloved mother, jumping into her lap, and interrupting the conversation, cried out—

“Oh, mother I want to speak to you, I have seen in the courtyard a pilgrim, who squeezed me very tight.”

“Ah!” cried the chatelaine, hurrying towards one of the servants who had charge of the young count and watched over his precious days, “I have forbidden you ever to leave my son in the hands of strangers, not even in those of the holiest man in the world. You quit my service.”

“Alas! my lady,” replied the old equerry, quite overcome, “this one wished him no harm for he wept while kissing him passionately.”

“He wept?” said she; “ah! it's the father.”

Having said which, she leaned her head of upon the chair in which she was sitting, and which you may be sure was the chair in which she has sinned.

Hearing these strange words the ladies was so surprised that at first they did not perceive that the seneschal's widow was dead, without its ever been known if her sudden death was caused by her sorrow at the departure of her lover, who, faithful to his vow, did not wish to see her, or from great joy at his return and the hope of getting the interdict removed which the Abbot of Marmoustiers had placed upon their loves. And there was a great mourning for her, for the Sire de Jallanges lost his spirits when he saw his lady laid in the ground, and became a monk of Marmoustiers, which at that time was called by some Maimoustier, as much as to say Maius Monasterium, the largest monastery, and it was indeed the finest in all France.

THE KING'S SWEETHEART

There lived at this time at the forges of the Pont−aux−Change, a goldsmith whose daughter was talked about in Paris on account of her great beauty, and renowned above all things for her exceeding gracefulness. There were those who sought her favours by the usual tricks of love and, but others offered large sums of money to the father to give them his daughter in lawful wedlock, the which pleased him not a little.

One of his neighbours, a parliamentary advocate, who by selling his cunning devices to the public had acquired as many lands as a dog has fleas, took it into his head to offer the said father a domain in consideration of his consent to this marriage, which he ardently desired to undertake. To this arrangement our goldsmith was nothing loth. He bargained away his daughter, without taking into consideration the fact that her patched−up old suitor had the features of an ape and had scarcely a tooth in his jaws. The smell which emanated from his mouth did not however disturb his own nostrils, although he was filthy and high flavoured, as are all those who pass their lives amid the smoke of chimneys, yellow parchment, and other black proceedings. Immediately this sweet girl saw him she exclaimed, “Great Heaven! I would rather not have him.”

“That concerns me not,” said the father, who had taken a violent fancy to the proffered domain. “I give him to you for a husband. You must get on as well as you can together. That is his business now, and his duty is to make himself agreeable to you.”

“Is it so?” said she. “Well then, before I obey your orders I'll let him know what he may expect.”

And the same evening, after supper, when the love−sick man of law was pleading his cause, telling her he was mad for her, and promising her a life of ease and luxury, she taking him up, quickly remarked—

“My father had sold me to you, but if you take me, you will make a bad bargain, seeing that I would rather offer myself to the passers−by than to you. I promise you a disloyalty that will only finish with death—yours or mine.”

Then she began to weep, like all young maidens will before they become experienced, for afterwards they never cry with their eyes. The good advocate took this strange behaviour for one of those artifices by which the women seek to fan the flames of love and turn the devotion of their admirers into the more tender caress and more daring osculation that speaks a husband's right. So that the knave took little notice of it, but laughing at the complaints of the charming creature, asked her to fix the day.

“To−morrow,” replied she, “for the sooner this odious marriage takes place, the sooner I shall be free to have gallants and to lead the gay life of those who love where it pleases them.”

Thereupon the foolish fellow—as firmly fixed as a fly in a glue pot— went away, made his preparations, spoke at the Palace, ran to the High Court, bought dispensations, and conducted his purchase more quickly than he ever done one before, thinking only of the lovely girl. Meanwhile the king, who had just returned from a journey, heard nothing spoken of at court but the marvellous beauty of the jeweller's daughter who had refused a thousand crowns from this one, snubbed that one; in fact, would yield to no one, but turned up her nose at the finest young men of the city, gentlemen who would have forfeited their seat in paradise only to possess one day, this little dragon of virtue.

The good king, was a judge of such game, strolled into the town, past the forges, and entered the goldsmith's shop, for the purpose of buying jewels for the lady of his heart, but at the same time to bargain for the most precious jewel in the shop. The king not taking a fancy to the jewels, or they not being to his taste, the good man looked in a secret drawer for a big white diamond.

“Sweetheart,” said he, to the daughter, while her father's nose was buried in the drawer, “sweetheart, you were not made to sell precious stones, but to receive them, and if you were to give me all the little rings in the place to choose from, I know one that many here are mad for; that pleases me; to which I should ever be subject and servant; and whose price the whole kingdom of France could never pay.”

“Ah!, sire!” replied the maid, “I shall be married to−morrow, but if you will lend me the dagger that is in your belt, I will defend my honour, and you shall take it, that the gospel made be observed wherein it says,'Render unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's' . . .”

Immediately the king gave her the little dagger, and her brave reply rendered him so amorous that he lost his

appetite. He had an apartment prepared, intending to lodge his new lady−love in the Rue a l'Hirundelle, in one of his palaces.

And now behold my advocate, in a great hurry to get married, to the disgust of his rivals, the leading his bride to the altar to the clang of bells and the sound of music, so timed as to provoke the qualms of diarrhoea. In the evening, after the ball, comes he into the nuptial chamber, where should be reposing his lovely bride. No longer is she a lovely bride—but a fury—a wild she−devil, who, seated in an armchair, refuses her share of her lord's couch, and sits defiantly before the fire warming at the same time her ire and her calves. The good husband, quite astonished, kneels down gently before her, inviting her to the first passage of arms in that charming battle which heralds a first night of love; but she utters not a word, and when he tries to raise her garment, only just to glance at the charms that have cost him so dear, she gives him a slap that makes his bones rattle, and refuses to utter a syllable.

This amusement, however, by no means displeased our friend the advocate, who saw at the end of his troubles that which you can as well imagine as he did; so played he his share of the game manfully, taking cheerfully the punishment bestowed upon him. By so much hustling about, scuffling, and struggling he managed at last to tear away a sleeve, to slit a petticoat, until he was able to place his hand upon his own property. This bold endeavour brought Madame to her feet and drawing the king's dagger, “What would you with me?” she cried.

“Everything,” answered he.

“Ha! I should be a great fool to give myself against my inclination! If you fancied you would find my virtue unarmed you made a great error. Behold the poniard of the king, with which I will kill you if you make the semblance of a step towards me.”

So saying, she took a cinder, and having still her eyes upon her lord she drew a circle on the floor, adding, “These are the confines of the king's domain. Beware how you pass them.”

The advocate, with whose ideas of love−making the dagger sadly interfered, stood quite discomfited, but at the same time he heard the cruel speech of his tormentor he caught sight through the slits and tears in her robe of a sweet sample of a plump white thigh, and such voluptuous specimens of hidden mysteries, et cetera, that death seemed sweet to him if he could only taste of them a little. So that he rushed within the domain of the king, saying, “I mind not death.” In fact he came with such force that his charmer fell backwards onto the bed, but keeping her presence of mind she defended herself so gallantly that the advocate enjoyed no further advantage than a knock at the door that would not admit him, and he gained as well a little stab from the poniard which did not wound him deeply, so that it did not cost him very dearly, his attack upon the realm of his sovereign. But maddened with this slight advantage, he cried, “I cannot live without the possession of that lovely body, and those marvels of love. Kill me then!” And again he attacked the royal preserves. The young beauty, whose head was full of the king, was not even touched by this great love, said gravely, “If you menace me further, it is not you but myself I will kill.” She glared at him so savagely that the poor man was quite terrified, and commenced to deplore the evil hour in which he had taken her to wife, and thus the night which should have been so joyous, was passed in tears, lamentations, prayers, and ejaculations. In vain he tempted her with promises; she should eat out of gold, she should be a great lady, he would buy houses and lands for her. Oh! if she would only let him break one lance with her in the sweet conflict of love, he would leave her for ever and pass the remainder of his life according to her fantasy. But she, still unyielding, said she would permit him to die, and that was the only thing he could do to please her.

“I have not deceived you,” said she. “Agreeable to my promise, I shall give myself to the king, making you a present of the peddler, chance passers, and street loungers with whom I threatened you.”

When the day broke she put on her wedding garments and waited patiently till the poor husband had to depart to his office client's business, and then ran out into the town to seek the king. But she had not gone a bow−shot from the house before one of the king's servants who had watched the house from dawn, stopped her with the question—

“Do you seek the king?”

“Yes,” said she.

“Good; then allow me to be your good friend,” said the subtle courtier. “I ask your aid and protection, as now I give you mine.”

With that he told her what sort of a man the king was, which was his weak side, that he was passionate one

day and silent the next, that she would luxuriously lodged and well kept, but that she must keep the king well in hand; in short, he chatted so pleasantly that the time passed quickly until she found herself in the Hotel de l'Hirundelle where afterwards lived Madame d'Estampes. The poor husband shed scalding tears, when he found his little bird had flown, and became melancholy and pensive. His friends and neighbours edified his ears with as many taunts and jeers as Saint Jacques had the honour of receiving in Compostella, but the poor fellow took it so to heart, that at last they tried rather to assuage his grief. These artful compeers by a species of legal chicanery, decreed that the good man was not a cuckold, seeing that his wife had refused a consummation, and if the planter of horns had been anyone but the king, the said marriage might have been dissolved; but the amorous spouse was wretched unto death at my lady's trick. However, he left her to the king, determining one day to have her to himself, and thinking that a life−long shame would not be too dear a payment for a night with her. One must love well to love like that, eh? and there are many worldly ones, who mock at such affection. But he, still thinking of her, neglected his cases and his clients, his robberies and everything. He went to the palace like a miser searching for a lost sixpence, bowed down, melancholy, and absent−minded, so much so, that one day he relieved himself against the robe of a counsellor, believing all the while he stood against a wall. Meanwhile the beautiful girl was loved night and day by the king, who could not tear himself from her embraces, because in amorous play she was so excellent, knowing as well how to fan the flame of love as to extinguish it—to−day snubbing him, to−morrow petting him, never the same, and with it a thousand little tricks to charm the ardent lover.

A lord of Bridore killed himself through her, because she would not receive his embraces, although he offered her his land, Bridore in Touraine. Of these gallants of Touraine, who gave an estate for one tilt with love's lance, there are none left. This death made the fair one sad, and since her confessor laid the blame of it upon her, she determined for the future to accept all domains and secretly ease their owner's amorous pains for the better saving of their souls from perdition. 'Twas thus she commenced to build up that great fortune which made her a person of consideration in the town. By this means she prevented many gallant gentlemen from perishing, playing her game so well, and inventing such fine stories, that his Majesty little guessed how much she aided him in securing the happiness of his subjects. The fact is, she has such a hold over him that she could have made him believe the floor was the ceiling, which was perhaps easier for him to think than anyone else seeing that at the Rue d'Hirundelle my lord king passed the greater portion of his time embracing her always as though he would see if such a lovely article would wear away: but he wore himself out first, poor man, seeing that he eventually died from excess of love. Although she took care to grant her favours only to the best and noblest in the court, and that such occasions were rare as miracles, there were not wanting those among her enemies and rivals who declared that for 10,000 crowns a simple gentleman might taste the pleasures of his sovereign, which was false above all falseness, for when her lord taxed her with it, did she not reply, “Abominable wretches! Curse the devils who put this idea in your head! I never yet did have man who spent less than 30,000 crowns upon me.”

The king, although vexed could not repress a smile, and kept her on a month to silence scandal. And last, la demoiselle de Pisseleu, anxious to obtain her place, brought about her ruin. Many would have liked to be ruined in the same way, seeing she was taken by a young lord, was happy with him, the fires of love in her being still unquenched. But to take up the thread again. One day that the king's sweetheart was passing through the town in her litter to buy laces, furs, velvets, broideries, and other ammunition, and so charmingly attired, and looking so lovely, that anyone, especially the clerks, would have believed the heavens were open above them, behold, her good man, who comes upon her near the old cross. She, at that time lazily swinging her charming little foot over the side of the litter, drew in her head as though she had seen an adder. She was a good wife, for I know some who would have proudly passed their husbands, to their shame and to the great disrespect of conjugal rights.

“What is the matter?” asked one M. de Lannoy, who humbly accompanied her.

“Nothing,” she whispered; “but that person is my husband. Poor man, how changed he looks. Formerly he was the picture of a monkey; today he is the very image of a Job.”

The poor advocate stood opened−mouthed. His heart beat rapidly at the sight of that little foot—of that wife so wildly loved.

Observing which, the Sire de Lannoy said to him, with courtly innocence—

“If you are her husband, is that any reason you should stop her passage?”

At this she burst out laughing, and the good husband instead of killing her bravely, shed scalding tears at that laugh which pierced his heart, his soul, his everything, so much that he nearly tumbled over an old citizen whom

the sight of the king's sweetheart had driven against the wall. The aspect of this weak flower, which had been his in the bud, but far from him had spread its lovely leaves; of the fairy figure, the voluptuous bust—all this made the poor advocate more wretched and more mad for her than it is possible to express in words. You must have been madly in love with a woman who refuses your advances thoroughly to understand the agony of this unhappy man. Rare indeed is it to be so infatuated as he was. He swore that life, fortune, honour—all might go, but that for once at least he would be flesh−to−flesh with her, and make so grand a repast off her dainty body as would suffice him all his life. He passed the night saying, “oh yes; ah! I'll have her!” and “Curses am I not her husband?” and “Devil take me,” striking himself on the forehead and tossing about. There are chances and occasions which occur so opportunely in this world that little−minded men refuse them credence, saying they are supernatural, but men of high intellect know them to be true because they could not be invented. One of the chances came to the poor advocate, even the day after that terrible one which had been so sore a trial to him. One of his clients, a man of good renown, who had his audiences with the king, came one morning to the advocate, saying that he required immediately a large sum of money, about 12,000 crowns. To which the artful fellow replied, 12,000 crowns were not so often met at the corner of a street as that which often is seen at the corner of the street; that besides the sureties and guarantees of interest, it was necessary to find a man who had about him 12,000 crowns, and that those gentlemen were not numerous in Paris, big city as it was, and various other things of a like character the man of cunning remarked.

“Is it true, my lord, the you have a hungry and relentless creditor?” said he.

“Yes, yes,” replied the other, “it concerns the mistress of the king. Don't breathe a syllable; but this evening, in consideration of 20,000 crowns and my domain of Brie, I shall take her measure.”

Upon this the advocate blanched, and the courtier perceived he touched a tender point. As he had only lately returned from the wars, he did not know that the lovely woman adored by the king had a husband.

“You appear ill,” he said.

“I have a fever,” replied the knave. “But is it to her that you give the contract and the money?”

“Yes.”

“Who then manages the bargain? Is it she also?”

“No,” said the noble; “her little arrangements are concluded through a servant of hers, the cleverest little ladies'−maid that ever was. She's sharper than mustard, and these nights stolen from the king have lined her pockets well.”

“I know a Lombard who would accommodate you. But nothing can be done; of the 12,000 crowns you shall not have a brass farthing if this same ladies'−maid does not come here to take the price of the article that is so great an alchemist that turns blood into gold, by Heaven!”

“It will be a good trick to make her sign the receipt,” replied the lord, laughing.

The servant came faithfully to the rendezvous with the advocate, who had begged the lord to bring her. The ducats looked bright and beautiful. There they lay all in a row, like nuns going to vespers. Spread out upon the table they would have made a donkey smile, even if he were being gutted alive; so lovely, so splendid, were those brave noble young piles. The good advocate, however, had prepared this view for no ass, for the little handmaiden look longingly at the golden heap, and muttered a prayer at the sight of them. Seeing which, the husband whispered in her ear his golden words, “These are for you.”

“Ah!” said she; “I have never been so well paid.”

“My dear,” replied the dear man, “you shall have them without being troubled with me;” and turning her round, “Your client has not told you who I am, eh? No? Learn then, I am the husband of the lady whom the king has debauched, and whom you serve. Carry her these crowns, and come back here. I will hand over yours to you on a condition which will be to your taste.”

The servant did as she was bidden, and being very curious to know how she could get 12,000 crowns without sleeping with the advocate, was very soon back again.

“Now, my little one,” said he, “here are 12,000 crowns. With this sum I could buy lands, men, women, and the conscience of three priests at least; so that I believe if I give it to you I can have you, body, soul, and toe nails. And I shall have faith in you like an advocate, I expect that you will go to the lord who expects to pass the night with my wife, and you will deceive him, by telling him that the king is coming to supper with her, and that to−night he must seek his little amusements elsewhere. By so doing I shall be able to take his place and the

king's."

"But how?" said she.

"Oh!" replied he; "I have bought you, you and your tricks. You won't have to look at these crowns twice without finding me a way to have my wife. In bringing this conjunction about you commit no sin. It is a work of piety to bring together two people whose hands only been put one in to the other, and that by the priest."

"By my faith, come," said she; "after supper the lights will be put out, and you can enjoy Madame if you remain silent. Luckily, on these joyful occasions she cries more than she speaks, and asks questions with her hands alone, for she is very modest, and does not like loose jokes, like the ladies of the Court."

"Oh," cried the advocate, "look, take the 12,000 crowns, and I promise you twice as much more if I get by fraud that which belongs to me by right."

Then he arranged the hour, the door, the signal, and all; and the servant went away, bearing with her on the back of the mules the golden treasure wrung by fraud and trickery from the widow and the orphan, and they were all going to that place where everything goes—save our lives, which come from it. Now behold my advocate, who shaves himself, scents himself, goes without onions for dinner that his breath may be sweet, and does everything to make himself as presentable as a gallant signor. He gives himself the airs of a young dandy, tries to be lithe and frisky and to disguise his ugly face; he might try all he knew, he always smelt of the musty lawyer. He was not so clever as the pretty washerwoman of Portillon who one day wishing to appear at her best before one of her lovers, got rid of a disagreeable odour in a manner well known to young women of an inventive turn of mind. But our crafty fellow fancied himself the nicest man in the world, although in spite of his drugs and perfumes he was really the nastiest. He dressed himself in his thinnest clothes although the cold pinched him like a rope collar and sallied forth, quickly gaining the Rue d'Hirundelle. There he had to wait some time. But just as he was beginning to think he had been made a fool of, and just as it was quite dark, the maid came down and opened alike the door to him and good husband slipped gleefully into the king's apartment. The girl locked him carefully in a cupboard that was close to his wife's bed, and through a crack he feasted his eyes upon her beauty, for she undressed herself before the fire, and put on a thin nightgown, through which her charms were plainly visible. Believing herself alone with her maid she made those little jokes that women will when undressing. "Am I not worth 20,000 crowns to−night? Is that overpaid with a castle in Brie?"

And saying this she gently raised two white supports, firm as rocks, which had well sustained many assaults, seeing they had been furiously attacked and had not softened. "My shoulders alone are worth a kingdom; no king could make their equal. But I am tired of this life. That which is hard work is no pleasure." The little maid smiled, and her lovely mistress said to her, "I should like to see you in my place." Then the maid laughed, saying—

"Be quiet, Madame, he is there."

"Who?"

"Your husband."

"Which?"

"The real one."

"Chut!" said Madame.

And her maid told her the whole story, wishing to keep her favour and the 12,000 crowns as well.

"Oh well, he shall have his money's worth. I'll give his desires time to cool. If he tastes me may I lose my beauty and become as ugly as a monkey's baby. You get into bed in my place and thus gain the 12,000 crowns. Go and tell him that he must take himself off early in the morning in order that I may not find out your trick upon me, and just before dawn I will get in by his side."

The poor husband was freezing and his teeth were chattering, and the chambermaid coming to the cupboard on pretence of getting some linen, said to him, "Your hour of bliss approaches. Madame to−night has made grand preparations and you will be well served. But work without whistling, otherwise I shall be lost."

At last, when the good husband was on the point of perishing with cold, the lights were put out. The maid cried softly in the curtains to the king's sweetheart, that his lordship was there, and jumped into bed, while her mistress went out as if she had been the chambermaid. The advocate, released from his cold hiding−place, rolled rapturously into the warm sheets, thinking to himself, "Oh! this is good!" To tell the truth, the maid gave him his money's worth—and the good man thought of the difference between the profusion of the royal houses and the niggardly ways of the citizens' wives. The servant laughing, played her part marvellously well, regaling the knave

with gentle cries, shiverings, convulsions and tossings about, like a newly−caught fish on the grass, giving little Ah! Ah's! in default of other words; and as often as the request was made by her, so often was it complied with by the advocate, who dropped of to sleep at last, like an empty pocket. But before finishing, the lover who wished to preserve a souvenir of this sweet night of love, by a dextrous turn, plucked out one of his wife's hairs, where from I know not, seeing I was not there, and kept in his hand this precious gauge of the warm virtue of that lovely creature. Towards the morning, when the cock crew, the wife slipped in beside her husband, and pretended to sleep. Then the maid tapped gently on the happy man's forehead, whispering in his ear, “It is time, get into your clothes and off you go—it's daylight.” The good man grieved to lose his treasure, and wished to see the source of his vanished happiness.

“Oh! Oh!” said he, proceeding to compare certain things, “I've got light hair, and this is dark.”

“What have you done?” said the servant; “Madame will see she has been duped.”

“But look.”

“Ah!” said she, with an air of disdain, “do you not know, you who knows everything, that that which is plucked dies and discolours?” and thereupon roaring with laughter at the good joke, she pushed him out of doors. This became known. The poor advocate, named Feron, died of shame, seeing that he was the only one who had not his own wife while she, who was from this was called La Belle Feroniere, married, after leaving the king, a young lord, Count of Buzancois. And in her old days she would relate the story, laughingly adding, that she had never scented the knave's flavour.

This teaches us not to attach ourselves more than we can help to wives who refuse to support our yoke.

THE DEVIL'S HEIR

There once was a good old canon of Notre Dame de Paris, who lived in a fine house of his own, near St. Pierre−aux−Boeufs, in the Parvis. This canon had come a simple priest to Paris, naked as a dagger without its sheath. But since he was found to be a handsome man, well furnished with everything, and so well constituted, that if necessary he was able to do the work of many, without doing himself much harm, he gave himself up earnestly to the confessing of ladies, giving to the melancholy a gentle absolution, to the sick a drachm of his balm, to all some little dainty. He was so well known for his discretion, his benevolence, and other ecclesiastical qualities, that he had customers at Court. Then in order not to awaken the jealousy of the officials, that of the husbands and others, in short, to endow with sanctity these good and profitable practices, the Lady Desquerdes gave him a bone of St. Victor, by virtue of which all the miracles were performed. And to the curious it was said, “He has a bone which will cure everything;" and to this, no one found anything to reply, because it was not seemly to suspect relics. Beneath the shade of his cassock, the good priest had the best of reputations, that of a man valiant under arms. So he lived like a king. He made money with holy water; sprinkled it and transmitted the holy water into good wine. More than that, his name lay snugly in all the et ceteras of the notaries, in wills or in caudicils, which certain people have falsely written CODICIL, seeing that the word is derived from cauda, as if to say the tail of the legacy. In fact, the good old Long Skirts would have been made an archbishop if he had only said in joke, “I should like to put on a mitre for a handkerchief in order to have my head warmer.” Of all the benefices offered to him, he chose only a simple canon's stall to keep the good profits of the confessional. But one day the courageous canon found himself weak in the back, seeing that he was all sixty− eight years old, and had held many confessionals. Then thinking over all his good works, he thought it about time to cease his apostolic labours, the more so, as he possessed about one hundred thousand crowns earned by the sweat of his body. From that day he only confessed ladies of high lineage, and did it very well. So that it was said at Court that in spite of the efforts of the best young clerks there was still no one but the Canon of St. Pierre−aux−Boeufs to properly bleach the soul of a lady of condition. Then at length the canon became by force of nature a fine nonagenarian, snowy about the head, with trembling hands, but square as a tower, having spat so much without coughing, that he coughed now without being able to spit; no longer rising from his chair, he who had so often risen for humanity; but drinking dry, eating heartily, saying nothing, but having all the appearance of a living Canon of Notre Dame. Seeing the immobility of the aforesaid canon; seeing the stories of his evil life which for some time had circulated among the common people, always ignorant; seeing his dumb seclusion, his flourishing health, his young old age, and other things too numerous to mention—there were certain people who to do the marvellous and injure our holy religion, went about saying that the true canon was long since dead, and that for more than fifty years the devil had taken possession of the old priest's body. In fact, it seemed to his former customers that the devil could only by his great heat have furnished these hermetic distillations, that they remembered to have obtained on demand from this good confessor, who always had le diable au corps. But as this devil had been undoubtedly cooked and ruined by them, and that for a queen of twenty years he would not have moved, well−disposed people and those not wanting in sense, or the citizens who argued about everything, people who found lice in bald heads, demanded why the devil rested under the form of a canon, went to the Church of Notre Dame at the hours when the canons usually go, and ventured so far as to sniff the perfume of the incense, taste the holy water, and a thousand other things. To these heretical propositions some said that doubtless the devil wished to convert himself, and others that he remained in the shape of the canon to mock at the three nephews and heirs of this said brave confessor and make them wait until the day of their own death for the ample succession of this uncle, to whom they paid great attention every day, going to look if the good man had his eyes open, and in fact found him always with his eye clear, bright, and piercing as the eye of a basilisk, which pleased them greatly, since they loved their uncle very much—in words. On this subject an old woman related that for certain the canon was the devil, because his two nephews, the procureur and the captain, conducting their uncle at night, without a lamp, or lantern, returning from a supper at the penitentiary's, had caused him by accident to tumble over a heap of stones gathered together to raise the statue of St. Christopher. At first the old man had struck fire in falling, but was, amid the cries of his dear nephews and by the light of the torches they came to seek at her house found standing

up as straight as a skittle and as gay as a weaving whirl, exclaiming that the good wine of the penitentiary had given him the courage to sustain this shock and that his bones were exceedingly hard and had sustained rude assaults. The good nephews believing him dead, were much astonished, and perceived that the day that was to dispatch their uncle was a long way off, seeing that at the business stones were of no use. So that they did not falsely call him their good uncle, seeing that he was of good quality. Certain scandalmongers said that the canon found so many stones in his path that he stayed at home not to be ill with the stone, and the fear of worse was the cause of his seclusion.

Of all these sayings and rumours, it remains that the old canon, devil or not, kept his house, and refused to die, and had three heirs with whom he lived as with his sciaticas, lumbagos, and other appendage of human life. Of the said three heirs, one was the wickedest soldier ever born of a woman, and he must have considerably hurt her in breaking his egg, since he was born with teeth and bristles. So that he ate, two−fold, for the present and the future, keeping wenches whose cost he paid; inheriting from his uncle the continuance, strength, and good use of that which is often of service. In great battles, he endeavoured always to give blows without receiving them, which is, and always will be, the only problem to solve in war, but he never spared himself there, and, in fact, as he had no other virtue except his bravery, he was captain of a company of lancers, and much esteemed by the Duke of Burgoyne, who never troubled what his soldiers did elsewhere. This nephew of the devil was named Captain Cochegrue; and his creditors, the blockheads, citizens, and others, whose pockets he slit, called him the Mau−cinge, since he was as mischievous as strong; but he had moreover his back spoilt by the natural infirmity of a hump, and it would have been unwise to attempt to mount thereon to get a good view, for he would incontestably have run you through.

The second had studied the laws, and through the favour of his uncle had become a procureur, and practised at the palace, where he did the business of the ladies, whom formerly the canon had the best confessed. This one was called Pille−grue, to banter him upon his real name, which was Cochegrue, like that of his brother the captain. Pille−grue had a lean body, seemed to throw off very cold water, was pale of face, and possessed a physiognomy like a polecat.

This notwithstanding, he was worth many a penny more than the captain, and had for his uncle a little affection, but since about two years his heart had cracked a little, and drop by drop his gratitude had run out, in such a way that from time to time, when the air was damp, he liked to put his feet into his uncle's hose, and press in advance the juice of this good inheritance. He and his brother, the soldier found their share very small, since loyally, in law, in fact, in justice, in nature, and in reality, it was necessary to give the third part of everything to a poor cousin, son of another sister of the canon, the which heir, but little loved by the good man, remained in the country, where he was a shepherd, near Nanterre.

The guardian of beasts, an ordinary peasant, came to town by the advice of his two cousins, who placed him in their uncle's house, in the hope that, as much by his silly tricks and his clumsiness, his want of brain, and his ignorance, he would be displeasing to the canon, who would kick him out of his will. Now this poor Chiquon, as the shepherd was named, had lived about a month alone with his old uncle, and finding more profit or more amusement in minding an abbot than looking after sheep, made himself the canon's dog, his servant, the staff of his old age, saying, “God keep you,” when he passed wind, “God save you,” when he sneezed, and “God guard you,” when he belched; going to see if it rained, where the cat was, remaining silent, listening, speaking, receiving the coughs of the old man in his face, admiring him as the finest canon there ever was in the world, all heartily and in good faith, knowing that he was licking him after the manner of animals who clean their young ones; and the uncle, who stood in no need of learning which side the bread was buttered, repulsed poor Chiquon, making him turn about like a die, always calling him Chiquon, and always saying to his other nephews that this Chiquon was helping to kill him, such a numskull was he. Thereupon, hearing this, Chiquon determined to do well by his uncle, and puzzled his understanding to appear better; but as he had a behind shaped like a pair of pumpkins, was broad shouldered, large limbed, and far from sharp, he more resembled old Silenus than a gentle Zephyr. In fact, the poor shepherd, a simple man, could not reform himself, so he remained big and fat, awaiting his inheritance to make himself thin.

One evening the canon began discoursing concerning the the devil and the grave agonies, penances, tortures, etc., which God will get warm for the accursed, and the good Chiquon hearing it, began to open his eyes as wide as the door of an oven, at the statement, without believing a word of it.

“What,” said the canon, “are you not a Christian?”

“In that, yes,” answered Chiquon.

“Well, there is a paradise for the good; is it not necessary to have a hell for the wicked?”

“Yes, Mr. Canon; but the devil's of no use. If you had here a wicked man who turned everything upside down; would you not kick him out of doors?”

“Yes, Chiquon.”

“Oh, well, mine uncle; God would be very stupid to leave in the this world, which he has so curiously constructed, an abominable devil whose special business it is to spoil everything for him. Pish! I recognise no devil if there be a good God; you may depend upon that. I should very much like to see the devil. Ha, ha! I am not afraid of his claws!”

“And if I were of your opinion I should have no care of my very youthful years in which I held confessions at least ten times a day.”

“Confess again, Mr. Canon. I assure you that will be a precious merit on high.”

“There, there! Do you mean it?”

“Yes, Mr. Canon.”

“Thou dost not tremble, Chiquon, to deny the devil?”

“I trouble no more about it than a sheaf of corn.”

“The doctrine will bring misfortune upon you.”

“By no means. God will defend me from the devil because I believe him more learned and less stupid than the savans make him out.”

Thereupon the two other nephews entered, and perceiving from the voice of the canon that he did not dislike Chiquon very much, and that the jeremiads which he had made concerning him were simple tricks to disguise the affection which he bore him, looked at each other in great astonishment.

Then, seeing their uncle laughing, they said to him—

“If you will make a will, to whom will you leave the house?

“To Chiquon.”

“And the quit rent of the Rue St. Denys?”

“To Chiquon.”

“And the fief of Ville Parisis?”

“To Chiquon.”

“But,” said the captain, with his big voice, “everything then will be Chiquon's.”

“No,” replied the canon, smiling, “because I shall have made my will in proper form, the inheritance will be to the sharpest of you three; I am so near to the future, that I can therein see clearly your destinies.”

And the wily canon cast upon Chiquon a glance full of malice, like a decoy bird would have thrown upon a little one to draw him into her net. The fire of his flaming eye enlightened the shepherd, who from that moment had his understanding and his ears all unfogged, and his brain open, like that of a maiden the day after her marriage. The procureur and the captain, taking these sayings for gospel prophecies, made their bow and went out from the house, quite perplexed at the absurd designs of the canon.

“What do you think of Chiquon?” said Pille−grue to Mau−cinge.

“I think, I think,” said the soldier, growling, “that I think of hiding myself in the Rue d'Hierusalem, to put his head below his feet; he can pick it up again if he likes.”

“Oh, oh!” said the procureur, “you have a way of wounding that is easily recognised, and people would say 'It's Cochegrue.' As for me, I thought to invite him to dinner, after which, we would play at putting ourselves in a sack in order to see, as they do at Court, who could walk best thus attired. Then having sewn him up, we could throw him into the Seine, at the same time begging him to swim.”

“This must be well matured,” replied the soldier.

“Oh! it's quite ripe,” said the advocate. “The cousin gone to the devil, the heritage would then be between us two.”

“I'm quite agreeable,” said the fighter, “but we must stick as close together as the two legs of the same body, for if you are fine as silk, I as strong as steel, and daggers are always as good as traps— you hear that, my good brother.”

“Yes,” said the advocate, “the cause is heard—now shall it be the thread or the iron?”

“Eh? ventre de Dieu! is it then a king that we are going to settle? For a simple numskull of a shepherd are so many words necessary? Come! 20,000 francs out of the Heritage to the one of us who shall first cut him off: I'll say to him in good faith, 'Pick up your head.'“

“And I, 'Swim my friend,'“ cried the advocate, laughing like the gap of a pourpoint.

And then they went to supper, the captain to his wench, and the advocate to the house of a jeweller's wife, of whom he was the lover.

Who was astonished? Chiquon! The poor shepherd heard the planning of his death, although the two cousins had walked in the parvis, and talked to each other as every one speaks at church when praying to God. So that Chiquon was much coupled to know if the words had come up or if his ears had gone down.

“Do you hear, Mister Canon?”

“Yes,” said he, “I hear the wood crackling in the fire.”

“Ho, ho!” replied Chiquon, “if I don't believe in the devil, I believe in St. Michael, my guardian angel; I go there where he calls me.”

“Go, my child,” said the canon, “and take care not to wet yourself, nor to get your head knocked off, for I think I hear more rain, and the beggars in the street are not always the most dangerous beggars.”

At these words Chiquon was much astonished, and stared at the canon; found his manner gay, his eye sharp, and his feet crooked; but as he had to arrange matters concerning the death which menaced him, he thought to himself that he would always have leisure to admire the canon, or to cut his nails, and he trotted off quickly through the town, as a little woman trots towards her pleasure.

His two cousins having no presumption of the divinatory science, of which shepherds have had many passing attacks, had often talked before him of their secret goings on, counting him as nothing.

Now one evening, to amuse the canon, Pille−grue had recounted to him how had fallen in love with him a wife of a jeweller on whose head he had adjusted certain carved, burnished, sculptured, historical horns, fit for the brow of a prince. The good lady was to hear him, a right merry wench, quick at opportunities, giving an embrace while her husband was mounting the stairs, devouring the commodity as if she was swallowing a a strawberry, only thinking of love−making, always trifling and frisky, gay as an honest woman who lacks nothing, contenting her husband, who cherished her so much as he loved his own gullet; subtle as a perfume, so much so, that for five years she managed so well with his household affairs, and her own love affairs, that she had the reputation of a prudent woman, the confidence of her husband, the keys of the house, the purse, and all.

“And when do you play upon this gentle flute?” said the canon.

“Every evening and sometimes I stay all the night.”

“But how?” said the canon, astonished.

“This is how. There is a room close to, a chest into which I get. When the good husband returns from his friend the draper's, where he goes to supper every evening, because often he helps the draper's wife in her work, my mistress pleads a slight illness, lets him go to bed alone, and comes to doctor her malady in the room where the chest is. On the morrow, when my jeweller is at his forge, I depart, and as the house has one exit on to the bridge, and another into the street, I always come to the door when the husband is not, on the pretext of speaking to him of his suits, which commence joyfully and heartily, and I never let them come to an end. It is an income from cuckoldom, seeing that in the minor expenses and loyal costs of the proceedings, he spends as much as on the horses in his stable. He loves me well, as all good cuckolds should love the man who aids them, to plant, cultivate, water and dig the natural garden of Venus, and he does nothing without me.”

Now these practices came back again to the memory of the shepherd, who was illuminated by the light issuing from his danger, and counselled by the intelligence of those measures of self−preservation, of which every animal possesses a sufficient dose to go to the end of his ball of life. So Chiquon gained with hasty feet the Rue de la Calandre, where the jeweller should be supping with his companion, and after having knocked at the door, replied to question put to him through the little grill, that he was a messenger on state secrets, and was admitted to the draper's house. Now coming straight to the fact, he made the happy jeweller get up from his table, led him to a corner, and said to him: “If one of your neighbours had planted a horn on your forehead and he was delivered to you, bound hand and foot, would you throw him into the river?”

“Rather,” said the jeweller, “but if you are mocking me I'll give you a good drubbing.”

“There, there!” replied Chiquon, “I am one of your friends and come to warn you that as many times as you have conversed with the draper's wife here, as often has your own wife been served the same way by the advocate Pille−grue, and if you will come back to your forge, you will find a good fire there. On your arrival, he who looks after your you−know−what, to keep it in good order, gets into the big clothes chest. Now make a pretence that I have bought the said chest of you, and I will be upon the bridge with a cart, waiting your orders.”

The said jeweller took his cloak and his hat, and parted company with his crony without saying a word, and ran to his hole like a poisoned rat. He arrives and knocks, the door is opened, he runs hastily up the stairs, finds two covers laid, sees his wife coming out of the chamber of love, and then says to her, “My dear, here are two covers laid.”

“Well, my darling are we not two?”

“No,” said he, “we are three.”

“Is your friend coming?” said she, looking towards the stairs with perfect innocence.

“No, I speak of the friend who is in the chest.”

“What chest?” said she. “Are you in your sound senses? Where do you see a chest? Is the usual to put friends in chests? Am I a woman to keep chests full of friends? How long have friends been kept in chests? Are you come home mad to mix up your friends with your chests? I know no other friend then Master Cornille the draper, and no other chest than the one with our clothes in.”

“Oh!,” said the jeweller, “my good woman, there is a bad young man, who has come to warn me that you allow yourself to be embraced by our advocate, and that he is in the chest.”

“I!” said she, “I would not put up with his knavery, he does everything the wrong way.”

“There, there, my dear,” replied the jeweller, “I know you to be a good woman, and won't have a squabble with you about this paltry chest. The giver of the warning is a box−maker, to whom I am about to sell this cursed chest that I wish never again to see in my house, and for this one he will sell me two pretty little ones, in which there will not be space enough even for a child; thus the scandal and the babble of those envious of your virtue will be extinguished for want of nourishment.”

“You give me great pleasure,” said she; “I don't attach any value to my chest, and by chance there is nothing in it. Our linen is at the wash. It will be easy to have the mischievous chest taken away tomorrow morning. Will you sup?”

“Not at all,” said he, “I shall sup with a better appetite without the chest.”

“I see,” said she, “that you won't easily get the chest out of your head.”

“Halloa, there!” said the jeweller to his smiths and apprentices; “come down!”

In the twinkling of an eye his people were before him. Then he, their master, having briefly ordered the handling of the said chest, this piece of furniture dedicated to love was tumbled across the room, but in passing the advocate, finding his feet in the air to the which he was not accustomed, tumbled over a little.

“Go on,” said the wife, “go on, it's the lid shaking.”

“No, my dear, it's the bolt.”

And without any other opposition the chest slid gently down the stairs.

“Ho there, carrier!” said the jeweller, and Chiquon came whistling his mules, and the good apprentices lifted the litigious chest into the cart.

“Hi, hi!” said the advocate.

“Master, the chest is speaking,” said an apprentice.

“In what language?” said the jeweller, giving him a good kick between two features that luckily were not made of glass. The apprentice tumbled over on to a stair in a way that induced him to discontinue his studies in the language of chests. The shepherd, accompanied by the good jeweller, carried all the baggage to the water−side without listening to the high eloquence of the speaking wood, and having tied several stones to it, the jeweller threw it into the Seine.

“Swim, my friend,” cried the shepherd, in a voice sufficiently jeering at the moment when the chest turned over, giving a pretty little plunge like a duck.

Then Chiqoun continued to proceed along the quay, as far as the Rue−du−port, St Laudry, near the cloisters of Notre Dame. There he noticed a house, recognised the door, and knocked loudly.

“Open,” said he, “open by order of the king.”

Hearing this an old man who was no other than the famous Lombard, Versoris, ran to the door.

“What is it?” said he.

“I am sent by the provost to warn you to keep good watch tonight,” replied Chiquon, “as for his own part he will keep his archers ready. The hunchback who has robbed you has come back again. Keep under arms, for he is quite capable of easing you of the rest.”

Having said this, the good shepherd took to his heels and ran to the Rue des Marmouzets, to the house where Captain Cochegrue was feasting with La Pasquerette, the prettiest of town−girls, and the most charming in perversity that ever was; according to all the gay ladies, her glance was sharp and piercing as the stab of a dagger. Her appearance was so tickling to the sight, that it would have put all Paradise to rout. Besides which she was as bold as a woman who has no other virtue than her insolence. Poor Chiquon was greatly embarrassed while going to the quarter of the Marmouzets. He was greatly afraid that he would be unable to find the house of La Pasquerette, or find the two pigeons gone to roost, but a good angel arranged there speedily to his satisfaction. This is how. On entering the Rue des Marmouzets he saw several lights at the windows and night−capped heads thrust out, and good wenches, gay girls, housewives, husbands, and young ladies, all of them are just out of bed, looking at each other as if a robber were being led to execution by torchlight.

“What's the matter?” said the shepherd to a citizen who in great haste had rushed to the door with a chamber utensil in his hand.

“Oh! it's nothing,” replied the good man. “We thought it was the Armagnacs descending upon the town, but it's only Mau−cinge beating La Pasquerette.”

“Where?” asked the shepherd.

“Below there, at that fine house where the pillars have the mouths of flying frogs delicately carved upon them. Do you hear the varlets and the serving maids?”

And in fact there was nothing but cries of “Murder! Help! Come some one!” and in the house blows raining down and the Mau−cinge said with his gruff voice:

“Death to the wench! Ah, you sing out now, do you? Ah, you want your money now, do you? Take that—”

And La Pasquerette was groaning, “Oh! oh! I die! Help! Help! Oh! oh!” Then came the blow of a sword and the heavy fall of a light body of the fair girl sounded, and was followed by a great silence, after which the lights were put out, servants, waiting women, roysterers, and others went in again, and the shepherd who had come opportunely mounted the stairs in company with them, but on beholding in the room above broken glasses, slit carpets, and the cloth on the floor with the dishes, everyone remained at a distance.

The shepherd, bold as a man with but one end in view, opened the door of the handsome chamber where slept La Pasquerette, and found her quite exhausted, her hair dishevelled, and her neck twisted, lying upon a bloody carpet, and Mau−cinge frightened, with his tone considerably lower, and not knowing upon what note to sing the remainder of his anthem.

“Come, my little Pasquerette, don't pretend to be dead. Come, let me put you tidy. Ah! little minx, dead or alive, you look so pretty in your blood I'm going to kiss you.” Having said which the cunning soldier took her and threw her upon the bed, but she fell there all of a heap, and stiff as the body of a man that had been hanged. Seeing which her companion found it was time for his hump to retire from the game; however, the artful fellow before slinking away said, “Poor Pasquerette, how could I murder so good of girl, and one I loved so much? But, yes, I have killed her, the thing is clear, for in her life never did her sweet breast hang down like that. Good God, one would say it was a crown at the bottom of a wallet. Thereupon Pasquerette opened her eyes and then bent her head slightly to look at her flesh, which was white and firm, and she brought herself to life by a box on the ears, administered to the captain.

“That will teach you to beware of the dead,” said she, smiling.

“And why did he kill you, my cousin?” asked the shepherd.

“Why? Tomorrow the bailiffs seize everything that's here, and he who has no more money than virtue, reproached me because I wished to be agreeable to a handsome gentlemen, who would save me from the hands of justice.

“Pasquerette, I'll break every bone in your skin.”

“There, there!” said Chiquon, whom the Mau−cinge had just recognised, “is that all? Oh, well, my good friend, I bring you a large sum.”

“Where from?” asked the captain, astonished.

“Come here, and let me whisper in your ear—if 30,000 crowns were walking about at night under the shadow of a pear−tree, would you not stoop down to pluck them, to prevent them spoiling?”

“Chiquon, I'll kill you like a dog if you are making game of me, or I will kiss you there where you like it, if you will put me opposite 30,000 crowns, even when it shall be necessary to kill three citizens at the corner of the Quay.”

“You will not even kill one. This is how the matter stands. I have for a sweetheart in all loyalty, the servant of the Lombard who is in the city near the house of our good uncle. Now I have just learned on sound information that this dear man has departed this morning into the country after having hidden under a pear−tree in his garden a good bushel of gold, believing himself to be seen only by the angels. But the girl who had by chance a bad toothache, and was taking the air at her garret window, spied the old crookshanks, without wishing to do so, and chattered of it to me in fondness. If you will swear to give me a good share I will lend you my shoulders in order that you may climb on to the top of the wall and from there throw yourself into the pear−tree, which is against the wall. There, now do you say that I am a blockhead, an animal?”

“No, you are a right loyal cousin, an honest man, and if you have ever to put an enemy out off the way, I am there, ready to kill even one of my own friends for you. I am no longer your cousin, but your brother. Ho there! sweetheart,” cried Mau−cinge to La Pasquerette, “put the tables straight, wipe up your blood, it belongs to me, and I'll pay you for it by giving you a hundred times as much of mine as I have taken of thine. Make the best of it, shake the black dog, off your back, adjust your petticoats, laugh, I wish it, look to the stew, and let us recommence our evening prayer where we left it off. Tomorrow I'll make thee braver than a queen. This is my cousin whom I wish to entertain, even when to do so it were necessary to turn the house out of windows. We shall get back everything tomorrow in the cellars. Come, fall to!”

Thus, and in less time than it takes a priest to say his Dominus vobiscum, the whole rookery passed from tears to laughter as it had previously from laughter to tears. It is only in these houses of ill−fame that love is made with the blow of a dagger, and where tempests of joy rage between four walls. But these are things ladies of the high−neck dress do not understand.

The said captain Cochegrue was gay as a hundred schoolboys at the breaking up of class, and made his good cousin drink deeply, who spilled everything country fashion, and pretended to be drunk, spluttering out a hundred stupidities, as, that “tomorrow he would buy Paris, would lend a hundred thousand crowns to the king, that he would be able to roll in gold;” in fact, talked so much nonsense that the captain, fearing some compromising avowal and thinking his brain quite muddled enough, led him outside with the good intention, instead of sharing with him, of ripping Chiquon open to see if he had not a sponge in his stomach, because he had just soaked in a big quart of the good wine of Suresne. They went along, disputing about a thousand theological subjects which got very much mixed up, and finished by rolling quietly up against the garden where were the crowns of the Lombard. Then Cochegrue, making a ladder of Chiquon's broad shoulders, jumped on to the pear−tree like a man expert in attacks upon towns, but Versoris, who was watching him, made a blow at his neck, and repeated it so vigorously that with three blows fell the upper portion of the said Cochegrue, but not until he had heard the clear voice of the shepherd, who cried to him, “Pick up your head, my friend.” Thereupon the generous Chiquon, in whom virtue received its recompense, thought it would be wise to return to the house of the good canon, whose heritage was by the grace of God considerably simplified. Thus he gained the Rue St. Pierre−Aux−Boeufs with all speed, and soon slept like a new−born baby, no longer knowing the meaning of the word “cousin−german.” Now, on the morrow he rose according to the habit of shepherds, with the sun, and came into his uncle's room to inquire if he spat white, if he coughed, if he had slept well; but the old servant told him that the canon, hearing the bells of St Maurice, the first patron of Notre Dame, ring for matins, he had gone out of reverence to the cathedral, where all the Chapter were to breakfast with the Bishop of Paris; upon which Chiquon replied: “Is his reverence the canon out of his senses thus to disport himself, to catch a cold, to get rheumatism? Does he wish to die? I'll light a big fire to warm him when he returns;” and the good shepherd ran into the room where the canon generally sat, and to his great astonishment beheld him seated in his chair.

“Ah, ah! What did she mean, that fool of a Bruyette? I knew you were too well advised to be shivering at this hour in your stall.”

The canon said not a word. The shepherd who was like all thinkers, a man of hidden sense, was quite aware

that sometimes old men have strange crotchets, converse with the essence of occult things, and mumble to themselves discourses concerning matters not under consideration; so that, from reverence and great respect for the secret meditations of the canon, he went and sat down at a distance, and waited the termination of these dreams; noticing, silently the length of the good man's nails, which looked like cobbler's awls, and looking attentively at the feet of his uncle, he was astonished to see the flesh of his legs so crimson, that it reddened his breeches and seemed all on fire through his hose.

He is dead, thought Chiquon. At this moment the door of the room opened, and he still saw the canon, who, his nose frozen, came back from church.

“Ho, ho!” said Chiquon, “my dear Uncle, are you out of your senses? Kindly take notice that you ought not to be at the door, because you are already seated in your chair in the chimney corner, and that it is impossible for there to be two canons like you in the world.”

“Ah! Chiquon, there was a time when I could have wished to be in two places at once, but such is not the fate of a man, he would be too happy. Are you getting dim−sighted? I am alone here.”

Then Chiquon turned his head towards the chair, and found it empty; and much astonished, as you will easily believe, he approached it, and found on the seat a little pat of cinders, from which ascended a strong odour of sulphur.

“Ah!” said he merrily, “I perceive that the devil has behaved well towards me—I will pray God for him.”

And thereupon he related naively to the canon how the devil had amused himself by playing at providence, and had loyally aided him to get rid of his wicked cousins, the which the canon admired much, and thought very good, seeing that he had plenty of good sense left, and often had observed things which were to the devil's advantage. So the good old priest remarked that 'as much good was always met with in evil as evil in good, and that therefore one should not trouble too much after the other world, the which was a grave heresy, which many councils have put right'.

And this was how the Chiquons became rich, and were able in these times, by the fortunes of their ancestors, to help to build the bridge of St. Michael, where the devil cuts a very good figure under the angel, in memory of this adventure now consigned to these veracious histories.

THE MERRY JESTS OF KING LOUIS THE ELEVENTH

King Louis The Eleventh was a merry fellow, loving a good joke, and— the interests of his position as king, and those of the church on one side—he lived jovially, giving chase to soiled doves as often as to hares, and other royal game. Therefore, the sorry scribblers who have made him out a hypocrite, showed plainly that they knew him not, since he was a good friend, good at repartee, and a jollier fellow than any of them.

It was he who said when he was in a merry mood, that four things are excellent and opportune in life—to keep warm, to drink cool, to stand up hard, and to swallow soft. Certain persons have accused him of taking up with a dirty trollops; this is a notorious falsehood, since all his mistresses, of whom one was legitimised, came of good houses and had notable establishments. He did not go in for waste and extravagance, always put his hand upon the solid, and because certain devourers of the people found no crumbs at his table, they have all maligned him. But the real collector of facts know that the said king was a capital fellow in private life, and even very agreeable; and before cutting off the heads of his friends, or punishing them—for he did not spare them—it was necessary that they should have greatly offended him, and his vengeance was always justice; I have only seen in our friend Verville that this worthy sovereign ever made a mistake; but one does not make a habit, and even for this his boon companion Tristan was more to blame than he, the king. This is the circumstance related by the said Verville, and I suspect he was cracking a joke. I reproduce it because certain people are not familiar with the exquisite work of my perfect compatriot. I abridge it and only give the substance, the details being more ample, of which facts the savans are not ignorant.

Louis XI. had given the Abbey of Turpenay (mentioned in 'Imperia') to a gentleman who, enjoying the revenue, had called himself Monsieur de Turpenay. It happened that the king being at Plessis−les−Tours, the real abbot, who was a monk, came and presented himself before the king, and presented also a petition, remonstrating with him that, canonically and a monastically, he was entitled to the abbey and that the usurping gentleman wronged of his right, and therefore he called upon his majesty to have justice done to him. Nodding his peruke, the king promised to render him contented. This monk, importunate as are all hooded animals, came often at the end of the king's meals, who, bored with the holy water of the convent, called friend Tristan and said to him: “Old fellow, there is here a Turpenay who angers me, rid the world of him for me.” Tristan, taking a frock for a monk, or a monk for a frock, came to this gentleman, whom all the court called Monsieur de Turpenay, and having accosted him managed to lead him to one side, and taking him by the button−hole gave him to understand that the king desired he should die. He tried to resist, supplicating and supplicating to escape, but in no way could he obtain a hearing. He was delicately strangled between the head and shoulders, so that he expired; and, three hours afterwards, Tristan told the king that he was discharged. It happened five days afterwards, which is the space in which souls come back again, that the monk came into the room where the king was, and when he saw him he was much astonished. Tristan was present: the king called him, and whispered into his ear—

“You have not done that which I told you to.”

“Saving your Grace I have done it. Turpenay is dead.”

“Eh? I meant this monk.”

“I understood the gentleman!”

“What, is it done then?”

“Yes, sire,”

“Very well then”—turning towards the monk—“come here, monk.” The monk approached. The king said to him, “Kneel down!” The poor monk began to shiver in his shoes. But the king said to him, “Thank God that he has not willed that you should be killed as I had ordered. He who took your estates has been instead. God has done you justice. Go and pray God for me, and don't stir out of your convent.”

The proves the good−heartedness of Louis XI. He might very well have hanged the monk, the cause of the error. As for the said gentleman, he died in the king's service.

In the early days of his sojourn at Plessis−les−Tours king Louis, not wishing to hold his drinking−bouts and give vent to his rakish propensities in his chateau, out of respect to her Majesty (a kingly delicacy which his successors have not possessed) became enamoured of a lady named Nicole Beaupertuys, who was, to tell the

truth, wife of a citizen of the town. The husband he sent into Ponent, and put the said Nicole in a house near Chardonneret, in that part which is the Rue Quincangrogne, because it was a lonely place, far from other habitations. The husband and the wife were thus both in his service, and he had by La Beaupertuys a daughter, who died a nun. This Nicole had a tongue as sharp as a popinjay's, was of stately proportions, furnished with large beautiful cushions of nature, firm to the touch, white as the wings of an angel, and known for the rest to be fertile in peripatetic ways, which brought it to pass that never with her was the same thing encountered twice in love, so deeply had she studied the sweet solutions of the science, the manners of accommodating the olives of Poissy, the expansions of the nerves, and hidden doctrines of the breviary, the which much delighted the king. She was as gay as a lark, always laughing and singing, and never made anyone miserable, which is the characteristic of women of this open and free nature, who have always an occupation—an equivocal one if you like. The king often went with the hail−fellows his friends to the lady's house, and in order not to be seen always went at night−time, and without his suite. But being always distrustful, and fearing some snare, he gave to Nicole all the most savage dogs he had in his kennels, beggars that would eat a man without saying “By your leave,” the which royal dogs knew only Nicole and the king. When the Sire came Nicole let them loose in the garden, and the door of the house being sufficiently barred and closely shut, the king put the keys in his pocket, and in perfect security gave himself up, with his satellites, to every kind of pleasure, fearing no betrayal, jumping about at will, playing tricks, and getting up good games. Upon these occasions friend Tristan watched the neighbourhood, and anyone who had taken a walk on the Mall of Chardonneret would be rather quickly placed in a position in which it would have been easy to give the passers−by a benediction with his feet, unless he had the king's pass, since often would Louis send out in search of lasses for his friends, or people to entertain him with the amusements suggested by Nicole or the guests. People of Tours were there for these little amusements, to whom he gently recommended silence, so that no one knew of these pastimes until after his death. The farce of “Baisez mon cul" was, it is said, invented by the said Sire. I will relate it, although it is not the subject of this tale, because it shows the natural comicality and humour of this merry monarch. They were at Tours three well known misers: the first was Master Cornelius, who is sufficiently well known; the second was called Peccard, and sold the gilt−work, coloured papers, and jewels used in churches; the third was hight Marchandeau, and was a very wealthy vine−grower. These two men of Touraine were the founders of good families, notwithstanding their sordidness. One evening that the king was with Beaupertuys, in a good humour, having drunk heartily, joked heartily, and offered early in the evening his prayer in Madame's oratory, he said to Le Daim his crony, to the Cardinal, La Balue, and to old Dunois, who were still soaking, “Let us have a good laugh! I think it will be a good joke to see misers before a bag of gold without being able to touch it. Hi, there!”

Hearing which, appeared one of his varlets.

“Go,” said he, “seek my treasurer, and let him bring hither six thousand gold crowns—and at once! And you will go and seize the bodies of my friend Cornelius, of the jeweller of the Rue de Cygnes, and of old Marchandeau, and bring them here, by order of the king.”

Then he began to drink again, and to judiciously wrangle as to which was the better, a woman with a gamy odour or a woman who soaped herself well all over; a thin one or a stout one; and as the company comprised the flower of wisdom it was decided that the best was the one a man had all to himself like a plate of warm mussels, at that precise moment when God sent him a good idea to communicate to her. The cardinal asked which was the most precious thing to a lady; the first or the last kiss? To which La Beaupertuys replied: “that it was the last, seeing that she knew then what she was losing, while at the first she did not know what she would gain.” During these sayings, and others which have most unfortunately been lost, came the six thousand gold crowns, which were worth all three hundred thousand francs of to−day, so much do we go on decreasing in value every day. The king ordered the crowns to be arranged upon a table, and well lighted up, so that they shone like the eyes of the company which lit up involuntarily, and made them laugh in spite of themselves. They did not wait long for the three misers, whom the varlet led in, pale and panting, except Cornelius, who knew the king's strange freaks.

“Now then, my friends,” said Louis to them, “have a good look at the crowns on the table.”

And the three townsmen nibbled at them with their eyes. You may reckon that the diamond of La Beaupertuys sparkled less than their little minnow eyes.

“These are yours,” added the king.

Thereupon they ceased to admire the crowns to look at each other; and the guests knew well that old knaves

are more expert in grimaces than any others, because of their physiognomies becoming tolerably curious, like those of cats lapping up milk, or girls titillated with marriage.

“There,” said the king, “all that shall be his who shall say three times to the two others, 'Baisez mon cul', thrusting his hand into the gold; but if he be not as serious as a fly who had violated his lady−love, if he smile while repeating the jest, he will pay ten crowns to Madame. Nevertheless he can essay three times.”

“That will soon be earned,” said Cornelius, who, being a Dutchman, had his lips as often compressed and serious as Madame's mouth was often open and laughing. Then he bravely put his hands on the crowns to see if they were good, and clutched them bravely, but as he looked at the others to say civilly to them, “Baisez mon cul,” the two misers, distrustful of his Dutch gravity, replied, “Certainly, sir,” as if he had sneezed. The which caused all the company to laugh, and even Cornelius himself. When the vine−grower went to take the crowns he felt such a commotion in his cheeks that his old scummer face let little laughs exude from its pores like smoke pouring out of a chimney, and he could say nothing. Then it was the turn of the jeweller, who was a little bit of a bantering fellow, and whose lips were as tightly squeezed as the neck of a hanged man. He seized a handful of the crowns, looked at the others, even the king, and said, with a jeering air, “Baisez mon cul.”

“Is it dirty?” asked the vine−dresser.

“Look and see,” replied the jeweller, gravely.

Thereupon the king began to tremble for these crowns, since the said Peccard began again, without laughing, and for the third time was about to utter the sacramental word, when La Beaupertuys made a sign of consent to his modest request, which caused him to lose his countenance, and his mouth broke up into dimples.

“How did you do it?” asked Dunois, “to keep a grave face before six thousand crowns?”

“Oh, my lord, I thought first of one of my cases which is tried tomorrow, and secondly, of my wife who is a sorry plague.”

The desire to gain this good round sum made them try again, and the king amused himself for about an hour at the expression of these faces, the preparations, jokes, grimaces, and other monkey's paternosters that they performed; but they were bailing their boats with a sieve, and for men who preferred closing their fists to opening them it was a bitter sorrow to have to count out, each one, a hundred crown to Madame.

When they were gone, and Nicole said boldly to the king, “Sire will you let me try?”

“Holy Virgin!” replied Louis; “no! I can kiss you for less money.”

That was said like a thrifty man, which indeed he always was.

One evening the fat Cardinal La Balue carried on gallantly with words and actions, a little farther than the canons of the Church permitted him, with this Beaupertuys, who luckily for herself, was a clever hussy, not to be asked with impunity how many holes there were in her mother's chemise.

“Look you here, Sir Cardinal!” said she; “the thing which the king likes is not to receive the holy oils.”

Then came Oliver le Daim, whom she would not listen to either, and to whose nonsense she replied, that she would ask the king if he wished her to be shaved.

Now as the said shaver did not supplicate her to keep his proposals secret, she suspected that these little plots were ruses practised by the king, whose suspicions had perhaps been aroused by her friends. Now, for being able to revenge herself upon Louis, she at least determined to pay out the said lords, to make fools of them, and amuse the king with the tricks she would play upon them. One evening that they had come to supper, she had a lady of the city with her, who wished to speak with the king. This lady was a lady of position, who wished asked the king pardon for her husband, the which, in consequence of this adventure, she obtained. Nicole Beaupertuys having led the king aside for a moment into an antechamber, told him to make their guests drink hard and eat to repletion; that he was to make merry and joke with them; but when the cloth was removed, he was to pick quarrels with them about trifles, dispute their words, and be sharp with them; and that she would then divert him by turning them inside out before him. But above all things, he was to be friendly to the said lady, and it was to appear as genuine, as if she enjoyed the perfume of his favour, because she had gallantly lent herself to this good joke.

“Well, gentlemen,” said the king, re−entering the room, “let us fall to; we have had a good day's sport.”

And the surgeon, the cardinal, a fat bishop, the captain of the Scotch Guard, a parliamentary envoy, and a judge loved of the king, followed the two ladies into the room where one rubs the rust off one's jaw bones. And there they lined the mold of their doublets. What is that? It is to pave the stomach, to practice the chemistry of nature, to register the various dishes, to regale your tripes, to dig your grave with your teeth, play with the sword

of Cain, to inter sauces, to support a cuckold. But more philosophically it is to make ordure with one's teeth. Now, do you understand? How many words does it require to burst open the lid of your understanding?

The king did not fail to distill into his guests this splendid and first−class supper. He stuffed them with green peas, returning to the hotch−potch, praising the plums, commending the fish, saying to one, “Why do you not eat?” to another, “Drink to Madame”; to all of them, “Gentlemen, taste these lobsters; put this bottle to death! You do not know the flavour of this forcemeat. And these lampreys—ah! what do you say to them? And by the Lord! The finest barbel ever drawn from the Loire! Just stick your teeth into this pastry. This game is my own hunting; he who takes it not offends me.” And again, “Drink, the king's eyes are the other way. Just give your opinion of these preserves, they are Madame's own. Have some of these grapes, they are my own growing. Have some medlars.” And while inducing them to swell out their abdominal protuberances, the good monarch laughed with them, and they joked and disputed, and spat, and blew their noses, and kicked up just as though the king had not been with them. Then so much victuals had been taken on board, so many flagons drained and stews spoiled, that the faces of the guests were the colour of cardinals gowns, and their doublets appeared ready to burst, since they were crammed with meat like Troyes sausages from the top to the bottom of their paunches. Going into the saloon again, they broke into a profuse sweat, began to blow, and to curse their gluttony. The king sat quietly apart; each of them was the more willing to be silent because all their forces were required for the intestinal digestion of the huge platefuls confined in their stomachs, which began to wabble and rumble violently. One said to himself, “I was stupid to eat of that sauce.” Another scolded himself for having indulged in a plate of eels cooked with capers. Another thought to himself, “Oh! oh! The forcemeat is serving me out.” The cardinal, who was the biggest bellied man of the lot, snorted through his nostrils like a frightened horse. It was he who was first compelled to give vent to a loud sounding belch, and then he soon wished himself in Germany, where this is a form of salutation, for the king hearing this gastric language looked at the cardinal with knitted brows.

“What does this mean?” said he, “am I a simple clerk?”

This was heard with terror, because usually the king made much of a good belch well off the stomach. The other guests determined to get rid in another way of the vapours which were dodging about in their pancreatic retorts; and at first they endeavoured to hold them for a little while in the pleats of their mesenteries. It was then that some of them puffed and swelled like tax−gatherers. Beaupertuys took the good king aside and said to him—

“Know now that I have had made by the Church jeweller Peccard, two large dolls, exactly resembling this lady and myself. Now when hard−pressed by the drugs which I have put in their goblets, they desire to mount the throne to which we are now about to pretend to go, they will always find the place taken; by this means you will enjoy their writhings.”

Thus having said, La Beaupertuys disappeared with the lady to go and turn the wheel, after the custom of women, and of which I will tell you the origin in another place. And after an honest lapse of water, Beaupertuys came back alone, leaving it to be believed that she had left the lady at the little laboratory of natural alchemy. Thereupon the king, singling out the cardinal, made him get up, and talked with him seriously of his affairs, holding him by the tassel of his amice. To all that the king said, La Balue replied, “Yes, sir,” to be delivered from this favour, and slip out of the room, since the water was in his cellars, and he was about to lose the key of his back−door. All the guests were in a state of not knowing how to arrest the progress of the fecal matter to which nature has given, even more than to water, the property of finding a certain level. Their substances modified themselves and glided working downward, like those insects who demand to be let out of their cocoons, raging, tormenting, and ungrateful to the higher powers; for nothing is so ignorant, so insolent as those cursed objects, and they are importunate like all things detained to whom one owes liberty. So they slipped at every turn like eels out of a net, and each one had need of great efforts and science not to disgrace himself before the king. Louis took great pleasure in interrogating his guests, and was much amused with the vicissitudes of their physiognomies, on which were reflected the dirty grimaces of their writhings. The counsellor of justice said to Oliver, “I would give my office to be behind a hedge for half a dozen seconds.”

“Oh, there is no enjoyment to equal a good stool; and now I am no longer astonished at sempiternal droppings of a fly,” replied the surgeon.

The cardinal believing that the lady had obtained her receipt from the bank of deposit, left the tassels of his girdle in the king's hand, making a start as if he had forgotten to say his prayers, and made his way towards the door.

“What is the matter with you, Monsieur le Cardinal?” said the king.

“By my halidame, what is the matter with me? It appears that all your affairs are very extensive, sire!”

The cardinal had slipped out, leaving the others astonished at his cunning. He proceeded gloriously towards the lower room, loosening a little the strings of his purse; but when he opened the blessed little door he found the lady at her functions upon the throne, like a pope about to be consecrated. Then restraining his impatience, he descended the stairs to go into the garden. However, on the last steps the barking of the dogs put him in great fear of being bitten in one of his precious hemispheres; and not knowing where to deliver himself of his chemical produce he came back into the room, shivering like a man who has been in the open air! The others seeing the cardinal return, imagined that he had emptied his natural reservoirs, unburdened his ecclesiastical bowels, and believed him happy. Then the surgeon rose quickly, as if to take note of the tapestries and count the rafters, but gained the door before anyone else, and relaxing his sphincter in advance, he hummed a tune on his way to the retreat; arrived there he was compelled, like La Balue, to murmur words of excuse to this student of perpetual motion, shutting the door with as promptitude as he opened it; and he came back burdened with an accumulation which seriously impeded his private channels. And in the same way went to guests one after the other, without being able to unburden themselves of their sauces, as soon again found themselves all in the presence of Louis the Eleventh, as much distressed as before, looking at each other slyly, understanding each other better with their tails than they ever understood with their mouths, for there is never any equivoque in the transactions of the parts of nature, and everything therein is rational and of easy comprehension, seeing that it is a science which we learn at our birth.

“I believe,” said the cardinal to the surgeon, “that lady will go on until to−morrow. What was La Beaupertuys about to ask such a case of diarrhoea here?”

“She's been an hour working at what I could get done in a minute. May the fever seize her” cried Oliver le Daim.

All the courtiers seized with colic were walking up and down to make their importunate matters patient, when the said lady reappeared in the room. You can believe they found her beautiful and graceful, and would willingly have kissed her, there where they so longed to go; and never did they salute the day with more favour than this lady, the liberator of the poor unfortunate bodies. La Balue rose; the others, from honour, esteem, and reverence of the church, gave way to the clergy, and, biding their time, they continued to make grimaces, at which the king laughed to himself with Nicole, who aided him to stop the respiration of these loose−bowelled gentlemen. The good Scotch captain, who more than all the others had eaten of a dish in which the cook had put an aperient powder, became the victim of misplaced confidence. He went ashamed into a corner, hoping that before the king, his mishap might escape detection. At this moment the cardinal returned horribly upset, because he had found La Beaupertuys on the episcopal seat. Now, in his torments, not knowing if she were in the room, he came back and gave vent to a diabolical “Oh!” on beholding her near his master.

“What do you mean?” exclaimed the king, looking at the priest in a way to give him the fever.

“Sire,” said La Balue, insolently, “the affairs of purgatory are in my ministry, and I am bound to inform you that there is sorcery going on in this house.”

“Ah! little priest, you wish to make game of me!” said the king.

At these words the company were in a terrible state.

“So you treat me with disrespect?” said the king, which made them turn pale. “Ho, there! Tristan, my friend!” cried Louis XI. from the window, which he threw up suddenly, “come up here!”

The grand provost of the hotel was not long before he appeared; and as these gentlemen were all nobodies, raised to their present position by the favour of the king, Louis, in a moment of anger, could crush them at will; so that with the exception of the cardinal who relied upon his cassock, Tristan found them all rigid and aghast.

“Conduct these gentleman to the Pretorium, on the Mall, my friend, they have disgraced themselves through over−eating.”

“Am I not good at jokes?” said Nicole to him.

“The farce is good, but it is fetid,” replied he, laughing.

This royal answer showed the courtiers that this time the king did not intend to play with their heads, for which they thanked heaven. The monarch was partial to these dirty tricks. He was not at all a bad fellow, as the guests remarked while relieving themselves against the side of the Mall with Tristan, who, like a good

Frenchman, kept them company, and escorted them to their homes. This is why since that time the citizens of Tours had never failed to defile the Mall of Chardonneret, because the gentlemen of the court had been there.

I will not leave this great king without committing to writing this good joke which he played upon La Godegrand, who was an old maid, much disgusted that she had not, during the forty years she had lived, been able to find a lid to her saucepan, enraged, in her yellow skin, that she still was as virgin as a mule. This old maid had her apartments on the other side of the house which belonged to La Beaupertuys, at the corner of the Rue de Hierusalem, in such a position that, standing on the balcony joining the wall, it was easy to see what she was doing, and hear what she was saying in the lower room where she lived; and often the king derived much amusement from the antics of the old girl, who did not know that she was so much within the range of his majesty's culverin. Now one market day it happened that the king had caused to be hanged a young citizen of Tours, who had violated a noble lady of a certain age, believing that she was a young maiden. There would have been no harm in this, and it would have been a thing greatly to the credit of the said lady to have been taken for a virgin; but on finding out his mistake, he had abominably insulted her, and suspecting her of trickery, had taken it into his head to rob her of a splendid silver goblet, in payment of the present he had just made her. This young man had long hair, and was so handsome that the whole town wished to see him hanged, both from regret and out of curiosity. You may be sure that at this hanging there were more caps than hats. Indeed, the said young man swung very well; and after the fashion and custom of persons hanged, he died gallantly with his lance couched, which fact made a great noise in the town. Many ladies said on this subject that it was a murder not to have preserved so fine a fellow from the scaffold.

“Suppose we were to put this handsome corpse in the bed of La Godegrand,” said La Beaupertuys to the king.

“We should terrify her,” replied Louis.

“Not at all, sire. Be sure that she will welcome even a dead man, so madly does she long for a living one. Yesterday I saw her making love to a young man's cap placed on the top of a chair, and you would have laughed heartily at her words and gestures.”

Now while this forty−year−old virgin was at vespers, the king sent to have this young townsman, who had just finished the last scene of his tragic farce, taken down, and having dressed him in a white shirt, two officers got over the walls of La Godegrand's garden, and put the corpse into her bed, on the side nearest the street. Having done this they went away, and the king remained in the room with the balcony to it, playing with Beaupertuys, and awaiting an hour at which the old maid should go to bed. La Godegrand soon came back with a hop, skip, and jump, as the Tourainians say, from the church of St Martin, from which she was not far, since the Rue de Hierusalem touches the walls of the cloister. She entered her house, laid down her prayer−book, chaplet, and rosary, and other ammunition which these old girls carry, then poked the fire, and blew it, warmed herself at it, settled herself in her chair, and played with her cat for want of something better; then she went to the larder, supping and sighing, and sighing and supping, eating alone, with her eyes cast down upon the carpet; and after having drunk, behaved in a manner forbidden in court society.

“Ah!” the corpse said to her, 'God bless you!'“

At this joke of luck of La Beaupertuys, both laughed heartily in their sleeves. And with great attention this very Christian king watched the undressing of the old maid, who admired herself while removing her things—pulling out a hair, or scratching a pimple which had maliciously come upon her nose; picking her teeth, and doing a thousand little things which, alas! all ladies, virgins or not, are obliged to do, much to their annoyance; but without these little faults of nature, they would be too proud, and one would not be able to enjoy their society. Having achieved her aquatic and musical discourse, the old maid got in between the sheets, and yelled forth a fine, great, ample, and curious cry, when she saw, when she smelt the fresh vigour of this hanged man and the sweet perfume of his manly youth; then sprang away from him out of coquetry. But as she did not know he was really dead, she came back again, believing he was mocking her, and counterfeiting death.

“Go away, you bad young man!” said she.

But you can imagine that she proffered this requests in a most humble and gracious tone of voice. Then seeing that he did not move, she examined him more closely, and was much astonished at this so fine human nature when she recognised the young fellow, upon whom the fancy took her to perform some purely scientific experiments in the interests of hanged persons.

“What is she doing?” said La Beaupertuys to the king.

"She is trying to reanimate him. It is a work of Christian humanity."

And the old girl rubbed and warmed this fine young man, supplicating holy Mary the Egyptian to aid her to renew the life of this husband who had fallen so amorously from heaven, when, suddenly looking at the dead body she was so charitably rubbing, she thought she saw a slight movement in the eyes; then she put her hand upon the man's heart, and felt it beat feebly. At length, from the warmth of the bed and of affection, and by the temperature of old maids, which is by far more burning then the warm blasts of African deserts, she had the delight of bringing to life that fine handsome young fellow who by lucky chance had been very badly hanged.

"See how my executioners serve me!" said Louis, laughing.

"Ah!" said La Beaupertuys, "you will not have him hanged again? he is too handsome."

"The decree does not say that he shall be hanged twice, but he shall marry the old woman."

Indeed, the good lady went in a great hurry to seek a master leech, a good bleeder, who lived in the Abbey, and brought him back directly. He immediately took his lancet, and bled the young man. And as no blood came out: "Ah!" said he, "it is too late, the transshipment of blood in the lungs has taken place."

But suddenly this good young blood oozed out a little, and then came out in abundance, and the hempen apoplexy, which had only just begun, was arrested in its course. The young man moved and came more to life; then he fell, from natural causes, into a state of great weakness and profound sadness, prostration of flesh and general flabbiness. Now the old maid, who was all eyes, and followed the great and notable changes which were taking place in the person of this badly hanged man, pulled the surgeon by the sleeve, and pointing out to him, by a curious glance of the eye, the piteous cause, said to him—

"Will he for the future be always like that?"

"Often," replied the veracious surgeon.

"Oh! he was much nicer hanged!"

At this speech the king burst out laughing. Seeing him at the window, the woman and the surgeon were much frightened, for this laugh seemed to them a second sentence of death for their poor victim. But the king kept his word, and married them. And in order to do justice he gave the husband the name of the Sieur de Mortsauf in the place of the one he had lost upon the scaffold. As La Godegrand had a very big basket of crowns, they founded a good family in Touraine, which still exists and is much respected, since M. de Mortsauf faithfully served Louis the Eleventh on different occasions. Only he never liked to come across gibbets or old women, and never again made amorous assignations in the night.

This teaches us to thoroughly verify and recognise women, and not to deceive ourselves in the local difference which exists between the old and the young, for if we are not hanged for our errors of love, there are always great risks to run.

THE HIGH CONSTABLE'S WIFE

The high constable of Armagnac espoused from the desire of a great fortune, the Countess Bonne, who was already considerably enamoured of little Savoisy, son of the chamberlain to his majesty King Charles the Sixth.

The constable was a rough warrior, miserable in appearance, tough in skin, thickly bearded, always uttering angry words, always busy hanging people, always in the sweat of battles, or thinking of other stratagems than those of love. Thus the good soldier, caring little to flavour the marriage stew, used his charming wife after the fashion of a man with more lofty ideas; of the which the ladies have a great horror, since they like not the joists of the bed to be the sole judges of their fondling and vigorous conduct.

Now the lovely Countess, as soon as she was grafted on the constable, only nibbled more eagerly at the love with which her heart was laden for the aforesaid Savoisy, which that gentleman clearly perceived.

Wishing both to study the same music, they would soon harmonise their fancies, and decipher the hieroglyphic; and this was a thing clearly demonstrated to the Queen Isabella, that Savoisy's horses were oftener stabled at the house of her cousin of Armagnac than in the Hotel St. Pol, where the chamberlain lived, since the destruction of his residence, ordered by the university, as everyone knows.

This discreet and wise princess, fearing in advance some unfortunate adventure for Bonne—the more so as the constable was as ready to brandish his broadsword as a priest to bestow benedictions—the said queen, as sharp as a dirk, said one day, while coming out from vespers, to her cousin, who was taking the holy water with Savoisy—

“My dear, don't you see some blood in that water?”

“Bah!” said Savoisy to the queen. “Love likes blood, Madame.”

This the Queen considered a good reply, and put it into writing, and later on, into action, when her lord the king wounded one of her lovers, whose business you see settled in this narrative.

You know by constant experience, that in the early time of love each of two lovers is always in great fear of exposing the mystery of the heart, and as much from the flower of prudence as from the amusement yielded by the sweet tricks of gallantry they play at who can best conceal their thoughts, but one day of forgetfulness suffices to inter the whole virtuous past. The poor woman is taken in her joy as in a lasso; her sweetheart proclaims his presence, or sometimes his departure, by some article of clothing—a scarf, a spur, left by some fatal chance, and there comes a stroke of the dagger that severs the web so gallantly woven by their golden delights. But when one is full of days, he should not make a wry face at death, and the sword of a husband is a pleasant death for a gallant, if there be pleasant deaths. So may be will finish the merry amours of the constable's wife.

One morning Monsieur d'Armagnac having lots of leisure time in consequence of the flight of the Duke of Burgundy, who was quitting Lagny, thought he would go and wish his lady good day, and attempted to wake her up in a pleasant enough fashion, so that she should not be angry; but she sunk in the heavy slumbers of the morning, replied to the action—

“Leave me alone, Charles!”

“Oh, oh,” said the constable, hearing the name of a saint who was not one of his patrons, “I have a Charles on my head!”

Then, without touching his wife, he jumped out of the bed, and ran upstairs with his face flaming and his sword drawn, to the place where slept the countess's maid−servant, convinced that the said servant had a finger in the pie.

“Ah, ah, wench of hell!” cried he, to commence the discharge of his passion, “say thy prayers, for I intend to kill thee instantly, because of the secret practices of Charles who comes here.”

“Ah, Monseigneur,” replied the woman, “who told you that?”

“Stand steady, that I may rip thee at one blow if you do not confess to me every assignation given, and in what manner they have been arranged. If thy tongue gets entangled, if thou falterest, I will pierce thee with my dagger!”

“Pierce me through!” replied the girl; “you will learn nothing.”

The constable, having taken this excellent reply amiss, ran her through on the spot, so mad was he with rage; and came back into his wife's chamber and said to his groom, whom, awakened by the shrieks of the girl, he met

upon the stairs, “Go upstairs; I've corrected Billette rather severely.”

Before he reappeared in the presence of Bonne he went to fetch his son, who was sleeping like a child, and led him roughly into her room. The mother opened her eyes pretty widely, you may imagine—at the cries of her little one; and was greatly terrified at seeing him in the hands of her husband, who had his right hand all bloody, and cast a fierce glance on the mother and son.

“What is the matter?” said she.

“Madame,” asked the man of quick execution, “this child, is he the fruit of my loins, or those of Savoisy, your lover?”

At this question Bonne turned pale, and sprang upon her son like a frightened frog leaping into the water.

“Ah, he is really ours,” said she.

“If you do not wish to see his head roll at your feet confess yourself to me, and no prevarication. You have given me a lieutenant.”

“Indeed!”

“Who is he?”

“It is not Savoisy, and I will never say the name of a man that I don't know.”

Thereupon the constable rose, took his wife by the arm to cut her speech with a blow of the sword, but she, casting upon him an imperial glance, cried—

“Kill me if you will, but touch me not.”

“You shall live,” replied the husband, “because I reserve you for a chastisement more ample then death.”

And doubting the inventions, snares, arguments, and artifices familiar to women in these desperate situations, of which they study night and day the variations, by themselves, or between themselves, he departed with this rude and bitter speech. He went instantly to interrogate his servants, presenting to them a face divinely terrible; so all of them replied to him as they would to God the Father on the Judgment Day, when each of us will be called to his account.

None of them knew the serious mischief which was at the bottom of these summary interrogations and crafty interlocutions; but from all that they said, the constable came to the conclusion that no male in his house was in the business, except one of his dogs, whom he found dumb, and to whom he had given the post of watching the gardens; so taking him in his hands, he strangled him with rage. This fact incited him by induction to suppose that the other constable came into his house by the garden, of which the only entrance was a postern opening on to the water side.

It is necessary to explain to those who are ignorant of it, the locality of the Hotel d'Armagnac, which had a notable situation near to the royal houses of St. Pol. On this site has since been built the hotel of Longueville. Then as at the present time, the residence of d'Armagnac had a porch of fine stone in Rue St. Antoine, was fortified at all points, and the high walls by the river side, in face of the Ile du Vaches, in the part where now stands the port of La Greve, were furnished with little towers. The design of these has for a long time been shown at the house of Cardinal Duprat, the king's Chancellor. The constable ransacked his brains, and at the bottom, from his finest stratagems, drew the best, and fitted it so well to the present case, that the gallant would be certain to be taken like a hare in the trap. “'Sdeath,” said he, “my planter of horns is taken, and I have the time now to think how I shall finish him off.”

Now this is the order of battle which this grand hairy captain who waged such glorious war against Duke Jean−sans−Peur commanded for the assault of his secret enemy. He took a goodly number of his most loyal and adroit archers, and placed them on the quay tower, ordering them under the heaviest penalties to draw without distinction of persons, except his wife, on those of his household who should attempt to leave the gardens, and to admit therein, either by night or by day, the favoured gentleman. The same was done on the porch side, in the Rue St Antoine.

The retainers, even the chaplain, were ordered not to leave the house under pain of death. Then the guard of the two sides of the hotel having been committed to the soldiers of a company of ordnance, who were ordered to keep a sharp lookout in the side streets, it was certain that the unknown lover to whom the constable was indebted for his pair of horns, would be taken warm, when, knowing nothing, he should come at the accustomed hour of love to insolently plant his standard in the heart of the legitimate appurtenances of the said lord count.

It was a trap into which the most expert man would fall unless he was seriously protected by the fates, as was

the good St. Peter by the Saviour when he prevented him going to the bottom of the sea the day when they had a fancy to try if the sea were as solid as terra firma.

The constable had business with the inhabitants of Poissy, and was obliged to be in the saddle after dinner, so that, knowing his intention, the poor Countess Bonne determined at night to invite her young gallant to that charming duel in which she was always the stronger.

While the constable was making round his hotel a girdle of spies and of death, and hiding his people near the postern to seize the gallant as he came out, not knowing where he would spring from, his wife was not amusing herself by threading peas nor seeking black cows in the embers. First, the maid−servant who had been stuck, unstuck herself and dragged herself to her mistress; she told her that her outraged lord knew nothing, and that before giving up the ghost she would comfort her dear mistress by assuring her that she could have perfect confidence in her sister, who was laundress in the hotel, and was willing to let herself be chopped up as small as sausage−meat to please Madame. That she was the most adroit and roguish woman in the neighbourhood, and renowned from the council chamber to the Trahoir cross among the common people, and fertile in invention for the desperate cases of love.

Then, while weeping for the decease of her good chamber woman, the countess sent for the laundress, made her leave her tubs and join her in rummaging the bag of good tricks, wishing to save Savoisy, even at the price of her future salvation.

First of all the two women determined to let him know their lord and master's suspicion, and beg him to be careful.

Now behold the good washerwoman who, carrying her tub like a mule, attempts to leave the hotel. But at the porch she found a man−at−arms who turned a deaf ear to all the blandishments of the wash−tub. Then she resolved, from her great devotion, to take the soldier on his weak side, and she tickled him so with her fondling that he romped very well with her, although he was armour−plated ready for battle; but when the game was over he still refused to let her go into the street and although she tried to get herself a passport sealed by some of the handsomest, believing them more gallant: neither the archers, men−at−arms, nor others, dared open for her the smallest entrance of the house. “You are wicked and ungrateful wretches,” said she, “not to render me a like service.”

Luckily at this employment she learned everything, and came back in great haste to her mistress, to whom she recounted the strange machinations of the count. The two women held a fresh council and had not considered, the time it takes to sing Alleluia, twice, these warlike appearances, watches, defences, and equivocal, specious, and diabolical orders and dispositions before they recognised by the sixth sense with which all females are furnished, the special danger which threatened the poor lover.

Madame having learned that she alone had leave to quit the house, ventured quickly to profit by her right, but she did not go the length of a bow−shot, since the constable had ordered four of his pages to be always on duty ready to accompany the countess, and two of the ensigns of his company not to leave her. Then the poor lady returned to her chamber, weeping as much as all the Magdalens one sees in the church pictures, could weep together.

“Alas!” said she, “my lover must then be killed, and I shall never see him again! . . . he whose words were so sweet, whose manners were so graceful, that lovely head that had so often rested on my knees, will now be bruised . . . What! Can I not throw to my husband an empty and valueless head in place of the one full of charms and worth . . . a rank head for a sweet−smelling one; a hated head for a head of love.”

“Ah, Madame!” cried the washerwoman, “suppose we dress up in the garments of a nobleman, the steward's son who is mad for me, and wearies me much, and having thus accoutered him, we push him out through the postern.

Thereupon the two women looked at each other with assassinating eyes.

“This marplot,” said she, “once slain, all those soldiers will fly away like geese.”

“Yes, but will not the count recognise the wretch?”

And the countess, striking her breast, exclaimed, shaking her head, “No, no, my dear, here it is noble blood that must be spilt without stint.”

Then she thought a little, and jumping with joy, suddenly kissed the laundress, saying, “Because I have saved my lover's life by your counsel, I will pay you for his life until death.”

Thereupon the countess dried her tears, put on the face of a bride, took her little bag and a prayer−book, and went towards the Church of St. Pol whose bells she heard ringing, seeing that the last Mass was about to be said. In this sweet devotion the countess never failed, being a showy woman, like all the ladies of the court. Now this was called the full−dress Mass, because none but fops, fashionables, young gentlemen and ladies puffed out and highly scented, were to be met there. In fact no dresses was seen there without armorial bearings, and no spurs that were not gilt.

So the Countess of Bonne departed, leaving at the hotel the laundress much astonished, and charged to keep her eyes about her, and came with great pomp to the church, accompanied by her pages, the two ensigns and men−at−arms. It is here necessary to say that among the band of gallant knights who frisked round the ladies in church, the countess had more than one whose joy she was, and who had given his heart to her, after the fashion of youths who put down enough and to spare upon their tablets, only in order to make a conquest of at least one out of a great number.

Among these birds of fine prey who with open beaks looked oftener between the benches and the paternosters than towards the altar and the priests, there was one upon whom the countess sometimes bestowed the charity of a glance, because he was less trifling and more deeply smitten than all the others.

This one remained bashful, always stuck against the same pillar, never moving from it, but readily ravished with the sight alone of this lady whom he had chosen as his. His pale face was softly melancholy. His physiognomy gave proof of fine heart, one of those which nourish ardent passions and plunge delightedly into the despairs of love without hope. Of these people there are few, because ordinarily one likes more a certain thing than the unknown felicities lying and flourishing at the bottommost depths of the soul.

This said gentleman, although his garments were well made, and clean and neat, having even a certain amount of taste shown in the arrangement, seemed to the constable's wife to be a poor knight seeking fortune, and come from afar, with his nobility for his portion. Now partly from a suspicion of his secret poverty, partly because she was well beloved by him and a little because he had a good countenance, fine black hair, and a good figure, and remained humble and submissive in all, the constable's wife desired for him the favour of women and of fortune, not to let his gallantry stand idle, and from a good housewifely idea, she fired his imagination according to her fantasies, by certain small favours and little looks which serpented towards him like biting adders, trifling with the happiness of this young life, like a princess accustomed to play with objects more precious than a simple knight. In fact, her husband risked the whole kingdom as you would a penny at piquet. Finally it was only three days since, at the conclusion of vespers, that the constable's wife pointed out to the queen this follower of love, said laughingly—

“There's a man of quality.”

This sentence remained in the fashionable language. Later it became a custom so to designate the people of the court. It was to the wife of the constable d'Armagnac, and to no other source, that the French language is indebted for this charming expression.

By a lucky chance the countess had surmised correctly concerning this gentleman. He was a bannerless knight, named Julien de Boys−Bourredon, who not having inherited on his estate enough to make a toothpick, and knowing no other wealth than the rich nature with which his dead mother had opportunely furnished him, conceived the idea of deriving therefrom both rent and profit at court, knowing how fond ladies are of those good revenues, and value them high and dear, when they can stand being looked at between two suns. There are many like him who have thus taken the narrow road of women to make their way; but he, far from arranging his love in measured qualities, spend funds and all, as soon as he came to the full−dress Mass, he saw the triumphant beauty of the Countess Bonne. Then he fell really in love, which was a grand thing for his crowns, because he lost both thirst and appetite. This love is of the worst kind, because it incites you to the love of diet, during the diet of love; a double malady, of which one is sufficient to extinguish a man.

Such was the young gentlemen of whom the good lady had thought, and towards whom she came quickly to invite him to his death.

On entering she saw the poor chevalier, who faithful to his pleasure, awaited her, his back against a pillar, as a sick man longs for the sun, the spring−time, and the dawn. Then she turned away her eyes, and wished to go to the queen and request her assistance in this desperate case, for she took pity on her lover, but one of the captains said to her, with great appearance of respect, “Madame, we have orders not to allow you to speak with man or

woman, even though it should be the queen or your confessor. And remember that the lives of all of us are at stake."

"Is it not your business to die?" said she.

"And also to obey," replied the soldier.

Then the countess knelt down in her accustomed place, and again regarding her faithful slave, found his face thinner and more deeply lined than ever it had been.

"Bah!" said she, "I shall have less remorse for his death; he is half dead as it is."

With this paraphrase of her idea, she cast upon the said gentleman one of those warm ogles that are only allowable to princesses and harlots, and the false love which her lovely eyes bore witness to, gave a pleasant pang to the gallant of the pillar. Who does not love the warm attack of life when it flows thus round the heart and engulfs everything?

Madame recognised with a pleasure, always fresh in the minds of women, the omnipotence of her magnificent regard by the answer which, without saying a word, the chevalier made to it. And in fact, the blushes which empurpled his cheeks spoke better than the best speeches of the Greek and Latin orators, and were well understood. At this sweet sight, the countess, to make sure that it was not a freak of nature, took pleasure in experimentalising how far the virtue of her eyes would go, and after having heated her slave more than thirty times, she was confirmed in her belief that he would bravely die for her. This idea so touched her, that from three repetitions between her orisons she was tickled with the desire to put into a lump all the joys of man, and to dissolve them for him in one single glance of love, in order that she should not one day be reproached with having not only dissipated the life, but also the happiness of this gentleman. When the officiating priest turned round to sing the Off you go to this fine gilded flock, the constable's wife went out by the side of the pillar where her courtier was, passed in front of him and endeavoured to insinuate into his understanding by a speaking glance that he was to follow her, and to make positive the intelligence and significant interpretation of this gentle appeal, the artful jade turned round again a little after passing him to again request his company. She saw that he had moved a little from his place, and dared not advance, so modest was he, but upon this last sign, the gentleman, sure of not being over−credulous, mixed with the crowd with little and noiseless steps, like an innocent who is afraid of venturing into one of those good places people call bad ones. And whether he walked behind or in front, to the right or to the left, my lady bestowed upon him a glistening glance to allure him the more and the better to draw him to her, like a fisher who gently jerks the lines in order to hook the gudgeon. To be brief: the countess practiced so well the profession of the daughters of pleasure when they work to bring grist into their mills, that one would have said nothing resembled a harlot so much as a woman of high birth. And indeed, on arriving at the porch of her hotel the countess hesitated to enter therein, and again turned her face towards the poor chevalier to invite him to accompany her, discharging at him so diabolical a glance, that he ran to the queen of his heart, believing himself to be called by her. Thereupon, she offered him her hand, and both boiling and trembling from the contrary causes found themselves inside the house. At this wretched hour, Madame d'Armagnac was ashamed of having done all these harlotries to the profit of death, and of betraying Savoisy the better to save him; but this slight remorse was lame as the greater, and came tardily. Seeing everything ready, the countess leaned heavily upon her vassal's arm, and said to him—

"Come quickly to my room; it is necessary that I should speak with you."

And he, not knowing that his life was in peril, found no voice wherewith to reply, so much did the hope of approaching happiness choke him.

When the laundress saw this handsome gentleman so quickly hooked, "Ah!" said she, "these ladies of the court are best at such work." Then she honoured this courtier with a profound salutation, in which was depicted the ironical respect due to those who have the great courage to die for so little.

"Picard," said the constable's lady, drawing the laundress to her by the skirt, "I have not the courage to confess to him the reward with which I am about to pay his silent love and his charming belief in the loyalty of women."

"Bah! Madame: why tell him? Send him away well contented by the postern. So many men die in war for nothing, cannot this one die for something? I'll produce another like him if that will console you."

"Come along," cried the countess, "I will confess all to him. That will be the punishment for my sins."

Thinking that this lady was arranging with her servant certain trifling provisions and secret things in order not to be disturbed in the interview she had promised him, the unknown lover kept at a discreet distance, looking at

the flies. Nevertheless, he thought that the countess was very bold, but also, as even a hunchback would have done, he found a thousand reasons to justify her, and thought himself quite worthy to inspire such recklessness. He was lost in those good thoughts when the constable's wife opened the door of her chamber, and invited the chevalier to follow her in. There his noble lady cast aside all the apparel of her lofty fortune, and falling at the feet of this gentleman, became a simple woman.

"Alas, sweet sir!" said she, "I have acted vilely towards you. Listen. On your departure from this house, you will meet your death. The love which I feel for another has bewildered me, and without being able to hold his place here, you will have to take it before his murderers. This is the joy to which I have bidden you."

"Ah!" Replied Boys−Bourredon, interring in the depths of his heart a dark despair, "I am grateful to you for having made use of me as of something which belonged to you. . . . Yes, I love you so much that every day you I have dreamed of offering you in imitation of the ladies, a thing that can be given but once. Take, then, my life!"

And the poor chevalier, in saying this, gave her one glance to suffice for all the time he would have been able to look at her through the long days. Hearing these brave and loving words, Bonne rose suddenly.

"Ah! were it not for Savoisy, how I would love thee!" said she.

"Alas! my fate is then accomplished," replied Boys−Bourredon. "My horoscope predicted that I should die by the love of a great lady. Ah, God!" said he, clutching his good sword, "I will sell my life dearly, but I shall die content in thinking that my decease ensures the happiness of her I love. I should live better in her memory than in reality." At the sight of the gesture and the beaming face of this courageous man, the constable's wife was pierced to the heart. But soon she was wounded to the quick because he seemed to wish to leave her without even asking of her the smallest favour.

"Come, that I may arm you," said she to him, making an attempt to kiss him.

"Ha! my lady−love," replied he, moistening with a gentle tear the fire of his eyes, "would you render my death impossible by attaching too great a value to my life?"

"Come," cried she, overcome by this intense love, "I do not know what the end of all this will be, but come—afterwards we will go and perish together at the postern."

The same flame leaped in their hearts, the same harmony had struck for both, they embraced each other with a rapture in the delicious excess of that mad fever which you know well I hope; they fell into a profound forgetfulness of the dangers of Savoisy, of themselves, of the constable, of death, of life, of everything.

Meanwhile the watchman at the porch had gone to inform the constable of the arrival of the gallant, and to tell him how the infatuated gentleman had taken no notice of the winks which, during Mass and on the road, the countess had given him in order to prevent his destruction. They met their master arriving in great haste at the postern, because on their side the archers of the quay had whistled to him afar off, saying to him—

"The Sire de Savoisy has passed in."

And indeed Savoisy had come at the appointed hour, and like all the lovers, thinking only of his lady, he had not seen the count's spies and had slipped in at the postern. This collision of lovers was the cause of the constable's cutting short the words of those who came from the Rue St. Antoine, saying to them with a gesture of authority, that they did not think wise to disregard—

"I know that the animal is taken."

Thereupon all rushed with a great noise through this said postern, crying, "Death to him! death to him!" and men−at−arms, archers, the constable, and the captains, all rushed full tilt upon Charles Savoisy, the king's nephew, who they attacked under the countess's window, where by a strange chance, the groans of the poor young man were dolorously exhaled, mingled with the yells of the soldiers, at the same time as passionate sighs and cries were given forth by the two lovers, who hastened up in great fear.

"Ah!" said the countess, turning pale from terror, "Savoisy is dying for me!"

"But I will live for you," replied Boys−Bourredon, "and shall esteem it a joy to pay the same price for my happiness as he has done."

"Hide yourself in the clothes chest," cried the countess; "I hear the constable's footsteps."

And indeed M. d'Armagnac appeared very soon with a head in his hand, and putting it all bloody on the mantleshelf, "Behold, Madame," said he, "a picture which will enlighten you concerning the duties of a wife towards her husband."

"You have killed an innocent man," replied the countess, without changing colour. Savoisy was not my

lover.”

And with the this speech she looked proudly at the constable with a face marked by so much dissimulation and feminine audacity, that the husband stood looking as foolish as a girl who has allowed a note to escape her below, before a numerous company, and he was afraid of having made a mistake.

“Of whom were you thinking this morning?” asked he.

“I was dreaming of the king,” said she.

“Then, my dear, why not have told me so?”

“Would you have believed me in the bestial passion you were in?”

The constable scratched his ear and replied—

“But how came Savoisy with the key of the postern?”

“I don't know,” she said, curtly, “if you will have the goodness to believe what I have said to you.”

And his wife turned lightly on her heel like a weather−cock turned by the wind, pretending to go and look after the household affairs. You can imagine that D'Armagnac was greatly embarrassed with the head of poor Savoisy, and that for his part Boys−Bourredon had no desire to cough while listening to the count, who was growling to himself all sorts of words. At length the constable struck two heavy blows over the table and said, “I'll go and attack the inhabitants of Poissy.” Then he departed, and when the night was come Boys−Bourredon escaped from the house in some disguise or other.

Poor Savoisy was sorely lamented by his lady, who had done all that a woman could do to save her lover, and later he was more than wept, he was regretted; for the countess having related this adventure to Queen Isabella, her majesty seduced Boys−Bourredon from the service of her cousin and put him to her own, so much was she touched with the qualities and firm courage of this gentleman.

Boys−Bourredon was a man whom danger had well recommended to the ladies. In fact he comported himself so proudly in everything in the lofty fortune, which the queen had made for him, that having badly treated King Charles one day when the poor man was in his proper senses, the courtiers, jealous of favour, informed the king of his cuckoldom. Boys−Bourredon was in a moment sewn in a sack and thrown into the Seine, near the ferry at Charenton, as everyone knows. I have no need add, that since the day when the constable took it into his head to play thoughtlessly with knives, his good wife utilised so well the two deaths he had caused and threw them so often in his face, that she made him as soft as a cat's paw and put him in the straight road of marriage; and he proclaimed her a modest and virtuous constable's lady, as indeed she was. As this book should, according to the maxims of great ancient authors, join certain useful things to the good laughs which you will find therein and contain precepts of high taste, I beg to inform you that the quintessence of the story is this: That women need never lose their heads in serious cases, because the God of Love never abandons them, especially when they are beautiful, young, and of good family; and that gallants when going to keep an amorous assignation should never go there like giddy young men, but carefully, and keep a sharp look−out near the burrow, to avoid falling into certain traps and to preserve themselves; for after a good woman the most precious thing is, certes, a pretty gentleman.

THE MAID OF THILOUSE

The lord of Valennes, a pleasant place, of which the castle is not far from the town of Thilouse, had taken a mean wife, who by reason of taste or antipathy, pleasure or displeasure, health or sickness, allowed her good husband to abstain from those pleasures stipulated for in all contracts of marriage. In order to be just, it should be stated that the above−mentioned lord was a dirty and ill−favoured person, always hunting wild animals and not the more entertaining than is a room full of smoke. And what is more, the said sportsman was all sixty years of age, on which subject, however, he was a silent as a hempen widow on the subject of rope. But nature, which the crooked, the bandy−legged, the blind, and the ugly abuse so unmercifully here below, and have no more esteem for her than the well−favoured,—since, like workers of tapestry, they know not what they do,—gives the same appetite to all and to all the same mouth for pudding. So every beast finds a mate, and from the same fact comes the proverb, “There is no pot, however ugly, that does not one day find a cover.” Now the lord of Valennes searched everywhere for nice little pots to cover, and often in addition to wild, he hunted tame animals; but this kind of game was scarce in the land, and it was an expensive affair to discover a maid. At length however by reason of much ferreting about and much enquiry, it happened that the lord of Valennes was informed that in Thilouse was the widow of a weaver who had a real treasure in the person of a little damsel of sixteen years, whom she had never allowed to leave her apronstrings, and whom, with great maternal forethought, she always accompanied when the calls of nature demanded her obedience; she had her to sleep with her in her own bed, watched over her, got her up in the morning, and put her to such a work that between the twain they gained about eight pennies a day. On fete days she took her to the church, scarcely giving her a spare moment to exchange a merry word with the young people; above all was she strict in keeping hands off the maiden.

But the times were just then so hard that the widow and her daughter had only bread enough to save them from dying of hunger, and as they lodged with one of their poor relations, they often wanted wood in winter and clothes in summer, owing enough rent to frighten sergeants of justice, men who are not easily frightened at the debts of others; in short, while the daughter was increasing in beauty, the mother was increasing in poverty, and ran into debt on account of her daughter's virginity, as an alchemist will for the crucible in which his all is cast. As soon as his plans were arranged and perfect, one rainy day the said lord of Valennes by a mere chance came into the hovel of the two spinners, and in order to dry himself sent for some fagots to Plessis, close by. While waiting for them, he sat on a stool between the two poor women. By means of the grey shadows and half light of the cabin, he saw the sweet countenance of the maid of Thilouse; her arms were red and firm, her breasts hard as bastions, which kept the cold from her heart, her waist round as a young oak and all fresh and clean and pretty, like the first frost, green and tender as an April bud; in fact, she resembled all that is prettiest in the world. She had eyes of a modest and virtuous blue, with a look more coy than that of the Virgin, for she was less forward, never having had a child.

Had any one said to her, “Come, let us make love,” she would have said, “Love! What is that?” she was so innocent and so little open to the comprehensions of the thing.

The good old lord twisted about upon his stool, eyeing the maid and stretching his neck like a monkey trying to catch nuts, which the mother noticed, but said not a word, being in fear of the lord to whom the whole of the country belonged. When the fagot was put into the grate and flared up, the good hunter said to the old woman, “Ah, ah! that warms one almost as much as your daughter's eyes.”

“But alas, my lord,” said she, “we have nothing to cook on that fire.”

“Oh yes,” replied he.

“What?”

“Ah, my good woman, lend your daughter to my wife, who has need of a good handmaiden: we will give you two fagots every day.”

“Oh, my lord, what could I cook at such a good fire?”

“Why,” replied the old rascal, “good broth, for I will give you a measure of corn in season.”

“Then,” replied the old hag, “where shall I put it?”

“In your dish,” answered the purchaser of innocence.

“But I have neither dish nor flower−bin, nor anything.”

“Well I will give you dishes and flower−bins, saucepans, flagons, a good bed with curtains, and everything.”

“Yes,” replied the good widow, “but the rain would spoil them, I have no house.”

“You can see from here,” replied the lord, “the house of La Tourbelliere, where lived my poor huntsmen Pillegrain, who was ripped up by a boar?”

“Yes,” said the old woman.

“Well, you can make yourself at home there for the rest of your days.”

“By my faith;” cried the mother, letting fall her distaff, “do you mean what you say?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, what will you give my daughter?”

“All that she is willing to gain in my service.”

“Oh! my lord, you are a joking.”

“No,” said he.

“Yes,” said she.

“By St. Gatien, St. Eleuther, and by the thousand million saints who are in heaven, I swear that—”

“Ah! Well; if you are not jesting I should like those fagots to pass through the hands of the notary.”

“By the blood of Christ and the charms of your daughter am I not a gentleman? Is not my word good enough?”

“Ah! well I don't say that it is not; but as true as I am a poor spinner I love my child too much to leave her; she is too young and weak at present, she will break down in service. Yesterday, in his sermon, the vicar said that we should have to answer to God for our children.”

“There! There!” said the lord, “go and find the notary.”

An old woodcutter ran to the scrivener, who came and drew up a contract, to which the lord of Valennes then put his cross, not knowing how to write, and when all was signed and sealed—

“Well, old lady,” said he, “now you are no longer answerable to God for the virtue of your child.”

“Ah! my lord, the vicar said until the age of reason, and my child is quite reasonable.” Then turning towards her, she added, “Marie Fiquet, that which is dearest to you is your honour, and there where you are going everyone, without counting my lord, will try to rob you of it, but you see well what it is worth; for that reason do not lose it save willingly and in proper manner. Now in order not to contaminate your virtue before God and before man, except for a legitimate motive, take heed that your chance of marriage be not damaged beforehand, otherwise you will go to the bad.”

“Yes, dear mother,” replied the maid.

And thereupon she left the poor abode of her relation, and came to the chateau of Valennes, there to serve my lady, who found her both pretty and to her taste.

When the people of Valennes, Sache, Villaines, and other places, learned the high price given for the maid of Thilouse, the good housewives recognising the fact that nothing is more profitable than virtue, endeavoured to nourish and bring up their daughters virtuous, but the business was as risky as that of rearing silkworms, which are liable to perish, since innocence is like a medlar, and ripens quickly on the straw. There were, however, some girls noted for it in Touraine, who passed for virgins in the convents of the religious, but I cannot vouch for these, not having proceeded to verify them in the manner laid down by Verville, in order to make sure of the perfect virtue of women. However, Marie Fiquet followed the wise counsel of her mother, and would take no notice of the soft requests, honied words, or apish tricks of her master, unless they were flavoured with a promise of marriage.

When the old lord tried to kiss her, she would put her back up like a cat at the approach of a dog, crying out “I will tell Madame!” In short at the end of six months he had not even recovered the price of a single fagot. From her labour Marie Fiquet became harder and firmer. Sometimes she would reply to the gentle request of her master, “When you have taken it from me will you give it me back again?”

Another time she would say, “If I were as full of holes as a sieve not one should be for you, so ugly do I think you.”

The good old man took these village sayings for flowers of innocence, and ceased not make little signs to her, long harangues and a hundred vows and sermons, for by reason of seeing the fine breasts of the maid, her plump

hips, which at certain movements came into prominent relief, and by reason of admiring other things capable of inflaming the mind of a saint, this dear men became enamoured of her with an old man's passion, which augments in geometrical proportions as opposed to the passions of young men, because the old men love with their weakness which grows greater, and the young with their strength which grows less. In order to leave this headstrong girl no loophole for refusal, the old lord took into his confidence the steward, whose age was seventy odd years, and made him understand that he ought to marry in order to keep his body warm, and that Marie Fiquet was the very girl to suit him. The old steward, who had gained three hundred pounds by different services about the house, desired to live quietly without opening the front door again; but his good master begged him to marry to please him, assuring him that he need not trouble about his wife. So the good steward wandered out of sheer good nature into this marriage. The day of the wedding, bereft of all her reasons, and not able to find objections to her pursuer, she made him give her a fat settlement and dowry as the price of her conquest, and then gave the old knave leave to wink at her as often as he could, promising him as many embraces as he had given grains of wheat to her mother. But at his age a bushel was sufficient.

The festivities over, the lord did not fail, as soon as his wife had retired, to wend his way towards the well−glazed, well−carpeted, and pretty room where he had lodged his lass, his money, his fagots, his house, his wheat, and his steward. To be brief, know that he found the maid of Thilouse the sweetest girl in the world, as pretty as anything, by the soft light of the fire which was gleaming in the chimney, snug between the sheets, and with a sweet odour about her, as a young maiden should have, and in fact he had no regret for the great price of this jewel. Not being able to restrain himself from hurrying over the first mouthfuls of this royal morsel, the lord treated her more as a past master than a young beginner. So the happy man by too much gluttony, managed badly, and in fact knew nothing of the sweet business of love. Finding which, the good wench said, after a minute or two, to her old cavalier, “My lord, if you are there, as I think you are, give a little more swing to your bells.”

From this saying, which became spread about, I know not how, Marie Fiquet became famous, and it is still said in our country, “She is a maid of Thilouse,” in mockery of a bride, and to signify a “fricquenelle.”

“Fricquenelle” is said of a girl I do not wish you to find in your arms on your wedding night, unless you have been brought up in the philosophy of Zeno, which puts up with anything, and there are many people obliged to be Stoics in this funny situation, which is often met with, for Nature turns, but changes not, and there are always good maids of Thilouse to be found in Touraine, and elsewhere. Now if you asked me in what consists, or where comes in, the moral of this tale? I am at liberty to reply to the ladies; that the Cent Contes Drolatiques are made more to teach the moral of pleasure than to procure the pleasure of pointing a moral. But if it were a used up old rascal who asked me, I should say to him with all the respect due to his yellow or grey locks; that God wishes to punish the lord of Valennes, for trying to purchase a jewel made to be given.

THE BROTHERS−IN−ARMS

At the commencement of the reign of King Henry, second of the name, who loved so well the fair Diana, there existed still a ceremony of which the usage has since become much weakened, and which has altogether disappeared, like an infinity of the good things of the olden times. This fine and noble custom was the choice which all knights made of a brother−in−arms. After having recognised each other as two loyal and brave men, each one of this pretty couple was married for life to the other; both became brothers, the one had to defend the other in battling against the enemies who threatened him, and at Court against the friends who slandered him. In the absence of his companion the other was expected to say to one who should have accused his good brother of any disloyalty, wickedness or dark felony, “You have lied by your throat,” and so go into the field instantly, so sure was the one of the honour of the other. There is no need to add, that the one was always the second of the other in all affairs, good or evil, and that they shared all good or evil fortune. They were better than the brothers who are only united by the hazard of nature, since they were fraternised by the bonds of an especial sentiment, involuntary and mutual, and thus the fraternity of arms has produced splendid characters, as brave as those of the ancient Greeks, Romans, or others. . . . But this is not my subject; the history of these things has been written by the historians of our country, and everyone knows them.

Now at this time two young gentlemen of Touraine, of whom one was the Cadet of Maille, and the other Sieur de Lavalliere, became brothers− in−arms on the day they gained their spurs. They were leaving the house of Monsieur de Montmorency, where they had been nourished with the good doctrines of this great Captain, and had shown how contagious is valour in such good company, for at the battle of Ravenna they merited the praises of the oldest knights. It was in the thick of this fierce fight that Maille, saved by the said Lavalliere, with whom he had had a quarrel or two, perceived that this gentleman had a noble heart. As they had each received slashes in the doublets, they baptised their fraternity with their blood, and were ministered to together in one and the same bed under the tent of Monsieur de Montmorency their master. It is necessary to inform you that, contrary to the custom of his family, which was always to have a pretty face, the Cadet of Maille was not of a pleasing physiognomy, and had scarcely any beauty but that of the devil. For the rest he was lithe as a greyhound, broad shouldered and strongly built as King Pepin, who was a terrible antagonist. On the other hand, the Sieur de Lavalliere was a dainty fellow, for whom seemed to have been invented rich laces, silken hose, and cancellated shoes. His long dark locks were pretty as a lady's ringlets, and he was, to be brief, a child with whom all the women would be glad to play. One day the Dauphine, niece of the Pope, said laughingly to the Queen of Navarre, who did not dislike these little jokes, “that this page was a plaster to cure every ache,” which caused the pretty little Tourainian to blush, because, being only sixteen, he took this gallantry as a reproach.

Now on his return from Italy the Cadet of Maille found the slipper of marriage ready for his foot, which his mother had obtained for him in the person of Mademoiselle d'Annebaut, who was a graceful maiden of good appearance, and well furnished with everything, having a splendid hotel in the Rue Barbette, with handsome furniture and Italian paintings and many considerable lands to inherit. Some days after the death of King Francis—a circumstance which planted terror in the heart of everyone, because his said Majesty had died in consequence of an attack of the Neapolitan sickness, and that for the future there would be no security even with princesses of the highest birth—the above−named Maille was compelled to quit the Court in order to go and arrange certain affairs of great importance in Piedmont. You may be sure that he was very loath to leave his good wife, so young, so delicate, so sprightly, in the midst of the dangers, temptations, snares and pitfalls of this gallant assemblage, which comprised so many handsome fellows, bold as eagles, proud of mein, and as fond of women as the people are partial to Paschal hams. In this state of intense jealousy everything made him ill at ease; but by dint of much thinking, it occurred to him to make sure of his wife in the manner about to be related. He invited his good brother−in−arms to come at daybreak on the morning of his departure. Now directly he heard Lavalliere's horse in the courtyard, he leaped out of bed, leaving his sweet and fair better−half sleeping that gentle, dreamy, dozing sleep so beloved by dainty ladies and lazy people. Lavalliere came to him, and the two companions, hidden in the embrasure of the window, greeted each other with a loyal clasp of the hand, and immediately Lavalliere said to Maille—

“I should have been here last night in answer to thy summons, but I had a love suit on with my lady, who had given me an assignation; I could in no way fail to keep it, but I quitted her at dawn. Shall I accompany thee? I have told her of thy departure, she has promised me to remain without any amour; we have made a compact. If she deceives me—well a friend is worth more than a mistress!”

“Oh! my good brother” replied the Maille, quite overcome with these words, “I wish to demand of thee a still higher proof of thy brave heart. Wilt thou take charge of my wife, defend her against all, be her guide, keep her in check and answer to me for the integrity of my head? Thou canst stay here during my absence, in the green−room, and be my wife's cavalier.”

Lavalliere knitted his brow and said—

“It is neither thee nor thy wife that I fear, but evil−minded people, who will take advantage of this to entangle us like skeins of silk.”

“Do not be afraid of me,” replied Maille, clasping Lavalliere to his breast. “If it be the divine will of the Almighty that I should have the misfortune to be a cuckold, I should be less grieved if it were to your advantage. But by my faith I should die of grief, for my life is bound up in my good, young, virtuous wife.”

Saying which, he turned away his head, in order that Lavalliere should not perceive the tears in his eyes; but the fine courtier saw this flow of water, and taking the hand of Maille—

“Brother,” said he to him, “I swear to thee on my honour as a man, that before anyone lays a finger on thy wife, he shall have felt my dagger in the depth of his veins! And unless I should die, thou shalt find her on thy return, intact in body if not in heart, because thought is beyond the control of gentlemen.”

“It is then decreed above,” exclaimed Maille, “that I shall always be thy servant and thy debtor!”

Thereupon the comrade departed, in order not to be inundated with the tears, exclamations, and other expressions of grief which ladies make use of when saying “Farewell.” Lavalliere having conducted him to the gate of the town, came back to the hotel, waited until Marie d'Annebaut was out of bed, informed her of the departure of her good husband, and offered to place himself at her orders, in such a graceful manner, that the most virtuous woman would have been tickled with a desire to keep such a knight to herself. But there was no need of this fine paternoster to indoctrinate the lady, seeing that she had listened to the discourse of the two friends, and was greatly offended at her husband's doubt. Alas! God alone is perfect! In all the ideas of men there is always a bad side, and it is therefore a great science in life, but an impossible science, to take hold of everything, even a stick by the right end. The cause of the great difficulty there is in pleasing the ladies is, that there is it in them a thing which is more woman than they are, and but for the respect which is due to them, I would use another word. Now we should never awaken the phantasy of this malevolent thing. The perfect government of woman is a task to rend a man's heart, and we are compelled to remain in perfect submission to them; that is, I imagine, the best manner in which to solve the most agonising enigma of marriage.

Now Marie d'Annebaut was delighted with the bearing and offers of this gallant; but there was something in her smile which indicated a malicious idea, and, to speak plainly, the intention of putting her young guardian between honour and pleasure; to regale him so with love, to surround him with so many little attentions, to pursue him with such warm glances, that he would be faithless to friendship, to the advantage of gallantry.

Everything was in perfect trim for the carrying out of her design, because of the companionship which the Sire de Lavalliere would be obliged to have with her during his stay in the hotel, and as there is nothing in the world can turn a woman from her whim, at every turn the artful jade was ready to catch him in a trap.

At times she would make him remain seated near her by the fire, until twelve o'clock at night, singing soft refrains, and at every opportunity showed her fair shoulders, and the white temptations of which her corset was full, and casting upon him a thousand piercing glances, all without showing in her face the thoughts that surged in her brain.

At times she would walk with him in the morning, in the gardens of the hotel, leaning heavily upon his arm, pressing it, sighing, and making him tie the laces of her little shoes, which were always coming undone in that particular place. Then it would be those soft words and things which the ladies understand so well, little attentions paid to a guest, such as coming in to see if he were comfortable, if his bed were well made, the room clean, if the ventilation were good, if he felt any draughts in the night, if the sun came in during the day, and asking him to forgo none of his usual fancies and habits, saying—

“Are you accustomed to take anything in the morning in bed, such as honey, milk, or spice? Do the meal times

suit you? I will conform mine to yours: tell me. You are afraid to ask me. Come—”

She accompanied these coddling little attentions with a hundred affected speeches; for instance, on coming into the room she would say—

“I am intruding, send me away. You want to be left alone—I will go.” And always was she graciously invited to remain.

And the cunning Madame always came lightly attired, showing samples of her beauty, which would have made a patriarch neigh, even were he as much battered by time as must have been Mr. Methusaleh, with his nine hundred and sixty years.

That good knight being as sharp as a needle, let the lady go on with her tricks, much pleased to see her occupy herself with him, since it was so much gained; but like a loyal brother, he always called her absent husband to the lady's mind.

Now one evening—the day had been very warm—Lavalliere suspecting the lady's games, told her that Maille loved her dearly, that she had in him a man of honour, a gentleman who doted on her, and was ticklish on the score of his crown.

“Why then, if he is so ticklish in this manner, has he placed you here?”

“Was it not a most prudent thing?” replied he. “Was it not necessary to confide you to some defender of your virtue? Not that it needs one save to protect you from wicked men.”

“Then you are my guardian?” said she.

“I am proud of it!” exclaimed Lavalliere.

“Ah!” said she, “he has made a very bad choice.”

This remark was accompanied by a little look, so lewdly lascivious that the good brother−in−arms put on, by way of reproach, a severe countenance, and left the fair lady alone, much piqued at this refusal to commence love's conflict.

She remained in deep meditation, and began to search for the real obstacle that she had encountered, for it was impossible that it should enter the mind of any lady, that a gentleman could despise that bagatelle which is of such great price and so high value. Now these thoughts knitted and joined together so well, one fitting into the other, that out of little pieces she constructed a perfect whole, and found herself desperately in love; which should teach the ladies never to play with a man's weapons, seeing that like glue, they always stick to the fingers.

By this means Marie d'Annebaut came to a conclusion which she should have known at the commencement—viz., that to keep clear of her snares, the good knight must be smitten with some other lady, and looking round her, to see where her young guest could have found a needle−case to his taste, she thought of the fair Limeuil, one of Queen Catherine's maids, of Mesdames de Nevers, d'Estree, and de Giac, all of whom were declared friends of Lavalliere, and of the lot he must love one to distraction.

From this belief, she added the motive of jealousy to the others which tempted her to seduce her Argus, whom she did not wish to wound, but to perfume, kiss his head, and treat kindly.

She was certainly more beautiful, young, and more appetising and gentle than her rivals; at least, that was the melodious decree of her imaginations. So, urged on by the chords and springs of conscience, and physical causes which affect women, she returned to the charge, to commence a fresh assault upon the heart of the chevalier, for the ladies like that which is well fortified.

Then she played the pussy−cat, and nestled up close to him, became so sweetly sociable, and wheedled so gently, that one evening when she was in a desponding state, although merry enough in her inmost soul, the guardian−brother asked her—

“What is the matter with you?”

To which she replied to him dreamily, being listened to by him as the sweetest music—

That she had married Maille against her heart's will, and that she was very unhappy; that she knew not the sweets of love; that her husband did not understand her, and that her life was full of tears. In fact, that she was a maiden in heart and all, since she confessed in marriage she had experienced nothing but the reverse of pleasure. And she added, that surely this holy state should be full of sweetmeats and dainties of love, because all the ladies hurried into it, and hated and were jealous of those who out−bid them, for it cost certain people pretty dear; that she was so curious about it that for one good day or night of love, she would give her life, and always be obedient to her lover without a murmur; but that he with whom she would sooner than all others try the experiment would

not listen to her; that, nevertheless, the secret of their love might be kept eternally, so great was her husband's confidence in him, and that finally if he still refused it would kill her.

And all these paraphrases of the common canticle known to the ladies at their birth were ejaculated between a thousand pauses, interrupted with sighs torn from the heart, ornamented with quiverings, appeals to heaven, upturned eyes, sudden blushings and clutchings at her hair. In fact, no ingredient of temptation was lacking in the dish, and at the bottom of all these words there was a nipping desire which embellished even its blemishes. The good knight fell at the lady's feet, and weeping took them and kissed them, and you may be sure the good woman was quite delighted to let him kiss them, and even without looking too carefully to see what she was going to do, she abandoned her dress to him, knowing well that to keep it from sweeping the ground it must be taken at the bottom to raise it; but it was written that for that evening she should be good, for the handsome Lavalliere said to her with despair—

"Ah, madame, I am an unfortunate man and a wretch."

"Not at all," said she.

"Alas, the joy of loving you is denied to me."

"How?" said she.

"I dare not confess my situation to you!"

"Is it then very bad?"

"Ah, you will be ashamed of me!"

"Speak, I will hide my face in my hands," and the cunning madame hid her face is such a way that she could look at her well−beloved between her fingers.

"Alas!" said he, "the other evening when you addressed me in such gracious words, I was so treacherously inflamed, that not knowing my happiness to be so near, and not daring to confess my flame to you, I ran to a Bordel where all the gentleman go, and there for love of you, and to save the honour of my brother whose head I should blush to dishonour, I was so badly infected that I am in great danger of dying of the Italian sickness."

The lady, seized with terror, gave vent to the cry of a woman in labour, and with great emotion, repulsed him with a gentle little gesture. Poor Lavalliere, finding himself in so pitiable state, went out of the room, but he had not even reached the tapestries of the door, when Marie d'Annebaut again contemplated him, saying to herself, "Ah! what a pity!" Then she fell into a state of great melancholy, pitying in herself the gentleman, and became the more in love with him because he was fruit three times forbidden.

"But for Maille," said she to him, one evening that she thought him handsomer than unusual, "I would willingly take your disease. Together we should then have the same terrors."

"I love you too well," said the brother, "not to be good."

And he left her to go to his beautiful Limeuil. You can imagine that being unable to refuse to receive the burning glances of the lady, during meal times, and the evenings, there was a fire nourished that warmed them both, but she was compelled to live without touching her cavalier, otherwise than with her eyes. Thus occupied, Marie d'Annebaut was fortified at every point against the gallants of the Court, for there are no bounds so impassable as those of love, and no better guardian; it is like the devil, he whom it has in its clutches it surrounds with flames. One evening, Lavalliere having escorted his friend's wife to a dance given by Queen Catherine, he danced with the fair Limeuil, with whom he was madly in love. At that time the knights carried on their amours bravely two by two, and even in troops. Now all the ladies were jealous of La Limeuil, who at that time was thinking of yielding to the handsome Lavalliere. Before taking their places in the quadrille, she had given him the sweetest of assignations for the morrow, during the hunt. Our great Queen Catherine, who from political motives fermented these loves and stirred them up, like pastrycooks make the oven fires burn by poking, glanced at all the pretty couples interwoven in the quadrille, and said to her husband—

"When they combat here, can they conspire against you, eh?"

"Ah! but the Protestants?"

"Bah! have them here as well," said she, laughing. "Why, look at Lavalliere, who is suspected to be a Huguenot; he is converted by my dear little Limeuil, who does not play her cards badly for a young lady of sixteen. He will soon have her name down in his list."

"Ah, Madame! do not believe it," said Marie d'Annebaut, "he is ruined through that same sickness of Naples which made you queen."

At this artless confession, Catherine, the fair Diana, and the king, who were sitting together, burst out laughing, and the thing ran round the room. This brought endless shame and mockery upon Lavalliere. The poor gentleman, pointed at by everyone, soon wished somebody else in his shoes, for La Limeuil, who his rivals had not been slow laughingly to warn of her danger, appeared to shrink from her lover, so rapid was the spread, and so violent the apprehensions of this nasty disease. Thus Lavalliere found himself abandoned by everyone like a leper. The king made an offensive remark, and the good knight quitted the ball−room, followed by poor Marie in despair at the speech. She had in every way ruined the man she loved: she had destroyed his honour, and marred his life, since the physicians and master surgeons advance as a fact, incapable of contradiction, that persons Italianised by this love sickness, lost through it their greatest attractions, as well as their generative powers, and their bones went black.

Thus no woman would bind herself in legitimate marriage with the finest gentlemen in the kingdom if he were only suspected of being one of those whom Master Frances Rabelais named “his very precious scabby ones. . . . .”

As the handsome knight was very silent and melancholy, his companion said to him on the road home from Hercules House, where the fete had been held—

“My dear lord, I have done you a great mischief.”

“Ah, madame!” replied Lavalliere, “my hurt is curable; but into what a predicament have you fallen? You should not have been aware of the danger of my love.”

“Ah!” said she, “I am sure now always to have you to myself; in exchange for this great obloquy and dishonour, I will be forever your friend, your hostess, and your lady−love—more than that, your servant. My determination is to devote myself to you and efface the traces of this shame; to cure you by a watch and ward; and if the learned in these matters declare that the disease has such a hold of you that it will kill you like our defunct sovereign, I must still have your company in order to die gloriously in dying of your complaint. Even then,” said she, weeping, “that will not be penance enough to atone for the wrong I have done you.”

These words were accompanied with big tears; her virtuous heart waxed faint, she fell to the ground exhausted. Lavalliere, terrified, caught her and placed his hand upon her heart, below a breast of matchless beauty. The lady revived at the warmth of this beloved hand, experiencing such exquisite delights as nearly to make her again unconscious.

“Alas!” said she, “this sly and superficial caress will be for the future the only pleasure of our love. It will still be a hundred times better than the joys which poor Maille fancies he is bestowing on me. . . . Leave your hand there,” said she; “verily it is upon my soul, and touches it.”

At these words the knight was in a pitiful plight, and innocently confessed to the Lady that he experienced so much pleasure at this touch that the pains of his malady increased, and that death was preferable to this martyrdom.

“Let us die then,” said she.

But the litter was in the courtyard of the hotel, and as the means of death was not handy, each one slept far from the other, heavily weighed down with love, Lavalliere having lost his fair Limeuil, and Marie d'Annebaut having gained pleasures without parallel.

From this affair, which was quite unforeseen, Lavalliere found himself under the ban of love and marriage and dared no longer appear in public, and he found how much it costs to guard the virtue of a woman; but the more honour and virtue he displayed the more pleasure did he experience in these great sacrifices offered at the shrine of brotherhood. Nevertheless, his duty was very bitter, very ticklish, and intolerable to perform, towards the last days of his guard. And in this way.

The confession of her love, which she believed was returned, the wrong done by her to her cavalier, and the experience of an unknown pleasure, emboldened the fair Marie, who fell into a platonic love, gently tempered with those little indulgences in which there is no danger. From this cause sprang the diabolical pleasures of the game invented by the ladies, who since the death of Francis the First feared the contagion, but wished to gratify their lovers. To these cruel delights, in order to properly play his part, Lavalliere could not refuse his sanction. Thus every evening the mournful Marie would attach her guest to her petticoats, holding his hand, kissing him with burning glances, her cheek placed gently against his, and during this virtuous embrace, in which the knight was held like the devil by a holy water brush, she told him of her great love, which was boundless since it stretched through the infinite spaces of unsatisfied desire. All the fire with which the ladies endow their

substantial amours, when the night has no other lights than their eyes, she transferred into the mystic motions of her head, the exultations of her soul, and the ecstasies of her heart. Then, naturally, and with the delicious joy of two angels united by thought alone, they intoned together those sweet litanies repeated by the lovers of the period in honour of love—anthems which the abbot of Theleme has paragraphically saved from oblivion by engraving them on the walls of his Abbey, situated, according to master Alcofribas, in our land of Chinon, where I have seen them in Latin, and have translated them for the benefit of Christians.

"Alas!" said Marie d'Annebaut, "thou art my strength and my life, my joy and my treasure."

"And you," replied he "you are a pearl, an angel."

"Thou art my seraphim."

"You my soul."

"Thou my God."

"You my evening star and morning star, my honour, my beauty, my universe."

"Thou my great my divine master."

"You my glory, my faith, my religion."

"Thou my gentle one, my handsome one, my courageous one, my dear one, my cavalier, my defender, my king, my love. "

"You my fairy, the flower of my days, the dream of my nights."

"Thou my thought at every moment."

"You the delights of my eyes."

"Thou the voice of my soul."

"You my light by day."

"Thou my glimmer in the night."

"You the best beloved among women."

"Thou the most adored of men."

"You my blood, a myself better than myself."

"Thou art my heart, my lustre."

"You my saint, my only joy."

"I yield thee the palm of love, and how great so'er mine be, I believe thou lovest me still more, for thou art the lord."

"No; the palm is yours, my goddess, my Virgin Marie."

"No; I am thy servant, thine handmaiden, a nothing thou canst crush to atoms."

"No, no! it is I who am your slave, your faithful page, whom you see as a breath of air, upon whom you can walk as on a carpet. My heart is your throne."

"No, dearest, for thy voice transfigures me."

"Your regard burns me."

"I see but thee."

"I love but you."

"Oh! put thine hand upon my heart—only thine hand—and thou will see me pale, when my blood shall have taken the heat of thine."

Then during these struggles their eyes, already ardent, flamed still more brightly, and the good knight was a little the accomplice of the pleasure which Marie d'Annebaut took in feeling his hand upon her heart. Now, as in this light embrace all their strength was put forth, all their desires strained, all their ideas of the thing concentrated, it happened that the knight's transport reached a climax. Their eyes wept warm tears, they seized each other hard and fast as fire seizes houses; but that was all. Lavalliere had promised to return safe and sound to his friend the body only, not the heart.

When Maille announced his return, it was quite time, since no virtue could avoid melting upon this gridiron; and the less licence the lovers had, the more pleasure they had in their fantasies.

Leaving Marie d'Annebaut, the good companion in arms went as far as Bondy to meet his friend, to help him to pass through the forest without accident, and the two brothers slept together, according to the ancient custom, in the village of Bondy.

There, in their bed, they recounted to each other, one of the adventures of his journey, the other the gossip of

the camp, stories of gallantry, and the rest. But Maille's first question was touching Marie d'Annebaut, whom Lavalliere swore to be intact in that precious place where the honour of husbands is lodged; at which the amorous Maille was highly delighted.

On the morrow, they were all three re−united, to the great disgust of Marie, who, with the high jurisprudence of women, made a great fuss with her good husband, but with her finger she indicated her heart in an artless manner to Lavalliere, as one who said, “This is thine!”

At supper Lavalliere announced his departure for the wars. Maille was much grieved at this resolution, and wished to accompany his brother; that Lavalliere refused him point blank.

“Madame,” said he to Marie d'Annebaut, “I love you more than life, but not more than honour.”

He turned pale saying this, and Madame de Maille blanched hearing him, because never in their amorous dalliance had there been so much true love as in this speech. Maille insisted on keeping his friend company as far as Meaux. When he came back he was talking over with his wife the unknown reasons and secret causes of this departure, when Marie, who suspected the grief of poor Lavalliere said, “I know: he is ashamed to stop here because he has the Neapolitan sickness.”

“He!” said Maille, quite astonished. “I saw him when we were in bed together at Bondy the other evening, and yesterday at Meaux. There's nothing the matter with him; he is as sound as a bell.”

The lady burst into tears, admiring this great loyalty, the sublime resignation to his oath, and the extreme sufferings of this internal passion. But as she still kept her love in the recesses of her heart, she died when Lavalliere fell before Metz, as has been elsewhere related by Messire Bourdeilles de Brantome in his tittle−tattle.

THE VICAR OF AZAY−LE−RIDEAU

In those days the priests no longer took any woman in legitimate marriage, but kept good mistresses as pretty as they could get; which custom has since been interdicted by the council, as everyone knows, because, indeed, it was not pleasant that the private confessions of people should be retold to a wench who would laugh at them, besides the other secret doctrines, ecclesiastical arrangements, and speculations which are part and parcel of the politics of the Church of Rome. The last priest in our country who theologically kept a woman in his parsonage, regaling her with his scholastic love, was a certain vicar of Azay−le−Ridel, a place later on most aptly named as Azay−le−Brule, and now Azay−le−Rideau, whose castle is one of the marvels of Touraine. Now this said period, when the women were not averse to the odour of the priesthood, is not so far distant as some may think, Monsieur D'Orgemont, son of the preceding bishop, still held the see of Paris, and the great quarrels of the Armagnacs had not finished. To tell the truth, this vicar did well to have his vicarage in that age, since he was well shapen, of a high colour, stout, big, strong, eating and drinking like a convalescent, and indeed, was always rising from a little malady that attacked him at certain times; and, later on, he would have been his own executioner, had he determined to observe his canonical continence. Add to this that he was a Tourainian, id est, dark, and had in his eyes flame to light, and water to quench all the domestic furnaces that required lighting or quenching; and never since at Azay has been such vicar seen! A handsome vicar was he, square−shouldered, fresh coloured, always blessing and chuckling, preferred weddings and christenings to funerals, a good joker, pious in Church, and a man in everything. There have been many vicars who have drunk well and eaten well; others who have blessed abundantly and chuckled consumedly; but all of them together would hardly make up the sterling worth of this aforesaid vicar; and he alone has worthily filled his post with benedictions, has held it with joy, and in it has consoled the afflicted, all so well, that no one saw him come out of his house without wishing to be in his heart, so much was he beloved. It was he who first said in a sermon that the devil was not so black as he was painted, and who for Madame de Cande transformed partridges into fish saying that the perch of the Indre were partridges of the river, and, on the other hand, partridges perch in the air. He never played artful tricks under the cloak of morality, and often said, jokingly, he would rather be in a good bed then in anybody's will, that he had plenty of everything, and wanted nothing. As for the poor and suffering, never did those who came to ask for wool at the vicarage go away shorn, for his hand was always in his pocket, and he melted (he who in all else was so firm) at the sight of all this misery and infirmity, and he endeavoured to heal all their wounds. There have been many good stories told concerning this king of vicars. It was he who caused such hearty laughter at the wedding of the lord of Valennes, near Sacche. The mother of the said lord had a good deal to do with the victuals, roast meats and other delicacies, of which there was sufficient quantity to feed a small town at least, and it is true, at the same time, that people came to the wedding from Montbazon, from Tours, from Chinon, from Langeais, and from everywhere, and stopped eight days.

Now the good vicar, as he was going into the room where the company were enjoying themselves, met the little kitchen boy, who wished to inform Madame that all the elementary substances and fat rudiments, syrups, and sauces, were in readiness for a pudding of great delicacy, the secret compilation, mixing, and manipulation of which she wished herself to superintend, intending it as a special treat for her daughter−in−law's relations. Our vicar gave the boy a tap on the cheek, telling him that he was too greasy and dirty to show himself to people of high rank, and that he himself would deliver the said message. The merry fellow pushes open the door, shapes the fingers of his left hand into the form of a sheath, and moves gently therein the middle finger of his right, at the same time looking at the lady of Valennes, and saying to her, “Come, all is ready.” Those who did not understand the affair burst out laughing to see Madame get up and go to the vicar, because she knew he referred to the pudding, and not to that which the others imagined.

But a true story is that concerning the manner in which this worthy pastor lost his mistress, to whom the ecclesiastical authorities allowed no successor; but, as for that, the vicar did not want for domestic utensils. In the parish everyone thought it an honour to lend him theirs, the more readily because he was not the man to spoil anything, and was careful to clean them out thoroughly, the dear man. But here are the facts. One evening the good man came home to supper with a melancholy face, because he had just put into the ground a good farmer,

whose death came about in a strange manner, and is still frequently talked about in Azay. Seeing that he only ate with the end of his teeth, and turned up his nose at a dish of tripe, which had been cooked in his own special manner, his good woman said to him—

"Have you passed before the Lombard (see MASTER CORNELIUS passim), met two black crows, or seen the dead man turn in his grave, that you are so upset?"

"Oh! Oh!"

"Has anyone deceived you?"

"Ha! Ha!"

"Come, tell me!"

"My dear, I am still quite overcome at the death of poor Cochegrue, and there is not at the present moment a good housewife's tongue or a virtuous cuckold's lips that are not talking about it."

"And what was it?"

"Listen! This poor Cochegrue was returning from market, having sold his corn and two fat pigs. He was riding his pretty mare, who, near Azay, commenced to caper about without the slightest cause, and poor Cochegrue trotted and ambled along counting his profits. At the corner of the old road of the Landes de Charlemagne, they came upon a stallion kept by the Sieur de la Carte, in a field, in order to have a good breed of horses, because the said animal was fleet of foot, as handsome as an abbot, and so high and mighty that the admiral who came to see it, said it was a beast of the first quality. This cursed horse scented the pretty mare; like a cunning beast, neither neighed nor gave vent to any equine ejaculation, but when she was close to the road, leaped over forty rows of vines and galloped after her, pawing the ground with his iron shoes, discharging the artillery of a lover who longs for an embrace, giving forth sounds to set the strongest teeth on edge, and so loudly, that the people of Champy heard it and were much terrified thereat.

Cochegrue, suspecting the affair, makes for the moors, spurs his amorous mare, relying upon her rapid pace, and indeed, the good mare understands, obeys, and flies—flies like a bird, but a bowshot off follows the blessed horse, thundering along the road like a blacksmith beating iron, and at full speed, his mane flying in the wind, replying to the sound of the mare's swift gallop with his terrible pat−a−pan! pat−a−pan! Then the good farmer, feeling death following him in the love of the beast, spurs anew his mare, and harder still she gallops, until at last, pale and half dead with fear, he reaches the outer yard of his farmhouse, but finding the door of the stable shut he cries, 'Help here! Wife!' Then he turned round on his mare, thinking to avoid the cursed beast whose love was burning, who was wild with passion, and growing more amorous every moment, to the great danger of the mare. His family, horrified at the danger, did not go to open the stable door, fearing the strange embrace and the kicks of the iron−shod lover. At last, Cochegrue's wife went, but just as the good mare was half way through the door, the cursed stallion seized her, squeezed her, gave her a wild greeting, with his two legs gripped her, pinched her and held her tight, and at the same time so kneaded and knocked about Cochegrue that there was only found of him a shapeless mass, crushed like a nut after the oil has been distilled from it. It was shocking to see him squashed alive and mingling his cries with the loud love−sighs of the horse."

"Oh! the mare!" exclaimed the vicar's good wench.

"What!" said the priest astonished.

"Certainly. You men wouldn't have cracked a plumstone for us."

"There," answered the vicar, "you wrong me." The good man threw her so angrily upon the bed, attacked and treated her so violently that she split into pieces, and died immediately without either surgeons or physicians being able to determine the manner in which the solution of continuity was arrived at, so violently disjointed were the hinges and mesial partitions. You can imagine that he was a proud man, and a splendid vicar as has been previously stated.

The good people of the country, even the women, agreed that he was not to blame, but that his conduct was warranted by the circumstances.

From this, perhaps, came the proverb so much in use at that time, Que l'aze le saille! The which proverb is really so much coarser in its actual wording, that out of respect for the ladies I will not mention it. But this was not the only clever thing that this great and noble vicar achieved, for before this misfortune he did such a stroke of business that no robbers dare ask him how many angels he had in his pocket, even had they been twenty strong and over to attack him. One evening when his good woman was still with him, after supper, during which he had

enjoyed his goose, his wench, his wine, and everything, and was reclining in his chair thinking where he could build a new barn for the tithes, a message came for him from the lord of Sacche, who was giving up the ghost and wished to reconcile himself with God, receive the sacrament, and go through the usual ceremonies. “He is a good man and loyal lord. I will go.” said he. Thereupon he passed into the church, took the silver box where the blessed bread is, rang the little bell himself in order not to wake the clerk, and went lightly and willingly along the roads. Near the Gue−droit, which is a valley leading to the Indre across the moors, our good vicar perceived a high toby. And what is a high toby? It is a clerk of St. Nicholas. Well, what is that? That means a person who sees clearly on a dark night, instructs himself by examining and turning over purses, and takes his degrees on the high road. Do you understand now? Well then, the high toby waited for the silver box, which he knew to be of great value.

“Oh! oh!” said the priest, putting down the sacred vase on a stone at the corner of the bridge, “stop thou there without moving.”

Then he walked up to the robber, tipped him up, seized his loaded stick, and when the rascal got up to struggle with him, he gutted him with a blow well planted in the middle of his stomach. Then he picked up the viaticum again, saying bravely to it: “Ah! If I had relied upon thy providence, we should have been lost.” Now to utter these impious words on the road to Sacche was mere waste of breath, seeing that he addressed them not to God, but to the Archbishop of Tours, who have once severely rebuked him, threatened him with suspension, and admonished him before the Chapter for having publicly told certain lazy people that a good harvest was not due to the grace of God, but to skilled labour and hard work—a doctrine which smelt of the fagot. And indeed he was wrong, because the fruits of the earth have need both of one and the other; but he died in this heresy, for he could never understand how crops could come without digging, if God so willed it—a doctrine that learned men have since proved to be true, by showing that formerly wheat grew very well without the aid of man. I cannot leave this splendid model of a pastor without giving here one of the acts of his life, which proves with what fervour he imitated the saints in the division of their goods and mantles, which they gave formerly to the poor and the passers−by. One day, returning from Tours, where he had been paying his respects to the official, mounted on his mule, he was nearing Azay. On the way, just out side Ballan, he met a pretty girl on foot, and was grieved to see a woman travelling like a dog; the more so as she was visibly fatigued, and could scarcely raise one foot before the other. He whistled to her softly, and the pretty wench turned round and stopped. The good priest, who was too good a sportsman to frighten the birds, especially the hooded ones, begged her so gently to ride behind him on his mule, and in so polite a fashion, that the lass got up; not without making those little excuses and grimaces that they all make when one invites them to eat, or to take what they like. The sheep paired off with the shepherd, the mule jogged along after the fashion of mules, while the girl slipped now this way now that, riding so uncomfortably that the priest pointed out to her, after leaving Ballan, that she had better hold on to him; and immediately my lady put her plump arms around the waist of her cavalier, in a modest and timorous manner.

“There, you don't slip about now. Are you comfortable?” said the vicar.

“Yes, I am comfortable. Are you?”

“I?” said the priest, “I am better than that.”

And, in fact, he was quite at his ease, and was soon gently warmed in the back by two projections which rubbed against it, and at last seemed as though they wished to imprint themselves between his shoulder blades, which would have been a pity, as that was not the place for this white merchandise. By degrees the movement of mule brought into conjunction the internal warmth of these two good riders, and their blood coursed more quickly through their veins, seeing that it felt the motion of the mule as well as their own; and thus the good wench and the vicar finished by knowing each other's thoughts, but not those of the mule. When they were both acclimatised, he with her and she with him, they felt an internal disturbance which resolved itself into secret desires.

“Ah!” said the vicar, turning round to his companion, “here is a fine cluster of trees which has grown very thick.”

“It is too near the road,” replied the girl. “bad boys have cut the branches, and the cows have eaten the young leaves.”

“Are you not married?” asked the vicar, trotting his animal again.

“No,” said she.

“Not at all?”

“I'faith! No!”

“What a shame, at your age!”

“You are right, sir; but you see, a poor girl who has had a child is a bad bargain.”

Then the good vicar taking pity on such ignorance, and knowing that the canons say among other things that pastors should indoctrinate their flock and show them the duties and responsibilities of this life, he thought he would only be discharging the functions of his office by showing her the burden she would have one day to bear. Then he begged her gently not be afraid, for if she would have faith in his loyalty no one should ever know of the marital experiment which he proposed then and there to perform with her; and as, since passing Ballan the girl had thought of nothing else; as her desire had been carefully sustained, and augmented by the warm movements of the animal, she replied harshly to the vicar, “if you talk thus I will get down.” Then the good vicar continued his gentle requests so well that on reaching the wood of Azay the girl wished to get down, and the priest got down there too, for it was not across a horse that this discussion could be finished. Then the virtuous maiden ran into the thickest part of the wood to get away from the vicar, calling out, “Oh, you wicked man, you shan't know where I am.”

The mule arrived in a glade where the grass was good, the girl tumbled down over a root and blushed. The good vicar came to her, and there as he had rung the bell for mass he went through the service for her, and both freely discounted the joys of paradise. The good priest had it in his heart to thoroughly instruct her, and found his pupil very docile, as gentle in mind as soft in the flesh, a perfect jewel. Therefore was he much aggrieved at having so much abridged the lessons by giving it at Azay, seeing that he would have been quite willing to recommence it, like all of precentors who say the same thing over and over again to their pupils.

“Ah! little one,” cried the good man, “why did you make so much fuss that we only came to an understanding close to Azay?”

“Ah!” said she, “I belong to Bellan.”

To be brief, I must tell you that when this good man died in his vicarage there was a great number of people, children and others, who came, sorrowful, afflicted, weeping, and grieved, and all exclaimed, “Ah! we have lost our father.” And the girls, the widows, the wives and little girls looked at each other, regretting him more than a friend, and said, “He was more than a priest, he was a man!” Of these vicars the seed is cast to the winds, and they will never be reproduced in spite of the seminaries.

Why, even the poor, to whom his savings were left, found themselves still the losers, and an old cripple whom he had succoured hobbled into the churchyard, crying “I don't die! I don't!” meaning to say, “Why did not death take me in his place?” This made some of the people laugh, at which the shade of the good vicar would certainly not have been displeased.

THE REPROACH

The fair laundress of Portillon−les−Tours, of whom a droll saying has already been given in this book, was a girl blessed with as much cunning as if she had stolen that of six priests and three women at least. She did not want for sweethearts, and had so many that one would have compared them, seeing them around her, to bees swarming of an evening towards their hive. An old silk dyer, who lived in the Rue St. Montfumier, and there possessed a house of scandalous magnificence, coming from his place at La Grenadiere, situated on the fair borders of St. Cyr, passed on horseback through Portillon in order to gain the Bridge of Tours. By reason of the warmth of the evening, he was seized with a wild desire on seeing the pretty washerwoman sitting upon her door−step. Now as for a very long time he had dreamed of this pretty maid, his resolution was taken to make her his wife, and in a short time she was transformed from a washerwoman into a dyer's wife, a good townswoman, with laces, fine linen, and furniture to spare, and was happy in spite of the dyer, seeing that she knew very well how to manage him. The good dyer had for a crony a silk machinery manufacturer who was small in stature, deformed for life, and full of wickedness. So on the wedding−day he said to the dyer, “You have done well to marry, my friend, we shall have a pretty wife!”; and a thousand sly jokes, such as it is usual to address to a bridegroom.

In fact, this hunchback courted the dyer's wife, who from her nature, caring little for badly built people, laughed to scorn the request of the mechanician, and joked him about the springs, engines, and spools of which his shop was full. However, this great love of the hunchback was rebuffed by nothing, and became so irksome to the dyer's wife that she resolved to cure it by a thousand practical jokes. One evening, after the sempiternal pursuit, she told her lover to come to the back door and towards midnight she would open everything to him. Now note, this was on a winter's night; the Rue St.Montfumier is close to the Loire, and in this corner there continually blow in winter, winds sharp as a hundred needle−points. The good hunchback, well muffled up in his mantle, failed not to come, and trotted up and down to keep himself warm while waiting for the appointed hour. Towards midnight he was half frozen, as fidgety as thirty−two devils caught in a stole, and was about to give up his happiness, when a feeble light passed by the cracks of the window and came down towards the little door.

“Ah, it is she!” said he.

And this hope warned him once more. Then he got close to the door, and heard a little voice—

“Are you there?” said the dyer's wife to him.

“Yes.”

“Cough, that I may see.”

The hunchback began to cough.

“It is not you.”

Then the hunchback said aloud—

“How do you mean, it is not I? Do you not recognise my voice? Open the door!”

“Who's there?” said the dyer, opening the window.

“There, you have awakened my husband, who returned from Amboise unexpectedly this evening.”

Thereupon the dyer, seeing by the light of the moon a man at the door, threw a big pot of cold water over him, and cried out, “Thieves! thieves!” in such a manner that the hunchback was forced to run away; but in his fear he failed to clear the chain stretched across the bottom of the road and fell into the common sewer, which the sheriff had not then replaced by a sluice to discharge the mud into the Loire. In this bath the mechanician expected every moment to breathe his last, and cursed the fair Tascherette, for her husband's name being Taschereau, she was so called by way of a little joke by the people of Tours.

Carandas—for so was named the manufacturer of machines to weave, to spin, to spool, and to wind the silk—was not sufficiently smitten to believe in the innocence of the dyer's wife, and swore a devilish hate against her. But some days afterwards, when he had recovered from his wetting in the dyer's drain he came up to sup with his old comrade. Then the dyer's wife reasoned with him so well, flavoured her words with so much honey, and wheedled him with so many fair promises, that he dismissed his suspicions.

He asked for a fresh assignation, and the fair Tascherette with the face of a woman whose mind is dwelling on

a subject, said to him, “Come tomorrow evening; my husband will be staying some days at Chinonceaux. The queen wishes to have some of her old dresses dyed and would settle the colours with him. It will take some time.”

Carandas put on his best clothes, failed not to keep the appointment, appeared at the time fixed, and found a good supper prepared, lampreys, wine of Vouvray, fine white napkins—for it was not necessary to remonstrate with the dyer's wife on the colour of her linen—and everything so well prepared that it was quite pleasant to him to see the dishes of fresh eels, to smell the good odour of the meats, and to admire a thousand little nameless things about the room, and La Tascherette fresh and appetising as an apple on a hot day. Now, the mechanician, excited to excess by these warm preparations, was on the point of attacking the charms of the dyer's wife, when Master Taschereau gave a loud knock at the street door.

“Ha!” said madame, “what has happened? Put yourself in the clothes chest, for I have been much abused respecting you; and if my husband finds you, he may undo you; he is so violent in his temper.”

And immediately she thrust the hunchback into the chest, and went quickly to her good husband, whom she knew well would be back from Chinonceaux to supper. Then the dyer was kissed warmly on both his eyes and on both his ears and he caught his good wife to him and bestowed upon her two hearty smacks with his lips that sounded all over the room. Then the pair sat down to supper, talked together and finished by going to bed; and the mechanician heard all, though obliged to remain crumpled up, and not to cough or to make a single movement. He was in with the linen, crushed up as close as a sardine in a box, and had about as much air as he would have had at the bottom of a river; but he had, to divert him, the music of love, the sighs of the dyer, and the little jokes of La Tascherette. At last, when he fancied his old comrade was asleep, he made an attempt to get out of the chest.

“Who is there?” said the dyer.

“What is the matter my little one?” said his wife, lifting her nose above the counterpane.

“I heard a scratching,” said the good man.

“We shall have rain to−morrow; it's the cat,” replied his wife.

The good husband put his head back upon the pillow after having been gently embraced by his spouse. “There, my dear, you are a light sleeper. It's no good trying to make a proper husband of you. There, be good. Oh! oh! my little papa, your nightcap is on one side. There, put it on the other way, for you must look pretty even when you are asleep. There! are you all right?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sleep?” said she, giving him a kiss.

“Yes.”

In the morning the dyer's wife came softly and let out the mechanician, who was whiter than a ghost.

“Give me air, give me air!” said he.

And away he ran cured of his love, but with as much hate in his heart as a pocket could hold of black wheat. The said hunchback left Tours and went to live in the town of Bruges, where certain merchants had sent for him to arrange the machinery for making hauberks.

During his long absence, Carandas, who had Moorish blood in his veins, since he was descended from an ancient Saracen left half dead after the great battle which took place between the Moors and the French in the commune of Bellan (which is mentioned in the preceding tale), in which place are the Landes of Charlemagne, where nothing grows because of the cursed wretches and infidels there interred, and where the grass disagrees even with the cows—this Carandas never rose up or lay down in a foreign land without thinking of how he could give strength to his desires of vengeance; and he was dreaming always of it, and wishing nothing less than the death of the fair washerwoman of Portillon and often would cry out “I will eat her flesh! I will cook one of her breasts, and swallow it without sauce!” It was a tremendous hate of good constitution—a cardinal hate—a hate of a wasp or an old maid. It was all known hates moulded into one single hate, which boiled itself, concocted itself, and resolved self into an elixir of wicked and diabolical sentiments, warmed at the fire of the most flaming furnaces of hell—it was, in fact, a master hate.

Now one fine day, the said Carandas came back into Touraine with much wealth, that he brought from the country of Flanders, where he had sold his mechanical secrets. He bought a splendid house in Rue St. Montfumier, which is still to be seen, and is the astonishment of the passers−by, because it has certain very queer round humps fashioned upon the stones of the wall. Carandas, the hater, found many notable changes at the house

of his friend, the dyer, for the good man had two sweet children, who, by a curious chance, presented no resemblance either to the mother or to the father. But as it is necessary that children bear a resemblance to someone, there are certain people who look for the features of their ancestors, when they are good−looking—the flatters. So it was found by the good husband that his two boys were like one of his uncles, formerly a priest at Notre Dame de l'Egrignolles, but according to certain jokers, these two children were the living portraits of a good−looking shaven crown officiating in the Church of Notre Dame la Riche, a celebrated parish situated between Tours and Plessis. Now, believe one thing, and inculcate it upon your minds, and when in this book you shall only have gleaned, gathered, extracted, and learned this one principle of truth, look upon yourself as a lucky man—namely, that a man can never dispense with his nose, id est, that a man will always be snotty—that is to say, he will remain a man, and thus will continue throughout all future centuries to laugh and drink, to find himself in his shirt without feeling either better or worse there, and will have the same occupations. But these preparatory ideas are to better to fix in the understanding that this two−footed soul will always accept as true those things which flatter his passions, caress his hates, or serve his amours: from this comes logic. So it was that, the first day the above−mentioned Carandas saw his old comrade's children, saw the handsome priest, saw the beautiful wife of the dyer, saw La Taschereau, all seated at the table, and saw to his detriment the best piece of lamprey given with a certain air by La Tascherette to her friend the priest, the mechanician said to himself, “My old friend is a cuckold, his wife intrigues with the little confessor, and the children have been begotten with his holy water. I'll show them that the hunchbacks have something more than other men.”

And this was true—true as it is that Tours has always had its feet in the Loire, like a pretty girl who bathes herself and plays with the water, making a flick−flack, by beating the waves with her fair white hands; for the town is more smiling, merry, loving, fresh, flowery, and fragrant than all the other towns of the world, which are not worthy to comb her locks or to buckle her waistband. And be sure if you go there you will find, in the centre of it, a sweet place, in which is a delicious street where everyone promenades, where there is always a breeze, shade, sun, rain, and love. Ha! ha! laugh away, but go there. It is a street always new, always royal, always imperial—a patriotic street, a street with two paths, a street open at both ends, a wide street, a street so large that no one has ever cried, “Out of the way!” there. A street which does not wear out, a street which leads to the abbey of Grand−mont, and to a trench, which works very well with the bridge, and at the end of which is a finer fair ground. A street well paved, well built, well washed, as clean as a glass, populous, silent at certain times, a coquette with a sweet nightcap on its pretty blue tiles—to be short, it is the street where I was born; it is the queen of streets, always between the earth and sky; a street with a fountain; a street which lacks nothing to be celebrated among streets; and, in fact, it is the real street, the only street of Tours. If there are others, they are dark, muddy, narrow, and damp, and all come respectfully to salute this noble street, which commands them. Where am I? For once in this street no one cares to come out of it, so pleasant it is. But I owed this filial homage, this descriptive hymn sung from the heart to my natal street, at the corners of which there are wanting only the brave figures of my good master Rabelais, and of Monsieur Descartes, both unknown to the people of the country. To resume: the said Carandas was, on his return from Flanders, entertained by his comrade, and by all those by whom he was liked for his jokes, his drollery, and quaint remarks. The good hunchback appeared cured of his old love, embraced the children, and when he was alone with the dyer's wife, recalled the night in the clothes−chest, and the night in the sewer, to her memory, saying to her, “Ha, ha! what games you used to have with me.”

“It was your own fault,” said she, laughing. “If you had allowed yourself by reason of your great love to be ridiculed, made a fool of, and bantered a few more times, you might have made an impression on me, like the others.” Thereupon Carandas commenced to laugh, though inwardly raging all the time. Seeing the chest where he had nearly been suffocated, his anger increased the more violently because the sweet creature had become still more beautiful, like all those who are permanently youthful from bathing in the water of youth, which waters are naught less than the sources of love. The mechanician studied the proceedings in the way of cuckoldom at his neighbour's house, in order to revenge himself, for as many houses as there are so many varieties of manner are there in this business; and although all amours resemble each other in the same manner that all men resemble each other, it is proved to the abstractors of true things, that for the happiness of women, each love has its especial physiognomy, and if there is nothing that resembles a man so much as a man, there is also nothing differs from a man so much as a man. That it is, which confuses all things, or explains the thousand fancies of women, who seek the best men with a thousand pains and a thousand pleasures, perhaps more the one than the other. But how can I

blame them for their essays, changes, and contradictory aims? Why, Nature frisks and wriggles, twists and turns about, and you expect a woman to remain still! Do you know if ice is really cold? No. Well then, neither do you know that cuckoldom is not a lucky chance, the produce of brains well furnished and better made than all the others. Seek something better than ventosity beneath the sky. This will help to spread the philosophic reputation of this eccentric book. Oh yes; go on. He who cries “vermin powder,” is more advanced than those who occupy themselves with Nature, seeing that she is a proud jade and a capricious one, and only allows herself to be seen at certain times. Do you understand? So in all languages does she belong to the feminine gender, being a thing essentially changeable and fruitful and fertile in tricks.

Now Carandas soon recognised the fact that among cuckoldoms the best understood and the most discreet is ecclesiastical cuckoldom. This is how the good dyer's wife had laid her plans. She went always towards her cottage at Grenadiere−les−St.−Cyr on the eve of the Sabbath, leaving her good husband to finish his work, to count up and check his books, and to pay his workmen; then Taschereau would join her there on the morrow, and always found a good breakfast ready and his good wife gay, and always brought the priest with him. The fact is, this damnable priest crossed the Loire the night before in a small boat, in order to keep the dyer's wife warm, and to calm her fancies, in order that she might sleep well during the night, a duty which young men understand very well. Then this fine curber of phantasies got back to his house in the morning by the time Taschereau came to invite him to spend the day at La Grenadiere, and the cuckold always found the priest asleep in his bed. The boatman being well paid, no one knew anything of these goings on, for the lover journeyed the night before after night fall, and on the Sunday in the early morning. As soon as Carandas had verified the arrangement and constant practice of these gallant diversions, he determined to wait for a day when the lovers would meet, hungry one for the other, after some accidental abstinence. This meeting took place very soon, and the curious hunchback saw the boatman waiting below the square, at the Canal St. Antoine, for the young priest, who was handsome, blonde, slender, and well−shaped, like the gallant and cowardly hero of love, so celebrated by Monsieur Ariosto. Then the mechanician went to find the old dyer, who always loved his wife and always believed himself the only man who had a finger in her pie.

“Ah!, good evening, old friend,” said Carandas to Taschereau; and Taschereau made him a bow.

Then the mechanician relates to him all the secret festivals of love, vomits words of peculiar import, and pricks the dyer on all sides.

At length, seeing he was ready to kill both his wife and the priest, Carandas said to him, “My good neighbour, I had brought back from Flanders a poisoned sword, which will instantly kill anyone, if it only make a scratch upon him. Now, directly you shall have merely touched your wench and her paramour, they will die.”

“Let us go and fetch it,” said the dyer.

Then the two merchants went in great haste to the house of the hunchback, to get the sword and rush off to the country.

“But shall we find them in flagrante delicto?” asked Taschereau.

“You will see,” said the hunchback, jeering his friend. In fact, the cuckold had not long to wait to behold the joy of the two lovers.

The sweet wench and her well−beloved were busy trying to catch, in a certain lake that you probably know, that little bird that sometimes makes his nest there, and they were laughing and trying, and still laughing.

“Ah, my darling!” said she, clasping him, as though she wished to make an outline of him on her chest, “I love thee so much I should like to eat thee! Nay, more than that, to have you in my skin, so that you might never quit me.”

“I should like it too,” replied the priest, “but as you can't have me altogether, you must try a little bit at a time.”

It was at this moment that the husband entered, he sword unsheathed and flourished above him. The beautiful Tascherette, who knew her lord's face well, saw what would be the fate of her well−beloved the priest. But suddenly she sprang towards the good man, half naked, her hair streaming over her, beautiful with shame, but more beautiful with love, and cried to him, “Stay, unhappy man! Wouldst thou kill the father of thy children?”

Thereupon the good dyer staggered by the paternal majesty of cuckoldom, and perhaps also by the fire of his wife's eyes, let the sword fall upon the foot of the hunchback, who had followed him, and thus killed him.

This teaches us not to be spiteful.

EPILOGUE

Here endeth the first series of these Tales, a roguish sample of the works of that merry Muse, born ages ago, in our fair land of Touraine, the which Muse is a good wench, and knows by heart that fine saying of her friend Verville, written in LE MOYEN DE PARVENIR: It is only necessary to be bold to obtain favours. Alas! mad little one, get thee to bed again, sleep; thou art panting from thy journey; perhaps thou hast been further than the present time. Now dry thy fair naked feet, stop thine ears, and return to love. If thou dreamest other poesy interwoven with laughter to conclude these merry inventions, heed not the foolish clamour and insults of those who, hearing the carol of a joyous lark of other days, exclaim: Ah, the horrid bird!

END OF THE FIRST TEN TALES.